

THE
RADIO
ONE

Story of Pop

THE FIRST
ENCYCLOPEDIA OF
POP IN 26 WEEKLY PARTS

SLADE: Seventies-super jobs

JERRY LEE LEWIS: The killer returns

JOHNNY RAY: Cried all the way to the bank

PLUS: R&R Movies, Buddy Holly's songs, Country Blues, C&W and more

PART 3

25p

EVERY THURSDAY



'Country Roots' is the major theme of this issue, reflecting the third Radio One programme that deals with the extremely influential role of country music in the formation of rock & roll. Country music has a long and honourable tradition and, coupled with the Blues and black music, with which it was fused, contributed vitally to the chemistry that synthesised rock in the early '50s. The BBC will cover this ground with interviews and the records of those stars and producers who actually took the two traditions and created rock & roll.

Accordingly, in this issue we look at country music in its varied forms. We start a three-part series on country & western music in which such topics as the Grand Ole Opry (mecca for country singers), the Carter Family (important early influences), and stars like Jimmie Rodgers and Hank Williams are discussed and their roles in the story analysed. We look, too, at the great influence of black music, which threw up its own country blues.

One man who owes a lot to both musical streams is Jerry Lee Lewis, probably one of the liveliest of all the rockers. A larger-than-life hell-raiser of a singer who attacks a bottle with all the enthusiasm that he attacks a piano, Lewis is still, almost twenty years after his debut, such a commanding figure and charismatic star that he can pack halls wherever he plays. Only a few years ago his career was almost over in Britain because of his marriage.

Before Lewis, before Presley even, there was a man who stood head-and-shoulders above his contemporaries in popularity. He was Johnny Ray and, in retrospect, his importance in pop is enormous. He stood as a bridge between the crooning and hysterical popularity of Sinatra and the equally violent and bizarre following of Presley. Even more, he helped to form pop music – as distinct from rock – and blazed the trail for the pop dominance that followed the decline of R&R.

This issue looks at the considerable songwriting talents of Holly – talents that gave us some of the most memorable songs in the story of pop – and the extraordinary formula for chart success conceived by Slade. In addition to all this we look at another formula that spun off from R&R and started yet another industry – the creation of the rock film that was born with Bill Haley in *Rock Around The Clock*, and has continued to today. So this issue takes the story from Country to Hollywood, and from an idol who cried on stage to a singer who boozed and shouted his way to stardom.

**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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Jerry Lee Lewis

The Killer

On a hot, sultry day in August, 1956, four musicians gathered round a piano in the Sun recording studio, Memphis, Tennessee, and in two takes cut a version of 'Peace In The Valley' – the four musicians were Carl Perkins and Johnny Cash on guitars, Jerry Lee Lewis just singing, and Elvis Presley on piano. In those days, four guys trying for the big time; but at today's prices a multi-million pound combination of talent. To this day, that recording has never been released.

Jerry Lee Lewis was to become one of the small band of rock & roll entertainers who, even today, still invites criticism. Criticism, not so much for his music, but rather for his eccentric personal life-style.

Up-tempo Hymns

It took Lewis just nine years from his birth in Ferriday, Louisiana, on September 29th, 1935, to start tinkering with a piano. That part of America is still known as the Bible Belt, with religion playing a central part in community life. Some of the first songs Lewis learned were gospel numbers and hymns, but he wasn't content with a straight reproduction of the tunes, and always had to take them a stage further. While attending bible college he was discovered playing up-tempo versions of hymns and asked to leave. Then, as a door-to-door salesman (the only job he could find at the time), he spent most evenings arranging country and hillbilly music to suit his taste for wilder rhythms.

He didn't really regret his dismissal from the college in Waxahatchie, Texas, and still belongs to the church. "I don't claim to be a very good Christian, but you are either hot or you are cold, there's no inbetween," he once said.

His eager driving piano music, accompanied by a voice that often reached a scream, and an uninhibited streak of showmanship, led to several gigs in Louisiana night-clubs. Then, in February

1956, he walked into Sam Phillips' Sun studio and asked for an audition. At his first session he cut a version of Gene Autry's 'You're The Only Star In My Blue Heaven'. In those days he worked mainly with just a guitarist and drummer, and among his first 'back-up' men were Jimmy Van Eaton (drums) and Roland James (guitar) – from Billy Riley's band. Recording sessions at Sun tended to turn into parties. Things became so loose



Mike Cook

and the booze so plentiful that by the time it came round to Lewis cutting 'The Crawdaddy Song' he could only remember three of the ten verses and he took two piano breaks.

During his early days with Sun, Lewis became more and more influenced by boogie and blues piano styles, and as he developed in this field a lot of his country recordings were suppressed. Lewis still argues with the decision to hold back this material, and considers his more famous rock & roll numbers to be just as much country numbers as classics like 'You Win Again'.

"I've always been singing country & western," he pointed out in an interview some years later. "Even if they're sung as rock, 'Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On' and 'Great Balls Of Fire' are still country. Country music would have caught on a lot quicker as a commercial proposition if Jim Reeves hadn't been killed. It hurt country music a lot. It hurt a lot when Hank Williams died. He was spreading out real big when he died, he was set to go all the way."

Even before he had a hit record, Lewis was touring. He did a string of dates with Johnny Cash as far back as 1956, and at the end of 30 days had less than \$50 in his pocket. Another tour he undertook almost wrecked his career. It happened in Britain when he arrived with his third wife, Myra, who was also his cousin. A minor storm broke when it was discovered that he had married Myra in December, 1957, five months before his divorce from his second wife became final. When the news broke that Myra was all of 13-years-old, verbal thunder and lightning landed on the couple and a tour which was only into its fifth day had to be cancelled in the face of mounting public protest.

Abrupt End

During the first concert following the national newspapers' revelation of Myra's age, Lewis was greeted with the odd cat-call and an audience that had very little enthusiasm for the music. "I sure hope you ain't as dead as you sound," he announced with the trace of a sneer.

He is not beyond treating his audiences as mere witnesses to his act, and not as paying customers at all. In his own mind he can do no wrong, and if he wants to play mainly country music when the fans have come to hear good old rock & roll, well that's just too bad for them.

As his first British tour came to its abrupt end, and Lewis left on a midnight flight back to the States, his one feeling of regret was that he hadn't made the front pages of the British evening newspapers. "Who is this guy de Gaulle?" he asked, "he seems to have gone over bigger than us. What's so great about him?" When he arrived in New York, Lewis was said to be picking up \$100,000 for the cancelled tour - President Eisenhower's salary for a year in office! Perhaps it's not surprising that he told waiting reporters his short-lived tour had been "great, just great."



Jerry Lee Lewis appearing on the ATV *Tom Jones Show* in 1969.

Four years later, Lewis' three-year-old son drowned in a swimming pool accident five days before the start of another British tour. After the funeral, he went ahead with the tour. Then, in 1971, Myra hired a private detective to shadow her husband, a noted womaniser. When she had enough evidence, she divorced him on the grounds of cruelty and infidelity. Myra proceeded to marry the detective, and a month later Lewis wed the former wife of a police lieutenant.

Throughout all his personal troubles Lewis' fans remained faithful to him, and he has visited Britain successfully several times since his ejection by the press.

In the early days it was his habit of climbing on top of his piano, holding the microphone in one hand and stamping on the instrument's lid that brought him to the attention of the masses. He became known as something of a wild man, with a penchant for wine, women and song, and totally lacking in modesty. A brief appearance in the film *High School Confidential* set the seal on a budding career and put Lewis among the top money earners in the pop field. Though rock & roll was no longer the big business it had been towards the end of the '50s and during the early '60s, he managed to remain a huge attraction.

What'd I Say

His albums continued to attract healthy sales, though by this period the material showed a shifting of interest. Instead of concentrating so much on traditional and contemporary country songs, he veered towards rhythm & blues. On his 'More Of The Greatest Live Show On Earth' album recorded 'live' at the Panther Hall, Fort Worth, Texas, in 1966, he includes Chuck Berry's 'Little Queenie', 'Johnny B.

Goode' and 'Roll Over Beethoven', plus Ray Charles' 'What'd I Say'.

Stray Bottle

While talking to Larry Wilkinson of Radio WLOC at a disc jockey convention in Munfordville, Kentucky, in October, 1965, Lewis said: "I'd rather sing and play than eat when I'm hungry." The truth of that statement can be doubted, but Lewis often makes remarks about his love of music, alternating between rock & roll and country to suit the occasion.

Despite being initially banned on most 'white' radio stations in America because it was 'too sexy', 'Whole Lotta Shakin'' remained one of the most popular Jerry Lee Lewis records. An appearance on Steve Allen's networked TV show led to re-bookings for the following two weeks after Lewis obligingly lived up to his reputation by wrecking the piano. When he wasn't actually climbing on the piano, he would aim kicks at the stool or hit the keys with his feet. His habit of curling his right leg round the microphone stand, only to kick it sideways now and then and bring his foot down on the stage with a stamp, is alleged to have started when he wanted to trap a stray whisky bottle that was rolling away from him, though he has never commented on that one.

His attachment to the bottle is well known. Two examples of this occurred during his last British tour in early 1972. The tour opened in Middlesbrough and Lewis was, as is his custom, leaving things to the last moment before arriving at the theatre. When he finally made it, he was clutching a bottle of whisky which he took with him

to his dressing room and carried on drinking. By the time he was meant to go on stage the bottle appeared to be welded to his hand, and just as he was about to step from behind the curtain on to the stage in his familiar red trousers and matching shirt, the tour manager wrested the bottle from his grasp.

Some days later, a press reception was hosted for Lewis in a smart London hotel. He held court in a hired room, his right hand constantly clutching a filled glass of booze. It transpired that Lewis had achieved the seemingly impossible feat of checking into the hotel with a drink, heading for the bar, travelling to a TV studio to tape a show, still with a drink, and being driven drink in hand back to the hotel where he headed again for the bar before attending the reception.

In America in the mid-'60s Lewis occasionally played a guitar or drums on stage as well as the piano. It is a little known fact that he is skilled at all these instruments, picking up the rudiments of all three while still living on his father's farm in Ferriday.

Jerry Lee Lewis with his 13-year-old wife, Myra, in 1958

Paul Popper Ltd.





National Film Archive

Jerry Lee Lewis in *Keep On Rocking*.

Oddly enough, in view of his popularity, Lewis hasn't been the inspiration for many other artists, though Tom Jones admits to recording 'Green Green Grass Of Home' after hearing the American's recording of the song. In 1969, Jones brought Jerry Lee to London to appear on ATV's *Tom Jones Show* series. While Lewis got to work, the Welshman leaned on the piano with an eager look of admiration in his eyes.

Jesus Christ

During his stay in London on that occasion, Lewis told one reporter: "Booze and women are my two big weaknesses, and I've gotta have both when I need them." On a later visit he claimed that he didn't think his fourth marriage would last a long time because of his habits. He capped that by revealing in London in early 1972 that he had signed to play the part of Jesus Christ in a stage musical *The Carpenter*. He grew a beard for the part, but the project received no more publicity. Publicity is one commodity Lewis loves. He is rarely lost for a word and if an exaggeration sounds better than the plain truth, well then, he ain't about to hold his tongue. He even has a habit of personalising his songs, mentioning his own name. "Well, I never do the same thing

twice, so sometimes I sing something like 'don't let good old Jerry Lee down'," he explained. "I think if I'm singing a country song it makes it just that bit more intimate if I sing it with my name, like on 'Take Another Chance On Me', it's a little more real."

During another concert tour in 1973 he introduced his sister, Linda Gail Lewis, on stage. She has done some recordings with her famous brother, the most popular being their 'Together' album. He has a lot of faith in her talent, but while she is fairly well recognised in the country field in America, she has yet to make her mark elsewhere.

That tour showed how much Jerry Lee Lewis has veered back towards his country roots. A good 40% of the material was anything but rock & roll, with even 'That Old Rugged Cross' included in the programme. "I would say what I do now is country rock," he explained. "You can't beat country music, no matter what anybody says, country songs tell the truth." Lewis' feel for country music is well-known, and he has won many awards for his C&W recordings. His records frequently appear in the country charts in America, and sometimes simultaneously crop up in

the pop section. Yet when he came to London again in early 1973 for a recording session (accompanied by a young woman called Charlotte Bumps!), he featured a list of famous rock & roll songs. The resulting album 'London Session', had Lewis backed up by a number of the country's top instrumentalists – people like Klaus Voorman, Rory Gallagher, Alvin Lee and Peter Frampton.

'The Killer'

While loved – almost idolised – by the old-time rockers, Lewis does not command the same importance in the history of pop music as, for example, Chuck Berry. The reason is simple: he has never written his own material. Had he been able to write for himself he would, undoubtedly, be one of the giants of rock.

His performances have always been marked by that cool, professional, detached control of the audience that marks out an exceptional artist from the hoards of enthusiastic exhibitionists. And yet it was always other people's material that he was performing *and* recording – never his own.

As it is, Jerry Lee remains 'The Killer' – one of rock & roll's greatest characters.

NEXT WEEK IN ROCK: Little Richard – A-lop-bam-boom.

Act Naturally

The Rise of the Rock & Roll Movie

National Film Archive/Kobal Collection

Left to right: Stills from Marlon Brando in *The Wild One*; Mammie Van Doren, *Untamed Youth*; Sidney Poitier, *Blackboard Jungle*

1. **Scene: Interior.** School gym where a hop is in full swing. On stage a small group playing 'hot' rock & roll. The teens on the dance floor are jiving energetically, occasionally pausing to shout 'go, man, go'; 'crazy, man, crazy', etc.

Around the gym, under the climbing-bars, teachers – bespectacled, middle-aged, earnest – are frowning in disapproval at the noise and the dancers. One, elderly, wearing tweeds and smoking a pipe, storms out in disgust.

2. **Scene: Exterior.** A chauffeur-driven car speeds through a quiet night landscape. Zoom in on the back seat for close-up of a cigar-smoking, middle-aged, Jewish-looking agent. Off (faintly) comes the sound of rock & roll music as the car approaches the gym. Backseat passenger – identified as Siggie Deal – snatches a cigar from his mouth and barks to the chauffeur:

DEAL: "Listen! Bugsy, what's that sound? It's terrific! Stop the car, I gotta hear more of this."

