

ROCK'N'ROLL'S 1ST DECADE

Week Two: Rock'n'Roll Takes Off

Recommended Listening:

Bill Haley & His Comets, *The Best Of Bill Haley & His Comets: 20th Century Masters Millennium Collection* (MCA). Basic primer of his mid-1950s hits, including "Rock Around the Clock" and his first Top Ten pop hit, 1954's "Shake, Rattle and Roll."

Elvis Presley, *Elvis at Sun* (BMG, 2004). Both sides of all five of the singles Elvis Presley did for Sun records in 1954 and 1955, along with some outtakes. These were the recordings that, more than other, gave birth to rockabilly. Though they predate his rise to international superstardom in 1956, many critics consider these his finest recordings, and some consider them the very finest in all of rock'n'roll. A fuller document of Presley's pre-1956 recordings, including many live performances of varying fidelity and studio outtakes, is on the three-CD box set *A Boy From Tupelo: The Complete 1953-1955 Recordings*.

Various Artists, *The Doo Wop Box* (Rhino, 1994). Although this four-CD box goes all the way up to the mid-1960s, the first disc covers important hits from the late 1940s through the mid-1950s that were crucial to establish the black R&B vocal group sound. Especially important ones were the Crows' "Gee," the Chords' "Sh-Boom," and the Penguins' "Earth Angel," all of which were big pop hits in 1953 and 1954, before "Rock Around the Clock." Two subsequent four-CD box doo wop box sets on Rhino include much other material from both this era and post-1955.

Various Artists, *A Sun Blues Collection* (Rhino, 1990). Crucial Memphis electric blues recorded at Sun Records from the early-to-mid-1950s, including early recordings by B.B. King and Howlin' Wolf; Junior Parker's original version of "Mystery Train," covered by Elvis Presley on his fifth single in 1955; and Jackie Brenston's 1951 R&B smash "Rocket 88," which has often been cited as one of the first (and sometimes as the very first) rock'n'roll record.

Various Artists, *A Sun Country Collection* (Rhino, 1990). The country side of rock'n'roll is illustrated by this collection of early-to-mid-1950s country recordings done at Sun Records, including country-oriented tracks by early rockabilly stars Carl Perkins, Johnny Cash, and Jerry Lee Lewis.

Recommended Books:

Last Train to Memphis: The Rise of Elvis Presley, by Peter Guralnick (Little, Brown, 1994). The first part of a mammoth two-volume Presley biography focuses on his rise to fame, ending with his induction into the army in 1958.

Rock Around the Clock: The Record That Started the Rock Revolution!, by Jim Dawson (Backbeat, 2005). From a co-author of essential *What Was the First Rock'n'Roll Record* (see below), an entire volume, if moderate in size, devoted to the story of the first massive rock'n'roll hit.

Sam Phillips: The Man Who Invented Rock'n'Roll, by Peter Guralnick (Little, Brown, 2015). Huge (about 750-page) biography about the man who founded and ran Sun Records, the label that's most famous for launching Elvis Presley in 1954 and 1955. Sun also did the first, or some of the first, recordings by rockabilly stars Carl Perkins, Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Roy Orbison, as well as bluesmen B.B. King, Howlin' Wolf, Ike Turner, and Junior Parker, along with many others. The story's told in great detail – perhaps too great detail, as it really could have done with some editing to make the story more readable and less jammed with superfluous stories. You don't miss too much if you go for the more concise *Good Rockin' Tonight: Sun Records and the Birth of Rock and Roll* (listed on the handout for week three of this course).

Recommended DVDs:

Mystery Train (Image Entertainment, 1989). Though this is a fictional Jim Jarmusch-directed film taking place in the late 1980s, it captures the mystique of the aftershadows of Memphis blues and rock as well as anything committed to celluloid.

Notable Figures (Excluding Star Musicians):

Scotty Moore: Guitarist in the studio and onstage for Elvis Presley in the mid-1950s (and sometimes beyond). His crisp electrified licks were essential blueprints of the rockabilly sound.

Sam Phillips: The head of Sun Records did a great deal to discover, nurture, and produce early electric blues in the label's Memphis studio in the early 1950s. When he recorded white teenager Elvis Presley combining country & western with rhythm & blues in 1954 and 1955, the model was set for rockabilly music, which he'd record with great success by other mid-'50s artists like Carl Perkins, Johnny Cash, and Jerry Lee Lewis.

Notable Places:

Shreveport Municipal Auditorium: Venue from which the popular country-oriented radio/television show *The Louisiana Hayride* was broadcast between 1948 and 1960. Elvis Presley got some of his first wide regional exposure via appearance on *The Louisiana Hayride* in the mid-'50s.

Important Independent Record Labels:

Sun Records: Notable artists: Elvis Presley, Junior Parker, Little Milton, Rufus Thomas.

Audiovisual Clip List

Week Two:

Big Boy Crudup: That's Alright Mama (audio)

Elvis Presley: That's Alright Mama (audio)

Elvis Presley: Baby Let's Play House (video)

Junior Parker: Mystery Train (audio)

Elvis Presley: Mystery Train (audio)

Faye Adams: I'll Be True to You (audio)

Bill Haley: I'll Be True to You (audio)

Ray Charles: I Got a Woman (audio)

Elvis Presley: I Got a Woman (video)

The Beatles: I Got a Woman (audio)
The Crows: Gee (audio)
The Chords: Sh-Boom (audio)
The Crew-Cuts: Sh-Boom (video)
Bill Haley: Rock the Joint (audio)
Bill Haley: Rock Around the Clock (video)
Bill Haley: Rock Around the Clock (audio)
Fats Domino: Ain't That a Shame (video)
Pat Boone: Ain't That a Shame (video)
Little Richard: Tutti Frutti (video)
Pat Boone: Tutti Frutti (video)
Elvis Presley: Tutti Frutti (video)
Ink Spots: If I Didn't Care (video)
The Platters: Only You (video)
Chuck Berry: Maybellene (audio)
Bob Wills: Ida Red (video)
Bo Diddley: Bo Diddley (video)
Elvis Presley: Heartbreak Hotel (video)