

## ROCK'N'ROLL'S 1<sup>ST</sup> DECADE

### Week Four: Rock Diversifies in the Mid-1950s

#### Recommended Listening:

**The Coasters, *The Very Best of the Coasters*** (Rhino, 1990). One of the finest, and certainly the funniest, of the 1950s African-American rock vocal groups. Their hits "Searchin'," "Yakety Yak," "Charlie Brown," "Along Came Jones," and "Poison Ivy" are as notable for the songwriting and production of Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller as they are for the performances, taking rock lyrics in a humorous and more sophisticated, socially satirical direction. The two-CD set *50 Coastin' Classics* has some additional fine and notable songs.

**Bo Diddley, *His Best*** (Chess, 1997). Far less commercially successful than Chuck Berry, fellow Chess Records guitarist/singer/songwriter Bo Diddley was almost as influential. The most blues/R&B-influenced bands of the British bands especially counted him as among their chief inspirations, particularly the Rolling Stones and the Yardbirds. This has 20 of his most celebrated songs, including "I'm a Man," "Bo Diddley," "Pretty Things," "Who Do You Love?," "Mona," "Road Runner," "I Can Tell," and "You Can't Judge a Book By Its Cover," many of which boast his trademark Bo Diddley beat.

**The Platters, *Enchanted: The Best of the Platters*** (Rhino, 1998). The best of the most commercially successful doo wop group, if one of the smoothest, including their big hits "Only You," "The Magic Touch," and "The Great Pretender."

**Various Artists, *The Doo Wop Box Vol. 1-3*** (Rhino, 1994/1996/2000). For everyone except doo wop specialists, these three box sets, each of them four CDs in size, should cover every major doo wop hit and top-notch rarity/obscurity from the late 1940s through the mid-1960s. The final disc of volume 3 is devoted to more modern doo wop acts/revivalists, and far less essential.

Various Artists, *The Best of Doo Wop Ballads* (Rhino, 1989). For those whose budget and interest doesn't permit box sets, this and *The Best of Doo Wop Uptempo* (see below) are good single-disc compilations of some of the greatest doo wop hits. This one focuses on slow songs like the Five Satins' "In the Still of the Night," the Flamingos' "I Only Have Eyes for You," the Skyliners' "Since I Don't Have You," and the Penguins' "Earth Angel."

Various Artists, *The Best of Doo Wop Uptempo* (Rhino, 1989). The sister volume to *The Best of Doo Wop Ballads* is also chockful of classics, including the Dell Vikings' "Come Go with Me," Frankie Lymon's "Why Do Fools Fall in Love?," the Silhouettes' "Get a Job," the Montones' "Book of Love," and the Marcells' "Blue Moon."

### **Recommended Books:**

*Hound Dog: The Leiber & Stoller Autobiography*, by Jerry Leiber & Mike Stoller with David Ritz (Simon & Schuster, 2010). It could have been more detailed, but this autobiography by one of the greatest songwriting/production teams of rock'n'roll's first decade has plenty of interesting stories, as well as first-hand accounts of both the 1950s Los Angeles R&B scene and the more pop-oriented Brill Building one in which they became key figures after moving to New York.

*Spinning Blues into Gold: The Chess Brothers and the Legendary Chess Records*, by Nadine Cohodas (St. Martin's Press, 2001). Thorough history of how Chess Records was founded and run by Leonard Chess and Phil Chess, well-researched and clearly written.

*Turn Up the Radio! Rock, Pop, and Roll in Los Angeles 1956-1972*, by Harvey Kubernik (Santa Monica Press, 2014). It's impossible to comfortably put this into any one handout because of the many eras and styles covered, but it's placed here as it starts in the mid-1950s. This coffee-table-sized, 300-page oral history book has extended quotes from many artists, session musicians, producers, songwriters, engineers, DJs, and fans who were part of the L.A. rock scene between the mid-1950s and early 1970s. Early R&B, rockabilly, Phil Spector, surf music, folk-rock, psychedelic

rock, pop-rock, and singer-songwriters are all covered. Much of the material was drawn from nearly 40 years of interviews conducted by the author.

### **Notable Figures (Excluding Star Musicians):**

**Chet Atkins:** Although he is primarily known as a country artist and guitarist, he also worked on rock records as a session musician and producer, including major 1950s discs by Elvis Presley and the Everly Brothers.

**Jerry Leiber & Mike Stoller:** The songwriting/production team responsible for many hits by the Coasters and the Drifters, as well as writing some smashes for Elvis Presley. Initially based in Los Angeles, then in New York, where they continued to wield heavy influence in the rock industry in the first half of the 1960s.

**Mitch Miller:** Columbia Records A&R man who was perhaps rock'n'roll's most powerful outspoken opponent in the 1950s.

### **Notable Places:**

**RCA Recording Studios, Nashville branch:** The Everly Brothers recorded their 1950s hits here (although their records were on Cadence, not RCA), and Elvis Presley often used it as well. While it was mostly used for country music, rock was sometimes recorded there after the 1950s too, notably by Roy Orbison. Entrance to RCA Studio B is included in the price of a visit to the Country Music Hall of Fame.

### **Audiovisual Clips**

Frankie Lymon & the Teenagers: I'm Not a Juvenile Delinquent (video)

The Platters: The Great Pretender (video)

The Five Satins: In the Still of the Night (video)

The Silhouettes: Get a Job (video)

The Monotones: The Book of Love (video)

Del-Vikings: Come Go With Me (audio)

Danny & the Juniors: At the Hop (video)

The Diamonds: Little Darlin' (video)

Jan & Dean: Baby Talk (video)  
Coasters: Searchin' (video)  
Coasters: Three Cool Cats (audio)  
Beatles: Three Cool Cats (audio)  
Coasters: Along Came Jones (video)  
Chuck Berry: School Days (video)  
Chuck Berry: Johnny B. Goode (video)  
Elvis Presley: Jailhouse Rock (from movie of the same name) (video)  
Elvis Presley: Too Much (video)  
Elvis Presley: Treat Me Nice (video)  
Marty Robbins: A White Sport Coat (video)  
Bo Diddley: Pretty Thing (audio)  
Johnny Otis: Wille & the Hand Jive (video)  
Bo Diddley: Diddley Daddy (audio)  
Rolling Stones: Diddley Daddy (audio)  
Rolling Stones: 19<sup>th</sup> Nervous Breakdown (audio)  
Fats Domino: Blue Monday (video)  
Frankie Ford: Sea Cruise (video)