Deal jumps out of the car and strides purposefully towards the door of the gym, where he bumps into irate teacher who is emerging.

DEAL: "Hey, what's that sound?"

TEACHER: "Juvenile delinquents tearing up county property. I'm going to see the mayor about it."



Left to right: Jayne Mansfield and Tom Ewell in *The Girl Can't Help It*; James Dean and Julie Harris in *East of Eden*; James Dean in *Rebel Without A Cause*; Cliff Richard in *The Young Ones*.

Teacher strides off. Deal opens the door and walks into . . .

3. **Scene:** Interior. *The gym, where the music and dancing are even more frantic. A singer on stage is on his knees howling the song. Slowly the dancing stops as the couples walk to the stage in a semi-circle, watching his antics in rapt attention. Deal's face is seen in close-up, beaming. The song comes to an end, kids applaud wildly. Deal strides up to the stage and grabs the singer.*

DEAL: "Kid, you got something. I think there's a big future for your band in New York. Sign this contract and I'll make you a star."

SINGER: "Gee whiz, Mr. Deal. Gosh!"
As he signs the contract, the elderly teacher reappears with the mayor and police chief. They see what is happening and beam, converted. Music starts again. Everyone dances including the elderly teacher and mayor, who amusingly try to rock & roll. Dissolve on happy scene – mix to big New York theatre, hysteria scenes, fame, success, glamour and . . . FADE.

That sort scenario briefly sums up the story-line of a string of rock & roll films made in the wake of Bill Haley's surprising rise to fame during the early '50s. It was appropriate that Hollywood should attempt to cash in on the 'teen trend' for it was, after all, a film that gave rock & roll its original impetus.

James Dean

At a time when juvenile delinquency filled the headlines and James Dean in *East Of Eden* ('55), *Rebel Without A Cause* ('55), and Marlon Brando in *The*

Wild One ('54) were proving that misunderstood kids were big box-office for misunderstood kids; the movie moguls, ever ready to turn a fast buck, focused their attention on a potentially huge new market – the young. *The Wild One* had seemed so disturbing to adult eyes that the British censor refused it a certificate, effectively banning it (in fact it was shown in only one British cinema) and offering the young yet another symbol of repression. *Blackboard Jungle* was typical of the post-Dean imitations, being the story of an idealistic young teacher's attempt to educate his hoodlum pupils. It differed only in that it used their music – Haley's 'Rock Around The Clock' – and pushed both singer and song to international acclaim. The theme music of *Wild One* and *Rebel* had been typical orchestrated Hollywood muzak; but the record companies still attempted to cash-in on Dean's premature death – characteristically in a head-on car crash in 1955 – by releasing the scores of the films.

American Plot

Shrewd producers, seeing the way the wind was blowing and noticing the reaction to 'Rock Around The Clock' in *Blackboard Jungle*, turned their attention to rock & roll movies. The quickest off the mark was Fred Sears, director of turgid second features for a decade, who took Haley, his song, a paper-thin plot similar to the one above, and created *Rock Around The Clock* for a laughable \$200,000. This was essentially a cheap, quick, black-and-white cash-in, and it worked – probably beyond Sears' wildest dreams – for it grossed an astounding

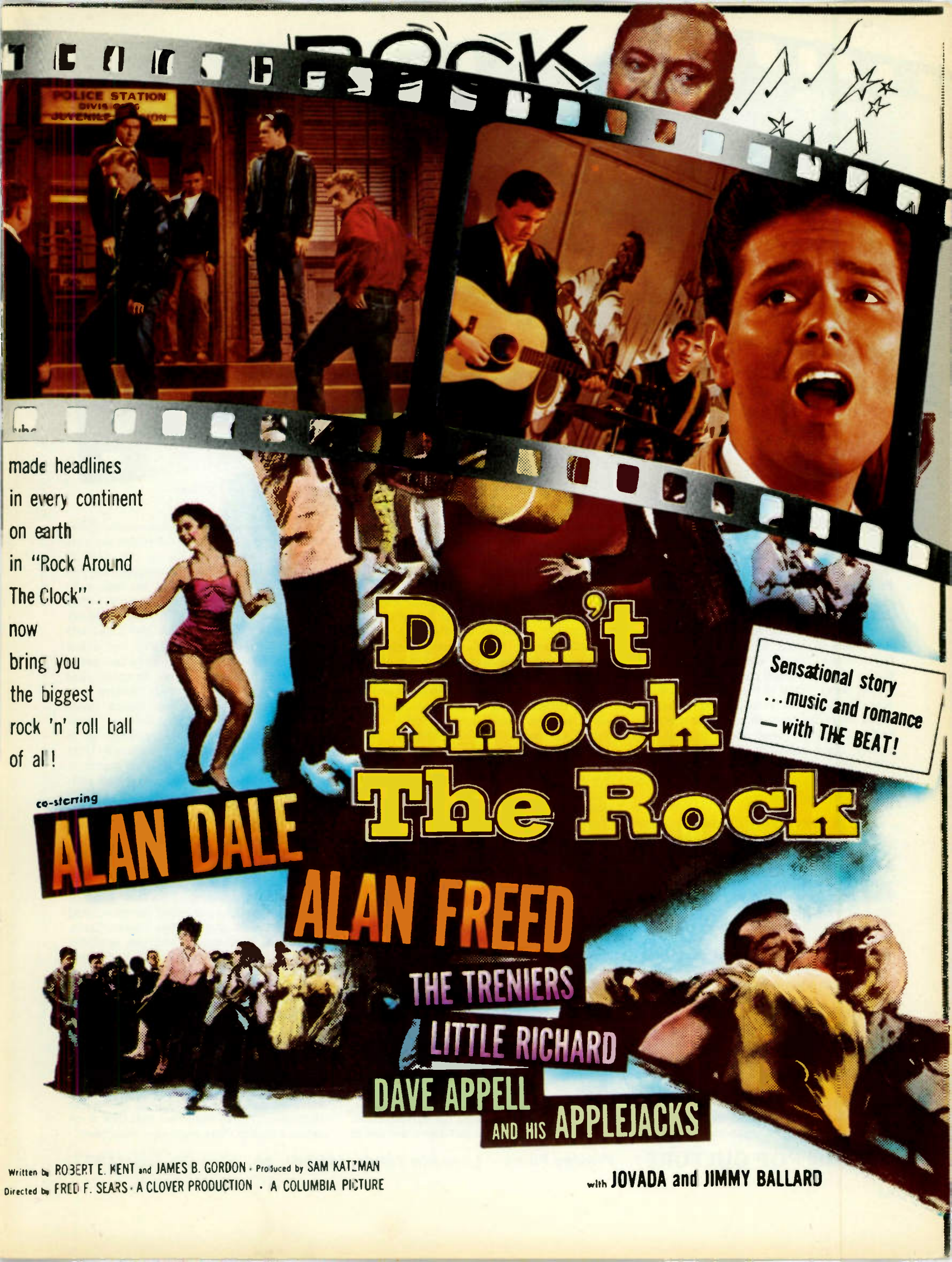
\$1,000,000 in one year in the States alone! And it was shown around the world. Allegedly it caused riots wherever it was screened, but often the press reports wildly exceeded the reality. However, Egypt saw it as an American plot 'designed to sow trouble in the Middle East by undermining Egyptian morale'; Iran banned it as 'a threat to civilization'; and Moscow, predictably, condemned it! Nonetheless wherever it went it caused extreme excitement among teens, and even ran for 11 weeks in Bombay! By any standards it was a bad movie, but it was all the kids had – their very own film, for the very first time.

Soap-Operas

After *Clock* the floodgates were open to a deluge of similar soap-operas. Next in 1956, came Haley in *Don't Knock The Rock* – a title custom-built to arouse teenage empathy. And in the same year, with virtually the same story-line, there was *Shake, Rattle & Roll* with Fats Domino.

But who cared about the story when you had the music. Soon any pretence at a plot was dropped in favour of stringing together as many rock acts as possible: *The Big Beat* ('57) featured Fats Domino, the Diamonds, the Dell Vikings and, curiously, the Mills Brothers and George Shearing; *Disc Jockey Jamboree* ('57) had Jerry Lee Lewis pounding out what he still considers to be his best performance of 'Great Balls Of Fire', as well as Domino again, Carl Perkins, and many lesser lights. They were in fact all much of an impoverished muchness.

Occasionally, there were brave attempts



made headlines
in every continent
on earth
in "Rock Around
The Clock"...
now
bring you
the biggest
rock 'n' roll ball
of all!



co-starring

ALAN DALE

Don't Knock The Rock

Sensational story
... music and romance
— with THE BEAT!

ALAN FREED

THE TRENIERS

LITTLE RICHARD

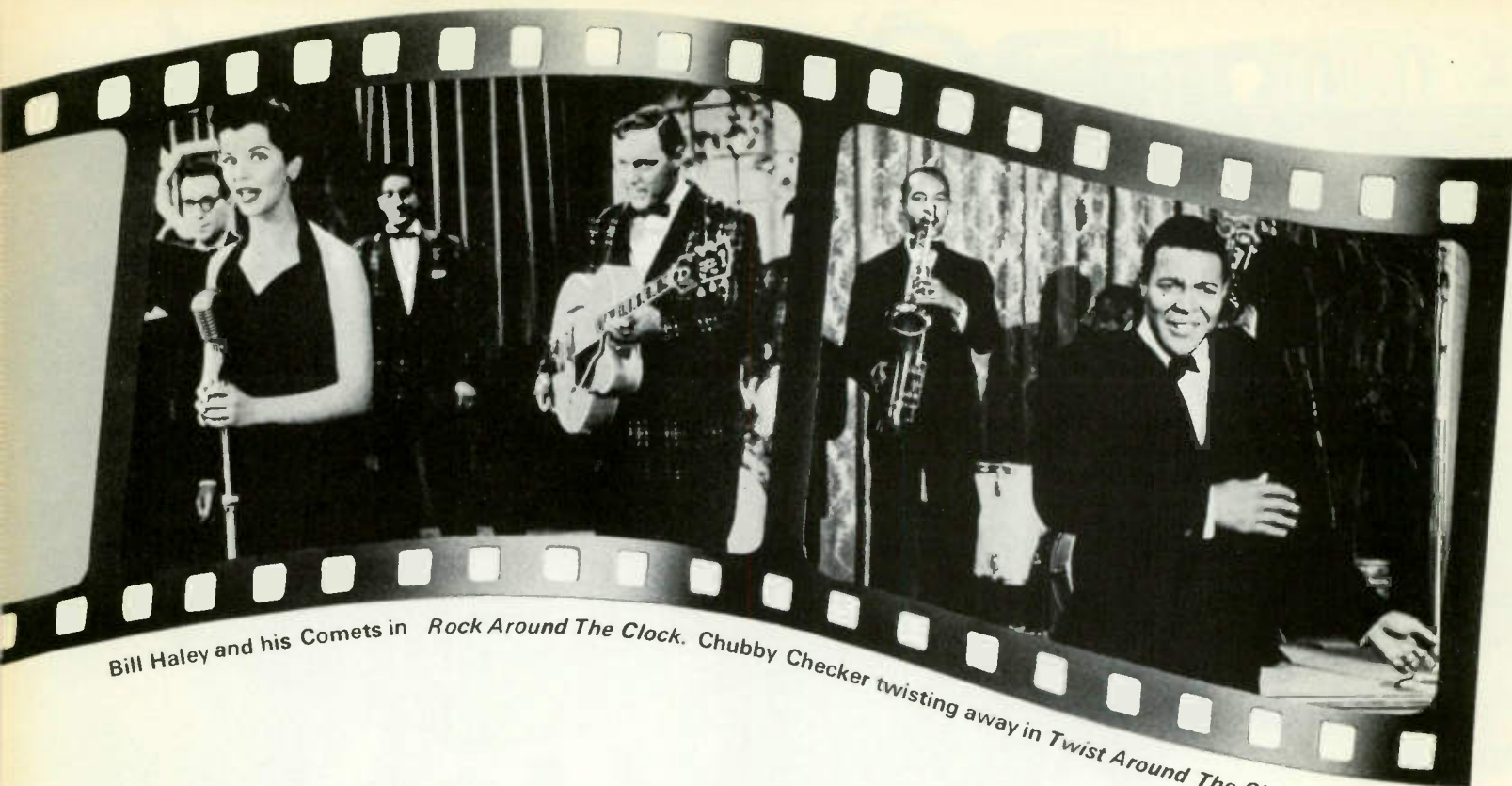
DAVE APPELL

AND HIS APPLEJACKS



Written by ROBERT E. KENT and JAMES B. GORDON • Produced by SAM KATZMAN
Directed by FRED F. SEARS • A CLOVER PRODUCTION • A COLUMBIA PICTURE

with JOVADA and JIMMY BALLARD



Bill Haley and his Comets in *Rock Around The Clock*. Chubby Checker twisting away in *Twist Around The Clock*.

to tackle other issues and even turn rockers into actors. *Untamed Youth* ('57), for example, has two entertainers exposing racketeering on a cotton farm, and features Eddie Cochran singing a Presley-esque version of 'Cottonpicker' among its delights. *Fury Unleashed* ('58), re-titled from *Hot Rod Gang* for British audiences who were thought to be ignorant of the terminology, shows Gene Vincent as the leader of a rock & roll combo and a hot-rod racing gang – one of the 'crazy kids living to a frenzied beat' – but trying to keep it quiet in order to grab an inheritance (a plot, incidentally, not unlike that of *The Young Ones* starring Cliff Richard four years later).

Jayne Mansfield

Not all the movies, however, were cheap quickies. In 1956 a respected Hollywood director – Frank Tashlin, responsible for some good, slick comedies – produced, wrote and directed *The Girl Can't Help It* which is probably the best remembered of all the early movies featuring R&R. Expensively made in colour for £700,000 it sends up the hype of the music industry (another favourite theme), and takes a few swipes at rock en route. It is notable for making rock 'legit' in that it put rock & roll stars in the same vehicle as established Hollywood players, but it is not essentially a rock movie – the plot and Jayne Mansfield loom too large for that! But stalwart actor Tom Ewell is there to hustle the story along as Little Richard (who sings the title song), Gene Vincent and the Blue Caps, Domino, the Platters and Cochran drift in and out delivering songs via TV screens, cabarets, etc. Some

of the comedy is sharp – including a spoof rock number entitled 'Rock Around The Rockpile' with lines like 'No lights on the Christmas tree, mother, they're using the electric chair tonight!' – and the rock artists are kept well in their place. It is also typically hypocritical in that it satirises the exploitation aspects of the rock & roll industry while it is, itself, exploiting; cleverly appealing to both adult and teen audiences with its glossy story and proud boast of '17 sensational rock & roll songs'.

The British movie industry was, typically, slow off the mark. But by 1957 it had come up with *Rock You Sinners*, much the same tired old plot again, but this time starring such luminaries as Art Baxter and his Rockin' Sinners, Tony Crombie and his Rockets, and Don Solla and his Rockin' Horses. Tommy Steele played himself in *The Tommy Steele Story* – a heart-warming but insipid bio-pic – and a couple of others like *The Duke Wore Jeans* ('58), which just about speaks for itself. After that he changed his medium, and went into the theatre and more conventional musicals. Cliff Richard crops up as a juvenile delinquent in *Serious Charge* ('58) where he sings 'Living Doll' for the first time; and even Terry Dene found time in his brief career to make a routine movie called *The Golden Disc* ('57).

Passing Fad

By and large the movies of the immediate post-rock period were notable only for their mediocrity. None stands up today as being anything other than boring or laughable – even *The Girl Can't Help It*, which occasionally turns up on television, is pallid and tedious – but some are worth

watching as records of performances of the stars of the times, many of whom are now dead and not elsewhere on film and, in their way, are unique and valuable for this reason. At the time rock & roll was seen as nothing more than a passing teen fad that could be milked for money. It wasn't until 1959 and *Jazz On A Hot Summer's Day* (still considered a classic), that music was given the full documentary approach. It is a film record of the Newport Jazz Festival, and does at least feature one rocker. Fortunately, it was Chuck Berry performing 'Sweet Little Sixteen', described even then by one reviewer as 'a tasteless rock & roll effort!' It wasn't until the middle of the next decade that rock and pop music were to be dignified with this type of cinematic treatment.

Nostalgia

In the end rock movies died a natural death. They were neither good enough nor, after the first wave, popular enough to continue. *Go, Johnny, Go* made in 1959 by Alan Freed's production company, had Eddie Cochran and Ritchie Valens (both, of course, now dead), and was probably the last of the true rock & roll films. Sadly, it has never been released in Britain. In best Hollywood tradition the early '60s saw a *Son Of . . .* production, and another attempted cash-in called *Twist Around The Clock*, but the enthusiasm was gone. It is to be regretted that no really great movie emerged during those years, and that those surviving have only interest value, nostalgia, and brief glimpses of early stars in action to recommend them. But Hollywood hardly expected that rock & roll would become more important than itself.

NEXT IN POP CULTURE:

Presley Films – *Love Me Tender* (1956) to *Elvis On Tour* (1972)



POP INFLUENCES: 1920-73

From mountain shacks to Cadillacs

In Nashville, Tennessee, lives an old gentleman who has spent most of his life picking guitars and banjos. In his late 70s, and rather hard of hearing, he's nevertheless considered a firm member of Nashville's famous country music show, the Grand Ole Opry. From time to time he joins the long, rambling programme that delights an on-the-spot audience of a few hundreds and later a radio audience of several millions. Sam McGee, for that's his name, has the longest record of all the Opry performers, nearly 50 years service, and he's one of few who can still recall the spit-and-prayer beginnings in the '20s.

What's more, he's the last link with a character who will always sum up for many what the Opry has meant to country music, and what country music has meant to them: the gold-toothed, wing-collared banjo-picker and wisecracker, Uncle Dave Macon. Sam was a companion of Uncle Dave's for years, and even now he likes to pick up a banjo sometimes, grin broadly, let out a whoop, and stamp off into one of the old man's favourites — some little song about avoiding widows, or getting drunk on moonshine.

But Uncle Dave has been dead more than 20 years, and Sam is getting on — when he and one or two others have passed, there'll be precious little left of the original spirit of the Opry. And this matters. The Opry has always been a sort of hub of country music. Nashville itself is well placed to be a meeting-ground for East and West, and it has always paid

attention both to the South-Eastern mountain music and the South-Western plains music. Simplifying matters a little, you can say that country music has trekked down two main highways, and it's in Nashville that they meet.

On one hand, there's the hill country of the South-Eastern states. To the remote and inaccessible reaches of this territory the pioneers from the Old World struggled, bringing their wagons, farm equipment and fiddles. And in the tiny homesteads perched on mountainsides or buried in valleys, they and their music stayed. English tourists who penetrated there at the turn of the century found music practically identical to that being sung and played in their home counties. When conditions became a little less rugged, and highways and railroads were carved through, or round, the mountains, and people had a chance to take musical

groups a-travelling, what they played was still only a holler away (as they'd say) from the Mother Country's. At the Wednesday night dances – it was on Wednesdays they had them, not at weekends; that was how mountain life seemed to work – the fiddlers and banjo-pickers would pass the hours offering hoedowns from old Ireland and Scotland, breaking off occasionally for one of the new-fangled waltzes.

At this stage it was the dancer that called the tune, not the armchair listener. But after the First World War things began to change – these were the pushy '20s, the ballyhoo years, and even backwoods music could discover some new wrinkles. Guitars came in. Groups began to play for sitting audiences in school-houses, or between acts at theatres, or as back-grounds for silent movies. And personalities started to appear, furthered by the new and fantastically energetic record business.

Funny Name

One of the first signs that country music meant more than a lone fiddler on a tree stump, or a blind banjoist on a street-corner, was the funny-name business. There were the Skillet-Lickers, the Gully Jumpers, the Georgia Crackers, the Southern Moonlight Entertainers, Fiddlin' John Carson's Virginia Reelers. (It was Carson who, exactly 50 years ago, made the first record of country music in the South.) Bands like these, with fiddles, banjos, mandolins and guitars, sometimes five or six members strong, set a pattern. The fiddler or fiddlers played wild cascading melodies, while banjo, mandolin and guitar laid a busy rhythm, the guitar sometimes taking off in ambitious step-ladder runs. Every now and then a singer would squeeze a verse in edgeways. The public, taking to this, demanded more singing. Which led, as you might expect, to groups that put singing first.

Such a group was the Carter Family of southern Virginia. They were A. P. Carter, his wife Sara, and his sister-in-law Maybelle. (Country music started in the family and, even when it became a business, often stayed there.) The Carters' instru-

Below: Jimmie Rodgers



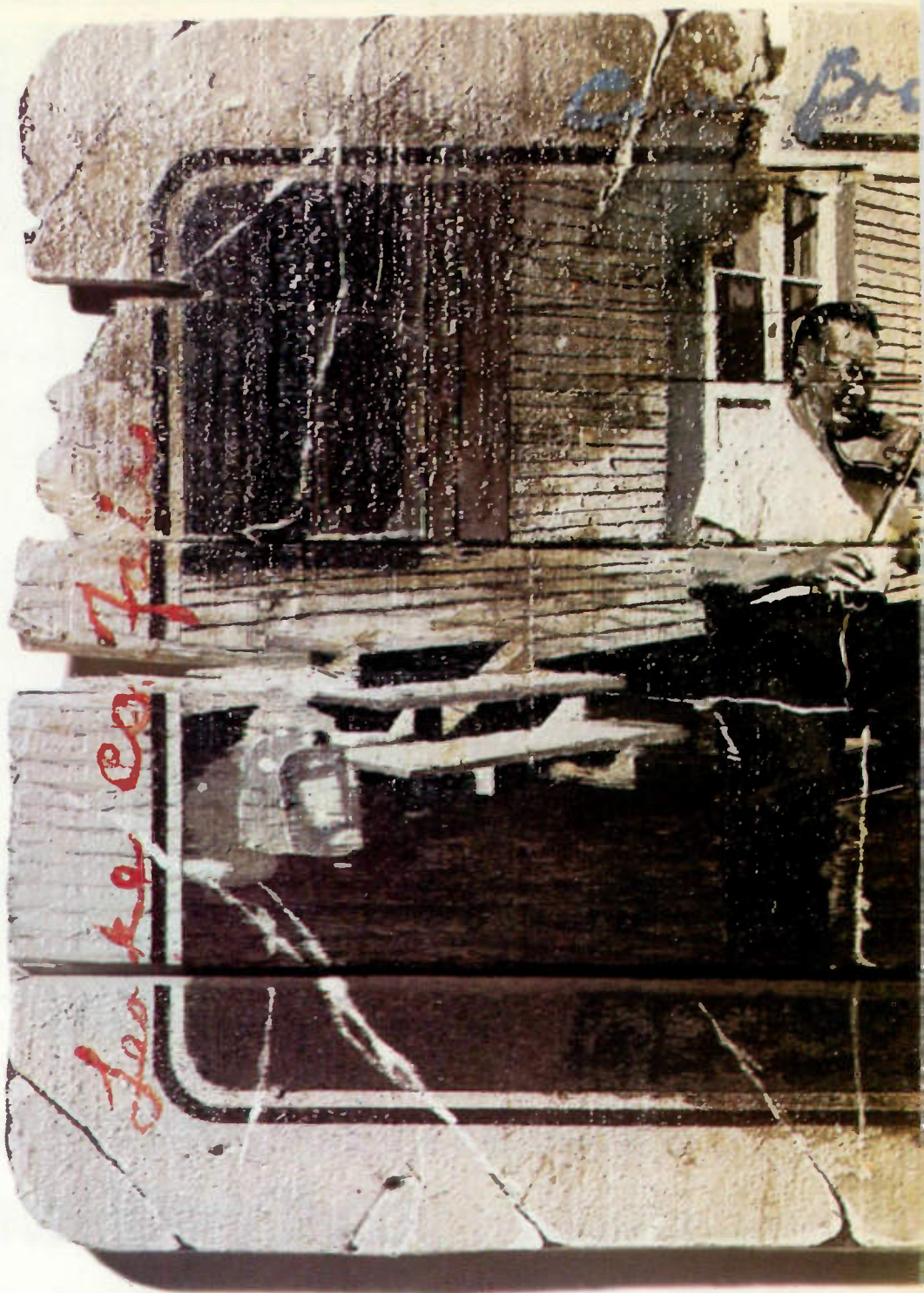
Tony Russell

ments were a guitar and an autcharp, played by the girls. But people loved them best for their bulging songbag, which A.P. stocked by collecting from amateur musicians up and down the mountains, with all the care of a butterfly-hunter. The trio's beautiful and moving harmonies made them the big record hit of the Depression years. Some echo of those days can be heard yet, for Maybelle is still singing with some of her daughters – and one of those daughters, June Carter, is now the wife and fellow performer of Johnny Cash.

By now the public was beginning to prefer songs to tunes, and the passing of the crazy old fiddle-bands could be seen like an overhanging storm cloud. But an even greater factor in the decline of that oldest of old-time music was the arrival of

another new artist. He was a song man, too; his only instrument was a lazily picked guitar. And he had hit on the cleverest formula in pop music history.

All the time the fiddlers and the Carters and so forth were doing their stuff, the black musicians of the South were playing their blues for their own people. White neighbours had always liked these blues, and the musicians among them would often play and sing them, but nobody had tried to set up a career as a white blues-singer. Then, from a poor background in a south Mississippi railroad worker's family, came a lanky fellow with a stack of funky blues verses, a guitar style to match, and a husky yodel – Jimmie Rodgers. In the best rags to riches style, Rodgers became an American hero, switching the subject of his music round to catch the market with ease.





Barry Thorpe

getting fond of. And the connection was there – Western Swing bands had trumpets and saxes and clarinets, and amplified steel guitars that sounded like front-line instruments too. Plus, of course, the regulation fiddles and banjos and ordinary guitars, with piano or accordion filling out the rhythm section. The result was that a Western Swing band (the best known were Bob Wills' Texas Playboys and Milton Brown's Musical Brownies) gave you everything. Old-time breakdowns, Blues, Dixieland jazz standards, novelty songs, 'heart' songs. ('Heart' songs were sentimental numbers about mother, home, . . . well, you know how it goes.) All this was delivered with bounce and blare, in a definitely new, and you could almost say *orchestral* kind of country music.

By World War Two Western Swing was a loud voice in country music, but Opry would have little of it. Swing used drums and electric instruments, and Opry was holding out against that kind of innovation. (Not any more.) Instead, Nashville radio looked faithfully to the South-East for its supplies, and after the doldrums it was finding them again.

Seeds of Bluegrass

Not that the South-East stringbands had died, they had just been taking a breather. The style was revived in wide-ranging bands like Mainer's Mountaineers which featured groups-within-groups. The Mainer crew, for instance, would alternate an old-fashioned hoedown; a 'heart' song by two members on mandolin and guitar; a sacred selection by everyone; and a blues by a soloist. The idea of vocal duets caught on especially widely, and most of the big names seemed to be pairs of brothers – Dixons, Delmores, Carlisles, Monroes. The sound was much quieter than Western Swing, just two guitars playing boogie, or guitar supporting a fluent mandolin or banjo, while the singers created plaintive tenor-and-baritone harmonies. What it amounted to, of course, was the seeds of bluegrass.

That was the more countryfied material available to the Opry as the '30s turned into the '40s. But there was another,

Below: Mainer's Mountaineers



Old Time Music

Blue Yodels

Rodgers was immense. As soon as he put out some of his 'blue yodels' he was the star of country music. His records sold all over the United States and even beyond (Britain issued dozens of them), his style was imitated from Texas to Tennessee, and east to the sea. Having scored with his blues, he turned to sentimental songs about mother, home, dad, boyhood. Then to songs of railroad life, which he knew something about. Then to songs of cowboy life, which he didn't know a thing about. Still, every time a coconut. Small wonder 'country music' is such an all-embracing term, when its first superstar mixed everything into it that he could lay his hands on.

By 1933 Jimmie Rodgers was dead, of

TB, but in the easier times of the post-Depression years country music followed his lessons with diligence. The stringbands of the South-East might be rather quiet, but those in the South-West were not. Texas and Oklahoma, which had started off with much the same tradition of old-time fiddling as the rest of the South, had taken it down a new road, developing a hot, jazzy style of song-and-dance music that fitted the new notion, amplification. Rodgers had shown that you had to be versatile. Whatever else it was, Western Swing was *that*.

Orchestral Country

It was a good name, Western Swing, because it suggested a connection with swing jazz, which hip Southerners were

punchier sound, which had the virtue of sounding electrified without having to be so. It was the thick-textured music of Roy Acuff and his Crazy Mountaineers, a brilliant combination of steel guitar and fiddle – a mixture of Western Swing sophistication and South-Eastern traditionalism. Acuff had just what was needed to stand on the meeting-ground of the two styles, and appropriately he became the leading figure on the Opry. His fame was enormous. He stood for governor of Tennessee. (But it was a bad year for Republicans.) He assembled the world's largest collection of hand-painted neckties. He earned a quarter of a million dollars annually. And when the Japanese charged on the US Marines at Okinawa, their battle-cry was: 'To hell with Roosevelt! To hell with Babe Ruth! To hell with Roy Acuff!'

Honky Tonk

World War Two, in fact, meant a lot to country music. The Western Swing bands spread their names and did their bit, playing for war-bond rallies. Someone should have written a million with the country ditty 'There's A Star Spangled Banner Waving Somewhere'. Servicemen in training or on leave demanded something loud (but country) and got what was known as 'honky tonk' music. It came out of the South-Western bars, electrified to meet the competition of the juke-boxes, and it put the fiddles in the rear while steel guitars moaned and shrieked. On this rollercoaster rode Ernest Tubb, 'The Texas Troubadour', who had started out as a Jimmie Rodgers imitator. And singer-pianist Moon Mullican, a Western Swing veteran and pre-rockabilly legend. And Webb Pierce, who filtered some of the blues out of Jimmie Rodgers' songs and steeped his own material in them.

This sound of the '40s was a tough, matted network of wailing steel guitars, bluesy background fiddles, throbbing rhythms, and singers with voices full of longing, pleading, hurting. There were, as they say, giants then. Many are gone, or have forsaken the sound for something newer. Acuff still gives out most of the original spirit – but then, he still has with him most of his original band. There is always Hank Snow, a hit-maker then and now, a Rodgers devotee who happened to have an outstandingly distinctive voice of his own. From Rodgers' roots too sprang Louisiana singer Jimmie Davis, who fought a massive handicap (three years of making disgracefully funky – and very funny blues) to become twice governor of his state, and composer of 'You Are My Sunshine' and 'Nobody's Darling But Mine'. Now, like many, he has joined the gospel fold, which also numbers Molly O'Day, the greatest woman singer of the '40s, and perhaps (though no record company will release the stuff to prove it) the greatest woman singer in all country music.

Now, the spirit of '40s country music rests in two places. In the South-East the culmination of the stringbands and the

duets, and all the music we looked at earlier, was bluegrass. "Bluegrass," one of its practitioners has said, "is a pretty clear-cut music – you is either playin' it or you ain't." When you is, the form is strict: you can have fiddle and banjo and mandolin and guitar and string-bass. (Permitted variations: no fiddle, or added steel-guitar, or double one of the instruments.) The singing is usually done by a lead voice, with two or three others joining in on the choruses. Between verses the musicians take solos, in highly complicated, fast-fingered styles peculiar to the music. It sounds mechanical, and in unskilled (or overskilled) hands it usually is, but the drive and thrust of a great bluegrass band on 'form is thrilling, and can leave an audience enraptured and breathless.

Bluegrass crystallised in the late '40s with the legendary Bill Monroe's Blue Grass Boys (hence the name), featuring the leader on mandolin, and banjoist Earl Scruggs, who had developed a three-finger picking technique which upturned previous concepts. Other talented musicians carried the torch on, and now bluegrass has some 25 years of history, in which time it's become a popular outdoor music (great at festivals), a popular do-it-yourself music (many fans are performers), and has remained, in essence, still a very *country*, country music.

Hank Williams

But the mainstream flowed in another direction. You need only glance at what comes out of Nashville to see that about 1% of it is bluegrass. The rest, if it takes inspiration from anything 25 years back, gets it not from the bluegrass bands, but from a single performer. Unlike Bill Monroe and many of the other originators of bluegrass, he is dead; indeed, like Jimmie Rodgers, he died almost before he had started, with just a hundred or so records and a remarkable history behind him. Yet most of these records are still available, and his name is in that tiny group respected by musicians from every other walk of music – the band of unique and unforgettable stylists.

The two things to remember about Hank Williams are his style and his songs. You can say that about other artists, but of nobody else could you say that either talent on its own would have taken him just about as far as he actually got. If Hank Williams had never written anything but his signature on a cheque-book, he'd still be a paramount country singer. If he'd had no more voice than a man would keep in his bathroom, his songs would have raised him to some sort of immortality.

Like Jimmie Rodgers he came from a poor Deep South background and had a rough sort of life until, soon after the war, he wrote a song called 'Move It On Over'. It had just the same tune as 'Rock Around The Clock' (but five years earlier), and it did nicely enough to attract the interest of a major record company. A sympathetic producer encouraged him to write, and in the next few years the skinny, nervous



young fellow thought up among others, 'I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry', 'Jambalaya', 'Hey Good Lookin'', 'You Win Again', 'There'll Be No Teardrops Tonight' and 'Your Cheatin' Heart'. He knew how to capture a moment of joy or despair in simple and instantly memorable words, which is why all of those songs, and a dozen or two more by him, are established country standards – songs people will



THE SUPERSTARS

SLADE

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their feet, screaming out the names of their favourites. The band have built their reputation on live performances. Even their studio recordings have an on-stage presence that is heightened by the use of such devices as distortion and echoed hand-clapping. Nevertheless, despite the band's consistent success on record, their singles still work as trailers for the live performance.

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The other reason the blokes like him is that he's no better looking than they are, and so doesn't constitute any kind of threat where girls are concerned. No girl is likely to tell her boyfriend, 'I wish you looked like him,' when him is Holder. And Holder plays up to the image, grimacing on-stage, pulling faces for the cameras. His appearance in general is outrageous:

*'Say I'm a scruff bag, and it's no
disgrace, I ain't in no hurry...'*

These days neither Holder nor the rest of the band are exactly scruffy, but they don't conform to the sartorial conventions of pop stardom. They may sparkle and glitter, and Dave Hill may have put on the bi-sexual costume of camp rock (that's why the boys don't mind him — no one who looks *that* much like a pouf could be a threat), but the style is still based on the skinhead image which first brought the band public attention in the late '60s.

The adoption of the skinhead image was an inspired publicity manoeuvre. At a time when all rock bands wore their hair long and a sizeable youth cult had boots, braces, and hair razored almost to the scalp, the stunt was doubly effective. At first it got them noticed because they looked like no other band in the country, and secondly it identified them with a large proportion of teenagers whose tastes were almost completely ignored by the mass music business. Skinheads were mostly Reggae fans, just as their Mod predecessors had picked up on blue-beat half a dozen years before. But, like blue-beat, Reggae had not infiltrated 'the business' in any significant way. Nevertheless, just as the Small Faces had been popular among Mods because they were Mods; Slade immediately attracted a following of skinheads, delighted to find their presence acknowledged in this way, even by a band that didn't play their music.

Anti-Social Cult

The band's association with a cult labelled as violent and anti-social by the media had certain disadvantages. Besides arousing the suspicion of all those who were alarmed by the skinheads' public image, Slade found promoters reluctant to book the band because they were afraid that either they or the audience they would

attract might cause trouble. So Slade let their hair grow, and today Holder remains the strongest link with the original audience as he struts around in braces, with his trousers short up around his shins, emitting a sort of style that has nothing to do with clothes.

*'So you think we have a lazy time,
Well you should know better...'*

Pop music is crowded with examples of bands, normally the ones with the better publicists, that have made it to the top with little talent and less work. But very few bands have ever hit the Big Time, as Slade did, with a reputation built up through a long background of live performances. It was this 'live' quality that stood out on 'Get Down And Get With It', which became their first hit in 1971, even though the record was made in the studio. It became an obvious number for getting the audience going, and undoubtedly a large proportion of the record's sales went to fans of the band who wanted to recapture the excitement of the live gigs.

Not that astute management hasn't been a factor in Slade's success. In Chas Chandler they have a manager who is a great believer in 'live' performances; even now he personally supervises sound-tests and rehearsals. His timing with Slade has been impeccable, and it's more than mere coincidence that their recording contract came up for re-negotiation the same week as their first hit single. Perhaps Chandler's loving care of the group stems from what happened to Jimi Hendrix after Jimi split from him.

A good manager can lift a group through the most difficult times. In July 1973, Slade were dealt a blow that would have kept many a lesser band off the road for months, when drummer Don Powell was nearly killed in a fatal car crash. Yet Slade were on the boards again in less than seven days with Jimmy Lea's younger brother, Frank, as stand-in drummer. They still produced that wild audience reaction which has made them famous.

Showmanship

Slade already have two American tours under their belt; the first playing second on the bill to Humble Pie, the second as top of the bill. American rock critics are making the same mistakes about Slade that the pop press did in Britain; one of them even saying that Slade won't make it in the States until they settle down and play some serious rock & roll! Slade's records however are beginning to creep up the charts and perhaps they will become 'the people's band' in the US as they have in Britain.

Slade's amazing band/audience relationship began as a reaction to the detached and egocentric manner of those late '60s rock bands; who many saw as playing basically for themselves, more interested in technical perfection than showmanship, and consequently preferring to play in the controlled conditions of a recording studio



Old Time Music

Centre: The Carter Family. Sara (right) is holding an autoharp, played by pressing the white buttons for different chords. Right: Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys, a scene from one of their many musical Westerns. Wills himself stands centre-left of the group, holding a fiddle. Far right: Hank Williams; the greatest star country music has yet produced.

Brian Chalker

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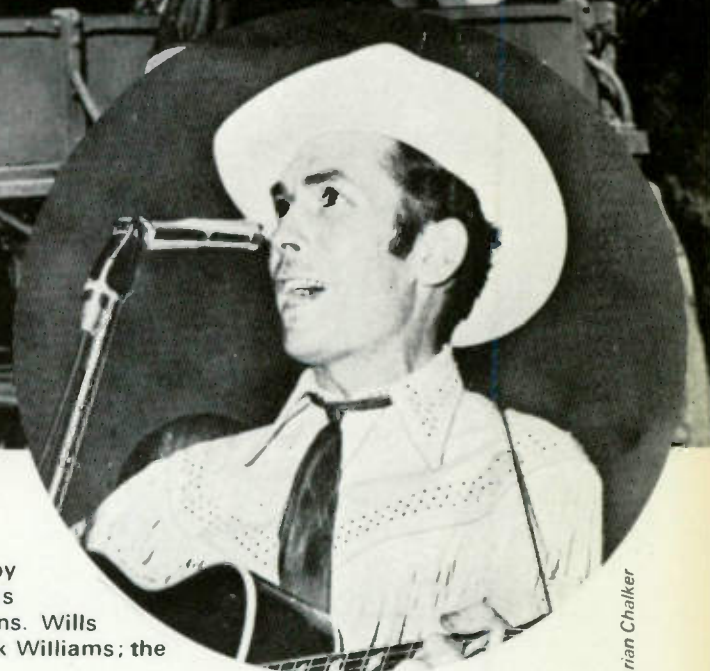
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*'Say I'm a scruff bag, and it's no
disgrace, I ain't in no hurry...'*

These days neither Holder nor the rest of the band are exactly scruffy, but they don't conform to the sartorial conventions of pop stardom. They may sparkle and glitter, and Dave Hill may have put on the bi-sexual costume of camp rock (that's why the boys don't mind him – no one who looks *that* much like a pouf could be a threat), but the style is still based on the skinhead image which first brought the band public attention in the late '60s.

The adoption of the skinhead image was an inspired publicity manoeuvre. At a time when all rock bands wore their hair long and a sizeable youth cult had boots, braces, and hair razored almost to the scalp, the stunt was doubly effective. At first it got them noticed because they looked like no other band in the country, and secondly it identified them with a large proportion of teenagers whose tastes were almost completely ignored by the mass music business. Skinheads were mostly Reggae fans, just as their Mod predecessors had picked up on blue-beat half a dozen years before. But, like blue-beat, Reggae had not infiltrated 'the business' in any significant way. Nevertheless, just as the Small Faces had been popular among Mods because they *were* Mods; Slade immediately attracted a following of skinheads, delighted to find their presence acknowledged in this way, even by a band that didn't play their music.

Anti-Social Cult

The band's association with a cult labelled as violent and anti-social by the media had certain disadvantages. Besides arousing the suspicion of all those who were alarmed by the skinheads' public image, Slade found promoters reluctant to book the band because they were afraid that either they or the audience they would

attract might cause trouble. So Slade let their hair grow, and today Holder remains the strongest link with the original audience as he struts around in braces, with his trousers short up around his shins, emitting a sort of style that has nothing to do with clothes.

*'So you think we have a lazy time,
Well you should know better...'*

Pop music is crowded with examples of bands, normally the ones with the better publicists, that have made it to the top with little talent and less work. But very few bands have ever hit the Big Time, as Slade did, with a reputation built up through a long background of live performances. It was this 'live' quality that stood out on 'Get Down And Get With It', which became their first hit in 1971, even though the record was made in the studio. It became an obvious number for getting the audience going, and undoubtedly a large proportion of the record's sales went to fans of the band who wanted to recapture the excitement of the live gigs.

Not that astute management hasn't been a factor in Slade's success. In Chas Chandler they have a manager who is a great believer in 'live' performances; even now he personally supervises sound-tests and rehearsals. His timing with Slade has been impeccable, and it's more than mere coincidence that their recording contract came up for re-negotiation the same week as their first hit single. Perhaps Chandler's loving care of the group stems from what happened to Jimi Hendrix after Jimi split from him.

A good manager can lift a group through the most difficult times. In July 1973, Slade were dealt a blow that would have kept many a lesser band off the road for months, when drummer Don Powell was nearly killed in a fatal car crash. Yet Slade were on the boards again in less than seven days with Jimmy Lea's younger brother, Frank, as stand-in drummer. They *still* produced that wild audience reaction which has made them famous.

Showmanship

Slade already have two American tours under their belt; the first playing second on the bill to Humble Pie, the second as top of the bill. American rock critics are making the same mistakes about Slade that the pop press did in Britain; one of them even saying that Slade won't make it in the States until they settle down and play some serious rock & roll! Slade's records however are beginning to creep up the charts and perhaps they will become 'the people's band' in the US as they have in Britain.

Slade's amazing band/audience relationship began as a reaction to the detached and egocentric manner of those late '60s rock bands; who many saw as playing basically for themselves, more interested in technical perfection than showmanship, and consequently preferring to play in the controlled conditions of a recording studio

than on-stage in front of an audience. As Slade's act developed with Chas Chandler (ex-Animals' bassist) as their manager, it acquired features from the skinhead cult, from football terraces, and embellishments from other performers.

However much critics put down the live spectacle as a substitute for musical talent, no band has ever strung hits together the way Slade do just because they come over strong on stage. Besides, Slade have long passed the point of relying on critics for their reputation. They demand to be accepted on their own terms or not at all. And those terms are clearly stated in their music, most of all in that one song: *So, Cum On Feel The Noize*.

BACK TRACK

All the group, excepting Dave Hill from Devon, were born in Wolverhampton.

Jimmy Lea born 14/6/52.

Don Powell born 10/9/50.

Dave Hill born 4/4/52.

Noddy (Neville) Holder born 15/6/50.

Slade began in the late '60s as the 'N Betweens, releasing records like 'You Better Run' (Columbia), and as Ambrose Slade, 'Genesis' (Fontana). Then, as Slade, they also released 'Wild Winds Are Blowing' (Fontana).

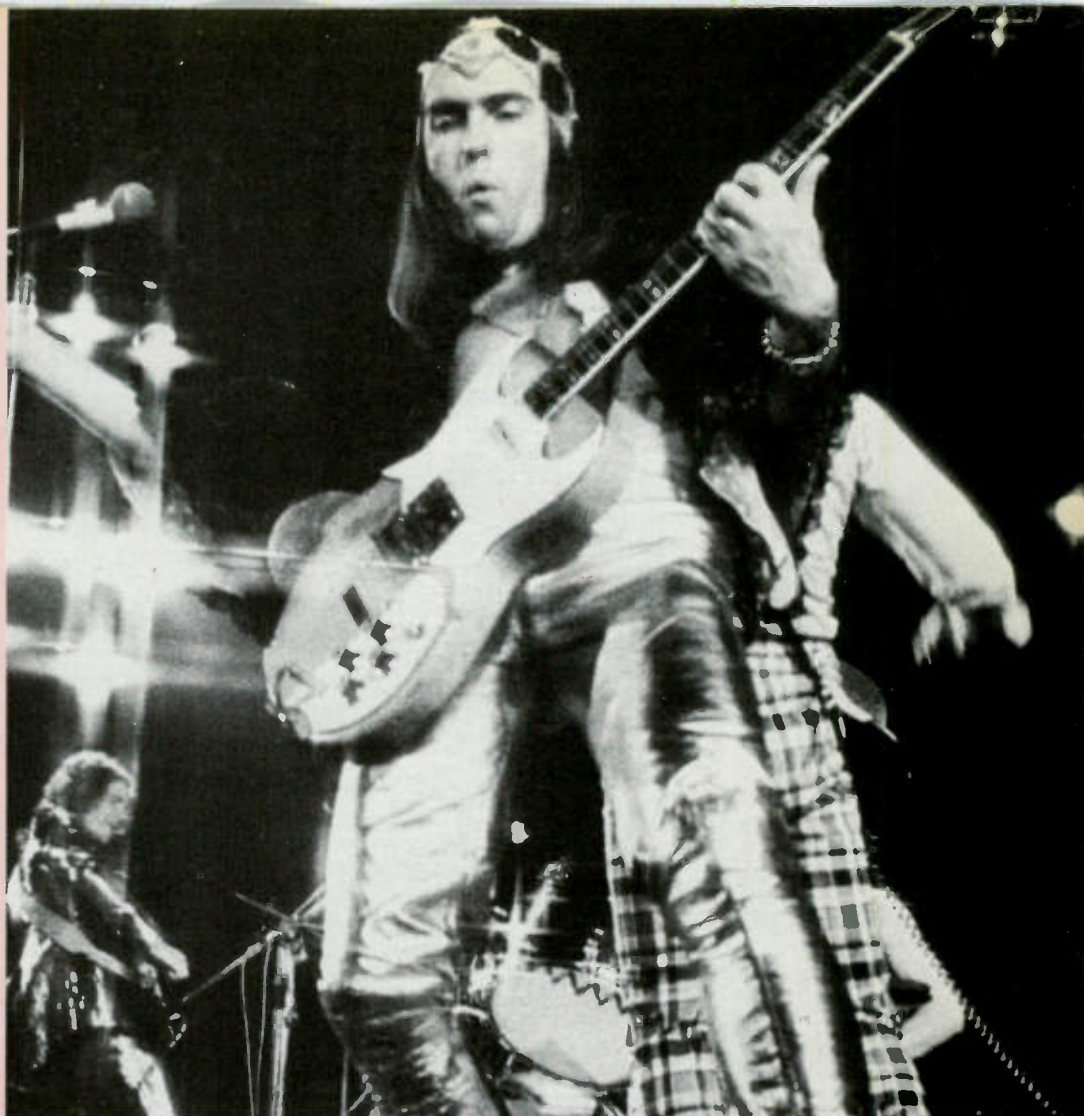
1970: 'The Shape Of Things To Come' and 'Know Who You Are' (Fontana).

1971: 'Get Down And Get With It' (no. 15) (Polydor). October, 'Cos I Luv You' (no. 1).

1972: January, 'Look Wot You Dun' (no. 4). March, 'Slade Alive' album (no. 1). May, 'Take Me Bak 'Ome' (no. 1). August, 'Mama Weer All Crazee Now' (no. 1). November, 'Gudbuy T' Jane' (no. 2). December, 'Slayed' album (no. 1).

1973: February, 'Cum On Feel The Noize' (no. 1). June, 'Skweez Me Pleeze Me' (no. 1).

Slade suffered their first blow in July, when drummer Don was involved in a serious car crash. He escaped with severe concussion, broken ribs, ankle etc, but his girlfriend was killed. There are two more album releases planned for the latter end of 1973.



Redferns

S.K.R.

Top: Dave Hill, the long-haired lead guitarist, rocking & rolling in their new '70s image. Below: Skinhead Slade line up as they originally began in the late '60s, in bover boots, braces and razored scalps. From left to right: Noddy Holder, Jimmy Lea, Dave Hill and Don Powell.

NEXT WEEK IN SUPERSTARS: Bolan; the Bopping Rocking Imp from T. Rex, who conquered Britain with ease, but failed to carry the hysteria to the States.

Country Blues

Come on in my kitchen

"I do not play no rock & roll. Only way you can rock me, you can put me in a rockin' chair and rock me": Despite Mississippi Fred McDowell's famous warning, Country Blues have consistently been a rich source of inspiration for modern rock & roll groups – particularly in Britain.

When the Stones recorded 'Love In Vain' and 'You Gotta Move', and the Beatles 'Matchbox', and Cream 'Four Until Late' and 'I'm So Glad', they were all fishing at the same pond, the pool of country blues. Dozens of other rock musicians have stopped by there; some of them almost qualify for season-tickets. So you may well wonder: what *is* country blues? Who *are* those shadowy figures whose music licences have been renewed in the names of Jagger and Clapton?

'Are' is wrong, by and large; 'were' is more appropriate, for the giants of country blues have mostly passed on. The music, though, is fortunately more than just its top-line performers, so country blues lives today, and without too much trouble it can still be found. But its heyday, its Golden Age, was between the wars, a decade or so each side of the Depression – the great period not only of blues but of traditional jazz, and old-time country music. A V-shaped time, when America plunged into trouble and winged out of it, sustained by music that seemed to draw vigour from the downs as often as the ups.

The blues, as we saw in a previous article, took shape a little before the beginning of the 20th Century, but their first 30 or so years are mysterious. It must have been an incredibly active time, though, because when the recording business took

not of the blues, and at the end of the '20s sent its roving microphones into the South to get some, what they found was no half-formed or tentative music. From state to state, county to county, even town to town there were miraculously varied approaches to country blues playing. The ball had bounced hither and thither through the South, and every place it landed it had left a subtly different imprint. Certainly the *form* of the thing didn't alter a lot; one blues was essentially like another, and most people played guitars. But that was just the foundation; thereafter, the music took on every shape imaginable and some scarcely imaginable – like one of those dizzying castles in a fantasy, all turrets and minarets and twisting staircases. The recording-men shook their heads in bewilderment and got to work.

Delta dawn

It wasn't the birthplace, but the Mississippi Delta country was certainly a brisk rearing-ground for the blues. Hot, flat cottonland, thickly populated with black plantation-workers and their families, it was no place for an easy life, and the blues it nourished were appropriately tough, brooding, and troubled. Delta bluesmen muttered or shouted their songs, while their guitars drummed relentlessly in what musicians call 'death rhythm' – a hypnotic, repetitive beat that seems to bear down on the listener like the sun. The Delta kings were men like Charley Patton and Son House, their blues hoarsely bellowed against

slapped bass-string runs and screaming bottleneck slides. A somewhat lighter variety was the sound of Tommy Johnson, who affected falsetto whoops over a rich interplay of two guitars. Their names are less than famous – though Son House has played in the USA and Europe in recent years – but in bluesmen's circles they are hardly forgotten. Their heritage is Chicago – the Delta-raised Howling Wolf recalls Patton's gruffness and the half-yodel of Tommy Johnson, while Muddy Waters is a direct descendant, musically speaking, of Son House.

Other Mississippi bluesmen: slide-guitarist Bukka White, adept imitator of rushing train-rhythms, cousin of, and formative influence on, B. B. King; Skip James – an eerie high-voiced singer with magic fingers – his 'little song' 'I'm So Glad' sold a few hundred copies when he recorded it, millions when Cream did 40 years later. And a sort of culmination of Mississippi blues – a summing-up of everything the style could do, and everything it could mean to the next generation of musicians – the blues of Robert Johnson.

Cause Unknown

It's hard to maintain a sense of balance, talking about Johnson; his music has affected people so much that he's been elevated to the level of a superman, and the little we know of him twisted to fit an ideal biography. He was a compulsive drinker, womaniser, rambler; when he sang his tremendous, hesitant, slow blues

'Come On In My Kitchen', listeners fell quiet and women wept. Impossible to evaluate such stories – they seem to fit the man on the records, but this is risky ground. We do know that Johnson was unpredictable and withdrawn; had a cataract in one eye; was rather ugly; died in his middle 20s, in 1938 – cause unknown. Beyond that we have only his music.

In Johnson's blues the almost unintelligible gruffness of earlier Delta singers disappears, giving way to an articulate baritone and a sharp, passionate attack. Similarly, instead of the slightly muddy textures of his predecessors' guitar-playing, Johnson wielded a ringing tone, crisp bass lines, deliberate slides. His style was a curious blend of country jamming and uptown picking; the anguish of his blues filtered through carefully worked-out guitar parts that refined, but never lost, their flavour. Precisely the figure who ought, theoretically, to stand between early country blues and the urban music of the post-war years – and indeed Johnson was seen by his fellows rather as a pointer to the future. Both the piercing bottleneck playing on 'Crossroads Blues' and the boogie bass of 'Dust My Broom' were legacies to Chicago's bluesmen; Johnson's style became a model and his songs standards. Like the work of the great pop-songwriters, even his least-known songs turn out to be winners, and some of them have lately come into their own, notably the lovely reflective melodies of 'Four Until Late' and 'Love In Vain'.

Texas troubadours

Country blues in Texas boasted Blind Lemon Jefferson, another man obscure out of all proportion to his importance and one-time fame. A fat street-singer, with a high wail of a voice and a lightning touch on the fret; creator of 'Matchbox Blues' and populariser of the wonderful, chilling, sacred song 'See That My Grave Is Kept Clean' – there are few other facts about him. His style was as far from, say, Charley Patton's as Dallas is from the Delta. A lively triplet rhythm displaced the heavy Mississippi beat, a rhythm you could skip to, a rollerskate under the voice rather than a solid platform. Over it Lemon's songs soared into the wide Texas sky. From nearby came an earthier echo, the free-form field-hollers of Texas Alexander, a heavily-built singer, chiefly remembered for a habit of buying new shoes and straightaway cutting them up with a bowie knife to make them airier.

Texas was also rich in piano-players with colourful names like Black Boy Shine and Black Ivory King, men who made records distinguished for their devil-may-care, ev-

bizarre lyrics, like Whistlin' Alex Moore's 'West Texas Woman':

*'The wolves howled till midnight,
Wild ox moaned till day;
The man in the moon looked down on us –
But had nothing to say...'*

The lost world of Atlanta

Across the South, in and around Atlanta, Georgia, clustered a fine, though now little-known, group of guitar-pickers, mostly 12-string men, with hard, clear voices and a slightly throwaway, tragicomic manner. The names, again, linger in the mind: Barbecue Bob was a favourite, as was his brother Laughin' Charley. The most prolific and remarkable was Blind Willie McTell, an utterly distinctive singer with a thin, nasal, but very affecting voice. He couldn't keep away from records – not content with following the business through the '20s and '30s, he made sessions under all sorts of circumstances right up to the end of the '50s, including fascinating occasions when he sang country songs, ragtime numbers and beautiful sacred selections. One of his pieces, 'Statesboro Blues', has been



Sylvia Pitcher

popularised by both Taj Mahal and the Allman Brothers.

Northwards, in North and South Carolina, country blues developed a little more slowly, finally to flower in the '30s in the work of such men as Blind Boy Fuller, with whom Brownie McGhee and Sonny Terry began their career together. The Rev. Gary Davis, from the same area, was very likely an early influence on Fuller, and until his death last year he was the foremost practitioner of the old Carolina style, whether on blues, on rags (at which he excelled) or on sacred songs, Fuller (who died in the '40s) picked clean, rather lilting blues melodies, and had a fondness for raggy numbers with harmonica and washboard joining in. By way of McGhee, this eventually led to the skiffle craze, but Fuller didn't find fame in its wake, since far too much of his repertoire was too dirty for the skifflers. Someone once said that the only conversation he admitted to his dinner-table was bawdy, because it was the only talk everybody was sure to join in. The blues record business evidently went along with that; Fuller had many rivals for the 'party blues' market, not least the Mississippi singer Bo Carter, who devised titles like 'Banana In Your Fruit Basket', 'Pin In Your Cushion', 'The Ins And Outs Of My Girl' and 'My Pencil Won't Write No More' (no wonder) at the drop of a contract. Fuller gamely retaliated with a title the Stones were later to borrow (and misspell), 'Get Your Yas Yas Out'.

Beale Street blues

If there was any one blues city, as distinct from all the strong blues areas, it was surely Memphis. As you would expect in a city perched at the junction of several states, Memphis blues took many forms. Along with the guitarists-cum-blues-singers, men like Sleepy John Estes, Furry Lewis and Robert Wilkins – the first two still around and playing, the third a preacher who's 'Prodigal Son' was later recorded rather successfully by the Stones – there were the jugbands, which blended blues with waltzes, stomps, messarounds, novelty songs and even jazz – hear Cannon's Jug Stompers' pure back-country version of 'Bugle Call Rag'. All the good-time bands there have been since – the Lovin' Spoonful, Mungo Jerry and so on – have, consciously or not, owed much to the original jugbands of the '20s, and Memphis boasted most of the important ones. They're long gone now, though – a couple of rather sad old men survive, but Beale Street hears jug music no more. Not that it would be very appropriate there; in tidying up Memphis' most famous thoroughfare as a blues history spot for



Valerie Wilmer

From Left to Right: Sonny Terry, Brownie McGhee, and Bukka White.

tourists, the city has said goodbye to most of the old dives and corners where blues used to hang out. The 'cuttiest place on earth', as one veteran described it, is these days only cut up by urban renewal.

Keep the down home fires burning

Throughout the South, normal pressures and movements of life have made it difficult for country blues to carry on as once they did. Since the great northward migrations of the '40s, when many practitioners took their fortunes away from the countryside, the down home music has lived a rather hand-to-mouth existence. The tent-shows, medicine-shows and minstrel troupes went out of favour; even out-of-the-way roadside cafes invested in jukeboxes rather than live entertainment. In the '40s, the South for the first time had its own record companies, but even then country bluesmen didn't fare much better — the local firms largely imitated the Chicago or New York or Los Angeles sounds, using whatever local talent could offer the most proficient copies, or best variations, of Northern product.

Electric Country

There were exceptions, of course. Though recording in New York, Brownie McGhee and Sonny Terry stayed with the unamplified harp/guitar blues of the '30s, updating it only slightly, and their discs sold well in the South. Wandering musicians like Willie McTell, or the Mississippi guitarist Big Joe Williams, a Delta-styled player with plenty of old-time verve, could always get a session somewhere. But generally such figures were survivals — good men you couldn't keep down, but scarcely hot properties. In Texas, however, shortly after World War Two, an indisputably country, and demonstrably commercial, singer arose: Lightnin' Hopkins.

Lightnin' made electric country blues not merely a possibility but an integral,

logical part of the music's history. Working alone, with a cheap and thunderous amplifier, he set the South's shacks shaking with his boogies and highly personal blues accounts of woman trouble, hurricanes, jails and hard times. A protest record about a Texas farmowner who had worked him too hard was a big hit, and nearly put him into an early grave. A complaint about women's hairstyles was equally well received, and soon other singers were gleefully adopting 'Short Haired Woman':

*'I don't want no woman, if her hair
ain't no longer than mine;
You know, she ain't good for nothin'
but trouble — keep you buyin' wigs
all the time.'*

Mavericks like Lightnin' apart, the day of the solo country artist was passing, at least in the terms of the record companies. But the music had begun as home stuff, back-porch picking, family-and-friends entertainment, and on that level it continued through favourable and unfavourable times alike. How you come to hear it today (unless you search it out for yourself) is by way of a new sort of record company — the kind that caters not for black singles-buyers, but for the white, LP-collecting enthusiasts.

Activity in this area has brought several distinguished country blues performers before today's audience, as well as rediscovering and re-recording some of the legends of the past. These last are, of course, old men, and their rediscovery often anticipates their death by only a few years — Skip James and Mississippi John Hurt are just two who have been, second time round, and gone. The entirely new names are not necessarily so old. They include Robert Pete Williams, an idiosyncratic singer/guitarist who made his first recordings within the walls of Angola State Penitentiary, Louisiana. He was paroled out, and has since toured Europe and sung at many festivals — a vividly personal

singer, with imaginative flights novel in blues composition.

On the festival circuit often enough with Williams used to be Fred McDowell, an endearing personality and a splendid, hard-driving, bottleneck guitarist. 'I do not play no rock & roll,' he used to warn audiences politely before starting a set; 'only way you can rock me, you put me in a rockin' chair and rock me.' Fred McDowell practically waged a one-man Country Blues Preservation Society, but he died in 1972.

Hidden Pickers

Country bluesmen still occur, though. Only a couple of years ago, from an unlikely location in Kentucky, there came a stunning ragtime picker named Bill Williams. He is, admittedly, in his late 70s — but he has an analogue, a considerably younger one, in the Virginia singer John Jackson, who, like him, ranges across blues, rags, country songs and guitar showpieces. With the constant interest in guitar-playing, it seems likely that 'hidden' pickers such as Williams and Jackson will regularly be stumbled on by enthusiasts. The rewards are LPs, festival and concert dates, and just occasionally big royalty gains; as when the Stones diverted several hundred dollars Fred McDowell's way for 'You Gotta Move'. The stakes, in fact, are rather better than those held out to country bluesmen in the '20s, and there was plenty of good music forthcoming then. Obviously there are many social and musical reasons why country blues should simply be thinner on the ground than it once was — but it's still too early to be writing any death certificates.

NEXT WEEK IN BLACK MUSIC: Chicago Blues, we follow the Blues to the city.

POP: 1951-59

Johnny Ray Nabob of Sob

Between the gentle art of crooning and the exciting act of rock & roll, there was one man who stood out as bridging the gap. No mean task since the two were sharply divided, for although Sinatra was initially frowned on as a teenage idol, few denied he had a good voice, and oldies were allowed to love him too; while Presley was not only frowned on as an idol and a personality but his appeal was exclusively to the young, and no one over 20 had a single good word to say for his musical ability.

But in between the two, between the comparatively polite mobbing of Sinatra the Voice, and the frenzy and hysteria generated by Presley the Hips, came someone with neither voice nor hips, Johnny Ray.

Johnny Ray was the man who ended it all and started it all. He appeared in the States post-Sinatra, pre-Presley, and you can either see him as linking them or simply filling in the gap between the two.

In the States he probably filled it in. He was regarded there more as a freak, a Tiny Tim figure, than an idol. And in many ways he was.

He was born John Alvin Ray, in Dallas, Oregon, in 1927. A happy child, according to those who knew him, his personality changed completely when, at the age of 10, he lost fifty per cent of his hearing when goofing around and being rather recklessly



Hulton Picture Library

tossed in a blanket by some of his friends. He then changed from being a boisterous, musical, extrovert character into what he later described as "just about the loneliest kid in the world."

And it was this loneliness, this freakishness about his hearing, that earned him a good half of his stardom. A tall, skinny guy, with big ears like Sinatra, weighing only just over 10 stone, he traded on his own misery. After an operation in 1957, which failed to restore his hearing, he was quoted as saying: "If I hadn't been deaf I would never have been such a success in show business. Deafness made me so sensitive as a kid that I developed a huge pent-up emotion which I can express in my singing. In show business I was battered down because I wore a deaf aid. Agents would say 'Get rid of that button'. But the more I was discouraged by them, the more determined I was to show them."

Typical of his harping on the little-boy-crippled line were the endless appeals to the emotion on the grounds that he was lonely, unloved. He was probably the first star to actually trade on anti-hero characteristics with remarks like: "I'm surrounded by people who love me, but I have one cross to bear - loneliness. Through a miracle of faith and the Divine powers that have guided my emotional and spiritual life I can bring some-

thing to the kids who love me. I guess I'm a symbol or something to them. They're wonderful. I wouldn't trade one precious memory. But right in the middle of all this love I'm always haunted by that one terrible thing - I feel so alone."

These days this sort of self-pity might seem corny and unattractive; in the '50s the whole idea of baring the sensitive soul in public was fresh and new and the fans slapped it up. Indeed his whole act was designed to incorporate the true and wretched self, and nine times out of ten ended with him actually bursting into tears on stage with his biggest hits, 'Cry' and 'The Little White Cloud That Cried'. This act earned him titles like 'The Nabob of Sob', 'Prince of Wails' and 'Cry-Guy', and had the *New Musical Express* announcing to their astonishment the arrival in Britain in 1953 of 'this amazing young man who leapt from obscurity to worldwide fame in two years by baring his emotions in public and by capitalising on the hitherto unfashionable art of shedding tears!'

Hitherto unfashionable it might have been, but if he was regarded as a freak in the States he was taken a great deal more seriously in Britain. After working as a bell-boy, a car attendant and a soda jerk, he started singing, basing his style, he said, on Negro singers like Ruth Brown and Miss



Melody Maker & Camera Press



U.P.I.

Johnny Ray fan mania hit an all-time high in 1953.

Cornshucks, and becoming reasonably well-known at the time to a minority of R&B fans. In 1950 he sailed on an ocean of emotion out of a back-street Detroit cabaret into New York's Copacabana Club at \$2,000 a week. After his two biggest hits, 'Cry' and 'The Little White Cloud That Cried,' which sold over 2,000,000 copies in 1952—both of which he wrote himself—he introduced himself to British fans in 1953 when he was earning around \$150,000 a week.

Melodrama

This first visit heralded perhaps his best and biggest year. Fans flocked to see him at the Palladium and scream as he put on the most soul-baring act they'd ever seen. He would come onto the stage, a lanky, almost ridiculous-looking character until he burst forth into a vortex of emotion, hunching himself tight into himself, gasping for breath, falling to his knees, staggering, clutching, beating his head against the piano and finally bursting into tears. It was melodrama at its best and the fans loved it.

But if his voice and numbers are forgotten, or dismissed as freakery, his act wasn't—it was probably the most important aspect of the man. Vocally and musically you could never say he bridged the gap between Sinatra and Presley, but stylistically he most certainly did. He was the first actually to kiss girls on stage; he was the first to bring sex overtly to the show and work solidly to a teenage audience. Even at the time, Bennie Green saw exactly what his appeal was in a review of one of his performances. 'In this inhibited world Johnny Ray fulfils for his

audience all their dreams of uninhibited emotionalism,' he wrote. 'He does what many secretly want to do. He screams, rants, raves and bawls, while thousands cheer him for doing so. He fulfils the secret yearnings of all of us too timid to attempt more than a cautious vocal in the bathroom.'

To the hung-up British he came as a breath of fresh air, with an act that was 'maudlin nostalgic, coy, bumptious, cute, precocious and tragic in turns.' 'Basically, I'm a very lonely guy', he would say appealingly, 'I'm like a kid who's trying to pinch a piece of candy and is afraid of being caught. I've never wanted money. I've never been interested in luxury. All I really want out of life is to be loved. Sounds kinda corny but it's true. I'm very sensitive.'

It was his sadness and his sensitivity that, in 1953, started him off on a few years of unconquered rule in Britain. Over a period of 10 years, in fact, he made over £1,000,000, crying, as no one could resist saying, all the way to the bank.

Clawing Girls

While Eddie Fisher became bigger in the States, Ray was the man for us and he returned to the Palladium in 1954, and was successfully knocked unconscious by girls clawing at him in Sheffield. He sang hits like 'Walking My Baby Back Home', 'Somebody Stole My Gal', 'Glad Rag Doll', 'Let's Walk That-a-Way' and he starred in his first film with Marilyn Monroe and Ethel Merman called *There's No Business Like Show Business*, appearing, typically, as a priest.

In 1955 he was back again at the London

Palladium, beating records set by Danny Kaye with between seven and eight thousand fans packing the streets outside. This time it was the girls of Edinburgh who knocked him unconscious, where 2,000 fans crowded round his hotel and he was forced to sing 'Cry', in a choking voice, on the balcony of his room to calm them down. In the States he even sang to the Hollywood Bowl, packed to its full capacity with 18,000 fans.

Last Nail

But by 1956, Elvis had arrived. Argument produced enraged comments in the press about who was better and whether Elvis was copying Ray's style; the charts reflected the battle with Ray's 'Just Walking In The Rain' at no. 1, and Elvis's 'Hound Dog' at no. 3. But when it came to the crunch the *NME* polls, while still voting Sinatra the *World's Outstanding Singer*, marked Elvis Presley as no. 2, Dickie Valentine as no. 3 with Johnny Ray lagging behind at no. 4.

Though he was still having hits, his appearance at the Palladium in 1957 was described as 'restrained but still setting the fans alight', though perhaps the last nail in his coffin was hammered home by a fan who didn't know what harm he was doing when he wrote: 'Surely now (Ray) must be accepted, not as a weeping exhibitionist, but as a talented and sincere artist.'

Ray was never a talented artist. His voice was mediocre and not one to stand the test of time, though he still continues to tour and make money. Was he sincere? Probably, but he was terribly confused. He married



Keystone Press Agency

He didn't have the trimmings of good music, great songs or a voice – just himself. Johnny Ray sang and sobbed his way into the hearts and nerve ends of millions of women.

Conway Picture Library

once – for seven months – went on the booze, started announcing that he never loved anyone except himself and, in 1959, he made a last grand gesture to melodrama when he was had up on the charge of 'accosting and soliciting' a vice-squad plain-clothes policeman for immoral purposes – he'd faced a similar charge once before in 1951 and been found guilty. In 1959 he was cleared. As he fell senseless (of course) to the floor, the mother instinct that had sustained his fans through his years as a star, appeared for the last time as the fore-woman of the jury, one Rose Pragnca, rushed towards him sobbing: "Oh, that poor boy!" "My prayers have been answered,"

sobbed the singer in reply, as he recovered.

His appeal lay in his melodrama, melodrama that appeared as new and refreshing after the formality of such stars as Crosby and Sinatra, but coarse and obvious when put up against competition from subtler operators like Presley who had more sex to offer, more confidence, more cool and a tantalising ability to harness the frenzy of their act. Ray in comparison to the staid oldies of the '40s must have appeared like a burst of emotion, drama and release; it was only when the real kings of emotional manipulation arrived that his act seemed simply raw and crude and almost embarrassing.

At the same time, it can't be forgotten

that it was he who made the personality of the singer even more important than talent in pop (Sinatra could at least sing), and he who was the first to bring to world stardom, simply a real and desperately lovable character, without any of the trimmings of good music, great songs, or a sensational voice to help him. After Johnny Ray no one could get away, in the world of real pop stardom at least, with musical talent alone.

It was Ray we can credit with making the saying 'the singer not the song' come true. From now on, the pop audience came to expect something rather more than just music from their idols – they wanted an image and personality too.

NEXT WEEK IN POP – Big-business saw there was big money in Rock; the result was Pop and such names as Paul Anka, the Everly Brothers and the pinnacle, Buddy Holly.

Songs of Buddy Holly

By the late '50s, there was already a second generation of rock musicians, people whose main influences came not from country music or rhythm & blues, but from rock & roll itself. Like the original rock & roll audience, they were teenagers, fresh out of high school or still there, and they wrote songs about the teenage experience, like Buddy Holly's 'What To Do':

*'The record hops and all the happy times
we had
The soda shops, the walks to school now
make me sad'*

or 'Everyday', where Buddy portrays the nervous love-lorn high school kid:

*'Everyday it's a-getting closer
Going faster than a roller coaster
Love like yours will surely come my way'*

If you've heard the record, you'll recall that on the words 'roller coaster' his voice rolls in that characteristic, semi-hiccuping way to give a simultaneous impression of gulping adolescent nervousness and the sudden lurchings of the fairground switch-back itself.

Apart from a few Chuck Berry songs, these kinds of images and feelings just didn't get expressed in first-generation rock & roll. Elvis, Bill Haley and Little Richard mostly took up-tempo black or hillbilly music as the model for their songs, and took over the themes from that music too. Only the beat and the abandoned singing were completely new. It was left to their successors, particularly Holly and the Everly Brothers, to produce the first real pop songs in the rock & roll tradition.

Holly's very first recordings in fact sounded a lot like Presley. And because his voice was almost the complete opposite to Elvis' they weren't very good. Rock & roll was a music best suited to boastful, strutting singers with strong, confident voices. Holly sounded different. His singing was higher-pitched with a nervous, tentative quality to it, and as long as he was trying to be a straightforward rock & roller, the unique qualities of his voice remained smothered.

But when he started to work with Norman Petty, who became his song-writing partner and record producer, Holly had found the right setting for the unfolding of his abilities. The important thing about Petty – beyond his ability to recognise real talent when he saw it, was that he wasn't into rock & roll at all – but

played piano in the older conventional pop styles. And out of the meeting of Petty's concern for melody and lyrics with Holly's vast natural rock talent came a series of great records – a music that was neither rock & roll nor straight pop, but something completely new.

It took a while for the Buddy Holly style to emerge. The first fruit of the Holly/Petty collaboration was 'That'll Be The Day', a song Holly had previously recorded in an unoriginal rock & roll style. Petty took a long hard look at it and completely transformed the sound. Instead of leaving the voice way out in front of the backing instruments, he produced a much tighter, denser sound by bringing the playing and the backing vocals right up next to Holly's voice.

How the record was produced was vital to its success. Whether he was conscious of it or not, Petty was one of the first to make record production a separate and creative activity. Previously, rock & roll records had been made simply as re-creations of the way a song was performed on stage, with perhaps the addition of a simple effect like an echo; with Petty, production and performance were to achieve a unity that set a standard for pop to follow.

It was with Buddy Holly's next record,





B.B.C.

Buddy Holly and the Crickets performing on BBC television in a show called *Off The Record*, March 1958.

however, that the breakthrough came. This single coupled 'Peggy Sue' with 'Everyday'.

'Peggy Sue' has an incredible fluidity in its overall sound. It is one long flow of words and music, rising and falling away in a series of crescendos like waves on the sea. In fact, its basic musical structure is the staple of blues and rock & roll, the trusty twelve-bar form. But you can't hear the joins, the places where the conventional rock or blues song changes gear or moves from one verse to the next. The drumming of Jerry Allison, and the swiftly strummed guitar of Holly himself, keep up that constant stream of sound against which the Buddy Holly voice can soar and dip to create a feeling of spontaneous excitement that has kept the disc a classic for over 15 years.

Nervous Excitement

How does Holly do that? In two main ways. In the average twelve-bar song, three lines are sung, and each line takes up only the first couple of bars of each line. Which means there's a clear gap between the lines, and the song has a regular pattern. But in 'Peggy Sue', Holly fills up every one of those twelve bars with singing, cramming them with phrases or else stretching out syllables in that unique, almost hiccuping way of his. So each verse becomes one line instead of three, and sometimes the verses are run into each other. The other thing is the constant repetition of the title – 'Peggy Sue' is sung maybe 20 times in under three minutes. But each time, Holly sings it differently, taking his voice very high or way down low, repeating the word 'Peggy' several times, or stretching out 'Sue' to cover four or more beats.

This way of using a singing voice had a far-reaching effect on other singers, particularly in Britain. Some like Adam Faith, merely copied some of Buddy Holly's

more obvious mannerisms (remember the way Adam used to sing 'baby?'), but others absorbed the deeper lesson. Among these were the Beatles, whose famous 'yeah yeah yeah' and falsetto 'ooh' on their early hits would not have been possible if Holly hadn't shown how unexpected vocal effects could be used to inject energy and excitement into fairly conventional lyrics.

Buddy Holly's songwriting skill developed under Norman Petty's guidance too, so that his songs kept pace with the complexity and imagination of his singing. His voice suggested the other side of teenage feelings to the husky assurance of Elvis: nervous excitement, day-dreaming, longing, anticipation. In songs like 'Not Fade Away' and 'Everyday', Buddy wrote lyrics to match those feelings.

'Everyday' is an unusual song for a male rock singer in the late '50s, because it's about trying to summon up courage to speak to a girl he secretly loves:

*'Everyday it's a-getting faster
All my friends say, go up and ask her
Love like yours will surely come my way'*

This is a long way from the ultra-masculine themes of most early rock & roll, and here too Holly was one of the pioneers in his choice of themes for his songs, which pre-figure the approaches of many later singer/songwriters.

Not Bothered

'Not Fade Away' is full of abrupt changes from boastful self-assurance to its opposite, and the words are mirrored in the way his voice switches from low to high register. And to show the whole thing isn't to be taken too seriously, he throws in an amusing and rhyming bit of word-play:

*'My love is bigger than a Cadillac
I try to show it but you drive me back'*

That pun on 'drive' is exactly the kind of thing that re-appears in rock much later on with the Beatles, Dylan and, come to that, David Bowie. And though Buddy Holly didn't bother too much with it – his generation weren't that interested in lyrics *as such* – if he hadn't died in an air crash at 22, he might have produced some songs to rival any of the great ones of the '60s.

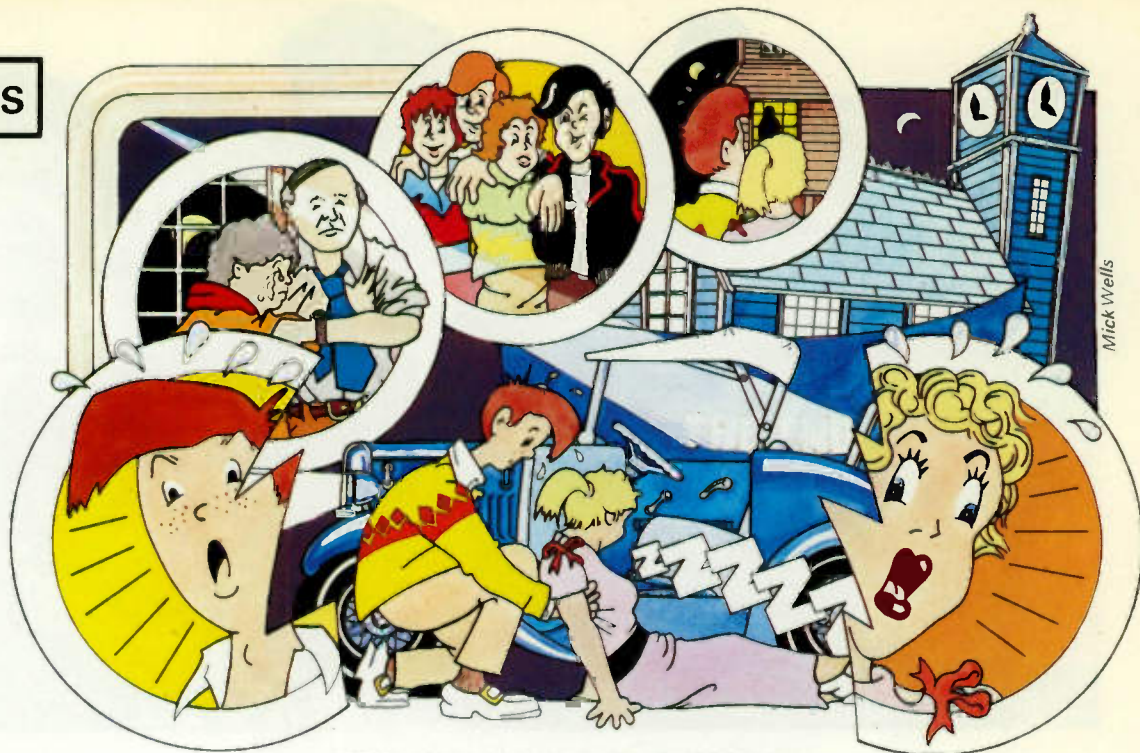
Musical Imagination

His genius really lay in the ability to combine each element of a record – voice, words, song-shape, rhythm, guitar – into a tight whole where everything contributed to the creation of a sound and a mood. This worked brilliantly on 'Listen To Me' and 'Words Of Love', the two great slow love songs which are masterpieces of understated atmospherics. In both, Holly's unique guitar tone – that curious but effective mellow jangling 'Tex-Mex' style – is at the centre of things. On 'Listen To Me', a long riff unwinds languidly to fade away as the singing starts and return at intervals throughout the record to produce the intimate feeling of the song. That's all the guitar does, but it took an exceptional musical imagination to realise that the endlessly repeated riff that formed the basis of so many fast rock & roll songs could be adapted to a slow love song.

And if Holly and Petty had lacked that imagination, hadn't known how to use Buddy's vast natural talent, he'd have been remembered as a freak vocalist rather than one of the founding fathers of the modern pop song.

NEXT WEEK IN MUSIC:
Leiber & Stoller 1949–73. A mighty pair of songwriters, who have been writing and producing records for bluesmen since 1949.

Talking 'bout my generation



CATHY'S CLOWN

*Don't want your love any more
Don't want your kisses, that's for sure
I die each time I hear this sound
'Here he comes
That's Cathy's Clown'*

*I've got to stand tall
You know a man can't crawl
For when he knows you tell lies
And he let's them pass by
Then he's not a man at all*

*Don't want your love any more,
Don't want your kisses, that's for sure
I die each time I hear this sound
'Here he comes
That's Cathy's Clown'*

*When you see me shed a tear
And you know that it's sincere
Don't you think it's kind of sad
That you're treating me so bad
Or don't you even care?*

CATHY'S CLOWN Don & Phil Everly

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The Everly Brothers had an impressive string of hits between the years of 1957 and 1965. The main theme throughout was, not surprisingly, love, but most of the songs were well above the normal standards of the time; ignoring the mawkishness that pervaded pop lyrics, they concentrated on specific incidents. 'Wake Up, Little Susie', their second British hit, is a beautifully-turned piece of songwriting craftsmanship that manages to convey in a very few words the morals, attitudes and mood of the time. Written by Boudleaux and Felice Bryant (who were responsible for so many Everlys' successes) it tells how Susie and her boyfriend are about to encounter not only parental disapproval, but also the nudging sniggers of the town because they innocently fell asleep during a boring movie. Implicit in the song is a condemnation of the morals of small-town America, where a pair of young lovers can't even stay out late without the finger of accusation being pointed at them; it must have struck an evocative chord to the teens of 1957 who were equally restricted by their parents. Only 10 years later, of course, Susie and her boy wouldn't have worried about what people were thinking!

By 1960 Don and Phil were writing their own hits, and 'Cathy's

WAKE UP LITTLE SUSIE

*Wake up, Little Susie, wake up
Wake up, Little Susie, wake up*

*We've both been sound asleep
Wake up, Little Susie, and weep
The movie's over, it's four o'clock
And we're in trouble deep
Wake up, Little Susie
Wake up, Little Susie
Well,
What are we gonna tell your Mama?
What are we gonna tell your Pa?
What are we gonna tell our friends when they say, 'Oooh la la?'
Wake up, Little Susie
Wake up, Little Susie*

*Well, we told your Mama that we'd be in by ten
Well, Susie baby, looks like we goofed again
Wake up, Little Susie
Wake up, Little Susie
We gotta go home*

*Wake up, Little Susie, wake up
Wake up, Little Susie, wake up
The movie wasn't so hot
It didn't have much of a plot
We fell asleep
Our goose is cooked
Our reputation is shot
Wake up Little Susie
Wake up Little Susie
Well,
What are we gonna tell your Mama? etc . . .*

WAKE UP, LITTLE SUSIE Boudleaux & Felice Bryant

Worldwide © House of Bryant

Clown' is rather more sophisticated. The boy is now a man and sensitive about his masculinity; he feels that he can't let Cathy get away with her infidelity and yet he's not quite sure what to do about it. The theme is a universal male one: how to cope with a tramp you're irrationally in love with, and ending up like a fool – without respect and without the girl. Again a reputation is at stake and again the song's message touches a tender nerve in the listener. Arguably, it is this ability in certain songs to find the sore point in the audience that raises them above the level of everyday wallpaper music to appeal to generations other than the one for which they were written.

POP FILE

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



CAPTAIN BEEFHEART AND HIS MAGIC BAND were formed in the days before Frank Zappa had invented the Mothers, when a number of his group left to form a band round singer and harmonica player Don Van Vliet (the Captain). This is no doubt the origin of public tension between Zappa and Beefheart, for when the band released their first album 'Safe As Milk' in 1968 it had a similar freak appeal to the Mothers. Beefheart has changed his line-up a number of times, but all his recordings are distinguished by his rasping, aggressive vocals and driving music. His albums 'Strictly Personal', 'Trout Mask Replica' and 'Lick My Decals Off Baby' established him as an underground legend, but led him away from all but a devoted following of 'Beefheart freaks'. In 1972 he released 'The Spotlight Kid' and this album re-established his popularity on a wide scale which he followed with a sell-out British concert tour. His latest album 'Clear Spot' features Rockette Morton, Ed Marimba, Zoot Horn Rollo and Orejon in the Magic Band. With typical big-time come-on Beefheart says: "We're the only people doing anything significant in modern music. I haven't heard anything else that gets away from Mother's heartbeat."

FREDDIE BELL AND THE BELLBOYS were possibly the first of rock's one-hit wonders. They had a hit both sides of the Atlantic in 1956 with 'Giddy Up A Ding Dong' on Mercury. Despite their appearance in the film *Rock Around The Clock* they vanished without trace.

CLIFF BENNETT AND THE REBEL ROUSERS hailed from Slough, Bucks. Cliff was a big ballroom attraction in the mid-'60s and had two hits with 'One Way Love' (1964) and the Beatles' 'Got To Get You Into My Life' (1966) although their strongest recording 'Three Rooms With Running Water' failed to make it. At a time when bands were getting dirtier and hairier, Cliff Bennett insisted on a short-haired clean-cut image for his band who wore tartan uniforms on stage. Cliff's drummer of that time, Lee Kerslake, is now with Uriah Heep. Cliff later changed the band's name to Toe Fat and is still playing today.



BERT BERNIS is best-known as a record producer at Atlantic working with Solomon Burke in particular, and as a hit songwriter. He wrote 'Cry To Me', 'Twist And Shout', 'Here Comes The Night' and 'Hang On Sloopy'. He also owned a record company Shout! and recorded some songs for Sue Records as Russell Byrd, which is also the name that he sometimes used as a songwriter.

DAVE BERRY started out round the clubs of Sheffield as an imitation Gene Vincent, all black leather and silver chains. He made four hit records, with his group the Cruisers 1963-66: 'Memphis Tennessee', 'The Crying Game', 'Little Things' and 'Mama'. He presented a different kind of visual image on TV where he made a point of appearing from behind pillars and staring straight at the camera while making strange beckoning

Robert Ellis



arm-movements, earning himself the epithet of 'the human slob'. He maintained he would be reincarnated as a snake, but never quite convinced anyone.

THE BIG BOPPER'S real name was J. P. Richardson. He adopted his stage name when working as a disc jockey on Radio KTRM in Beaumont, Texas. After some unsuccessful singles, he wrote and recorded the fine 'Chantilly Lace' which was third-most played record in America in 1958 and was released in 37 countries. It hit the UK charts just two weeks before the Big Bopper was killed in the same plane crash as Buddy Holly and Richie Valens on February 3rd, 1959. 'Chantilly Lace' went on to earn him a posthumous Gold Disc. Unfortunately, he is now remembered more for the plane crash than the record.

BIG BROTHER AND THE HOLDING COMPANY were destined to become famous mainly for their lead singer the late Janis Joplin. They were playing round San Francisco before Janis joined them in 1966, her first experience with a loud rock/blues band. In 1967 they made their name at the Monterey Pop Festival, following which Dylan's manager Albert Grossman signed up Janis and the group. Their first album, released in 1968, failed to capture their live feel but their second 'Cheap Thrills' later that year came nearer to it, containing some of Janis' most memorable performances with 'I Need A Man To Love', 'Piece Of My Heart' and 'Ball And Chain'. In 1968 Janis and the group went their own ways but she never again achieved

S.K.R.

S.K.R.



the live performance peak that was commonplace with Big Brother.

THE BIG THREE are not to be confused with Mama Cass' early group of the same name. The Big Three were one of the first Liverpool groups to follow the Beatles from the Cavern to national fame at a time when any Liverpoolian who could tell the difference between a guitar and a giraffe was offered a recording contract. Managed by Brian Epstein, the Big Three made the UK charts with 'Some Other Guy' and 'By The Way'. They played loud and tough and the idea of a three-piece group was quite original then. Their success didn't last long and the group disbanded, but in 1973 two of the original members, John Gufstafson and Brian Griffiths, plus ex-Elton John drummer Nigel Olsson, reformed the group and recorded again.

BLACK SABBATH are one of the groups that came out of the Birmingham scene. They had the distinction of making the British album charts without a mention in the pop press simply by impressing enough people on their way round the club circuit to make themselves stars. A shade short on subtlety and long on volume, they have one of those 'just-the-same-as-us' relationships with their audience in Britain. Tommy Iommi (guitar), Ozzy Osborne (vocals), Geezer Butler (bass), and Bill Ward (drums), deny that the group has any Black Magic associations – they just liked the name.

CILLA BLACK, real name Priscilla White, worked as cloakroom girl at the Cavern in Liverpool and was signed by Brian Epstein, the Beatles' manager. Cilla had two no. 1 hits in 1964 with 'Anyone Who Had A Heart' and 'You're My World', and continued to make the charts with songs like 'You've Lost That Loving Feeling' (1965), 'Alfie' (1966), and 'Surround Yourself With Sorrow' (1969). Since those days her charm and sense of humour have taken her effortlessly into the realms of TV variety stardom.



Redfearns

BLIND FAITH was formed by Eric Clapton, Ginger Baker and Stevie Winwood in 1968 after Cream had had enough. They rehearsed for some months, and brought in Rick Grech from Family to play bass. They made their first major appearance at a free concert in Hyde Park, London, on July 7th, 1969 before an estimated 200,000 people before embarking on a mammoth US tour. After a ridiculous supergroup build-up they proved to be an anti-climax, both live and on record. They soon split up, and no one's been quite as keen on 'supergroups' ever since.

BLOOD SWEAT AND TEARS were originally formed as a nine-piece band by organist Al Kooper in 1967 as a fusion of jazz and rock by adding brass to the basic rock-group format. Their single 'I Can't Quit Her' made the US charts, and their first album 'The Child Is Father To The Man' sold a million. Then Kooper quit, but after some re-arrangement of personnel and the addition of singer David Clayton-Thomas the group went on to make a series of best-selling albums, and some US hit singles including 'Spinning Wheel' and 'Hi De Ho'. After their fourth album Clayton-Thomas left and Jerry Fisher replaced him. More personnel changes and a new act scored BST a highly successful world tour in 1972. Their tightly arranged brass has produced a



S.K.R.

pleasant sound, but despite the talk about jazz-rock their connection with jazz remains tenuous, to say the least.

MIKE BLOOMFIELD was originally guitarist with the Paul Butterfield Band, and later formed the Electric Flag before rising to fame on a jam-session album called 'Super Session' made with Al Kooper and Steve Stills, which he followed with 'The Live Adventures Of Mike Bloomfield And Al Kooper'. Not only did these albums start the late '60s vogue for 'supergroups', but they opened the way to rock musicians moving from band to band to suit different projects. Bloomfield has also worked with Dylan on several albums, and was an integral part of Dylan's electric sound at the beginning of that period. He had an album released in August 1973 ('Bloomfield, Hammond and Dr. John'), with the blues singer John Paul Hammond (son of a senior CBS executive) and the legendary Dr. John.

POP FILE

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THE SUPERSTARS

Marc Bolan Super Star: A weird mixture of a speedy city ace kid and a strange enchanted nature boy. He was the wicked choirboy who flourished and bloomed in the flower power days. The flash and cool cockney who was there with his fingers in the petals.

ROCK

Little Richard: Once the Tutti Frutti King in the '50s, he has now become a parody of himself in the '70s. He revealed the blandness of Pat Boone and Bill Haley but is now a paler shade of grey himself.

THE MUSIC

Leiber and Stoller: Two brilliant songwriters, who were the first to bring satire and social conscience to rock & roll, making hit records out of this unlikely combination.

POP CULTURE

Presley Films: They combined an obvious romanticism with purely escapist plots (Elvis, the man-of-action – the racing driver, the pilot, the rodeo rider), and not even the quality of his songs could conceal the banality of it all.

BLACK MUSIC

Chicago Bound: The arrival of black Southern emigrants in Chicago and Detroit and the other industrial centres of the North brought a new sound of bottleneck guitar-playing and hollering styles of singing. As well as their own musicians, they also brought with them their own audiences and entrepreneurs, and soon they had their own record companies. Chicago became the centre of urban blues, reflecting the tempo and noise of the city.

POP

The Birth of Pop: Pop began with the subtle and sophisticated dilution of rock & roll, sung by people like Buddy Holly, the Everly Brothers and Rick Nelson – with Buddy Holly playing the part of the midwife.

POP INFLUENCES

Country & Western: This is the second article in a three-part series. It talks about the influence of country music on the British pop scene. How, when pop music is falling off, country music comes into the charts again.

PROFILE

Rick Nelson: The high school star who always had that extra touch of class . . . and still does.

Plus: Pop File and more Lyrics

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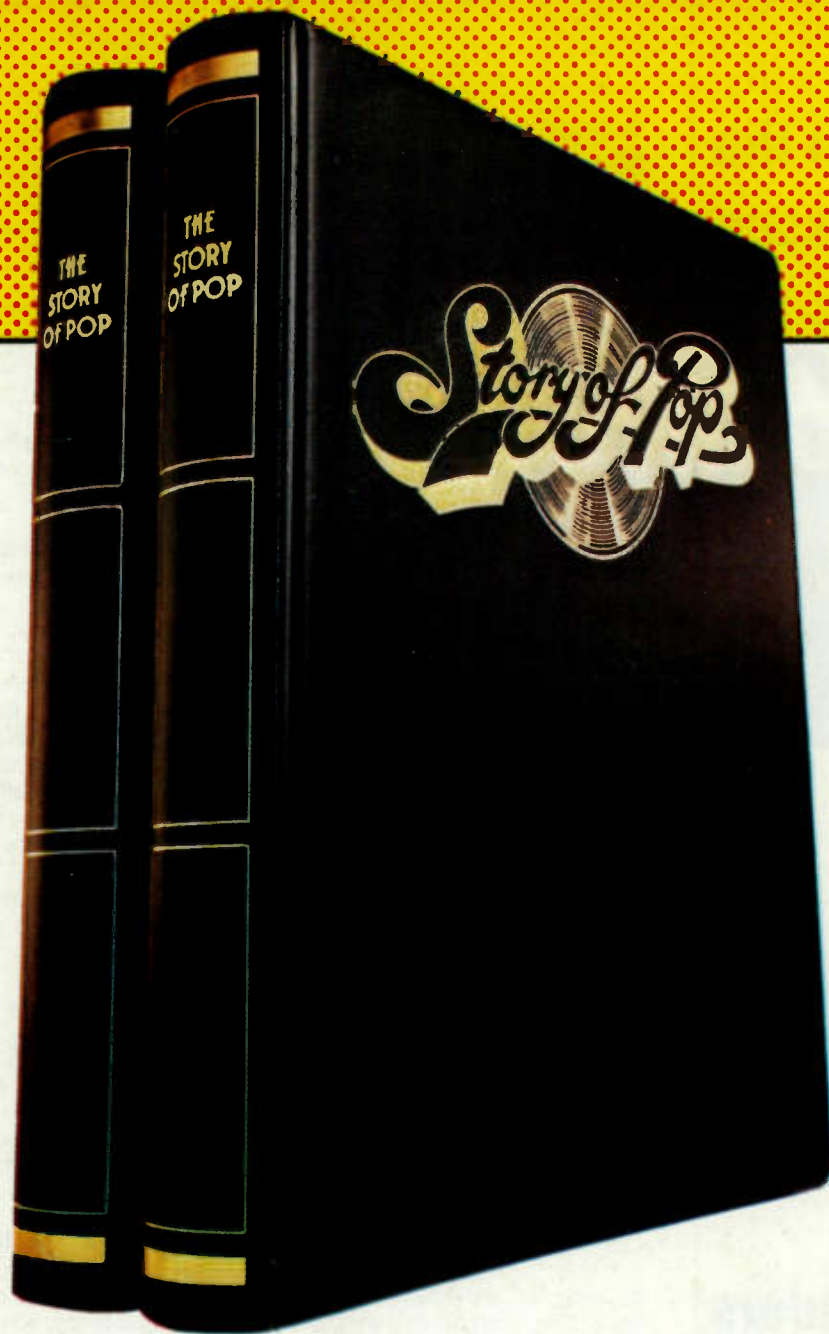
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