

ROCK'N'ROLL'S 1ST DECADE

Week Six: Rock in the Early 1960s: Teen Idols and Instrumental Rock

Recommended Listening:

Dion, *24 Golden Greats* (Arista, 1983). Dion's career was actually so long that it's hard for a single-disc compilation to give a full sense of its breadth. This one has all the hits, however, from his doo wop ones with the Belmonts and his early-'60s smashes as a soloist to the folk-rock ones from his late-'60s comeback. It's not widely known that at Columbia in the mid-1960s, he moved from teen idol rock into blues and folk-rock, and compilations which focus on those recordings (*Bronx Blues* and *The Road I'm On*) are also recommended.

Duane Eddy, *Twang Thang: The Duane Eddy Anthology* (Rhino, 1993). Duane Eddy's hits can seem repetitious in one heavy dose, but his low twanging lines were massively influential in establishing the supremacy of the guitar in rock and inspiring younger guitar heroes, including George Harrison. This two-CD collection might be too much for casual listeners, but is better packaged than the many single-disc compilations that have appeared.

The Everly Brothers, *Walk Right Back: The Everly Brothers on Warner Bros. 1960 to 1969* (Warner Archives, 1993). Conventional critical wisdom usually proclaims that the Everly Brothers went downhill after leaving Cadence Records for the new Warner Brothers label at the beginning of the 1960s. In fact, however, they continued to make some excellent music, especially at the beginning of that span, though they grew more erratic as the decade progressed and the hits stopped flowing. This set has two CDs of their 1960s material, including the early-'60s hits "Cathy's Clown," "Walk Right Back," and "Crying in the Rain." The CD compilation of their first two Warner Brothers LPs from 1960 and 1961 (with bonus tracks), *It's Everly Time & A Date with the Everly Brothers*, is also highly recommended.

Brenda Lee, *Anthology 1956-1980* (MCA, 1991). Too often dismissed as a teen idol singer, misclassified as a country artist, or acknowledged only as one of the few early female pop-rock stars, Brenda Lee was more than that. Her hits from the late 1950s to mid-1960s combined country, pop, and rock with the fast-growing sophistication of Nashville production. This two-CD set is necessary to cover all of her most worthwhile recordings.

Roy Orbison, *16 Biggest Hits* (Legacy, 1999). All of his magnificent hits for the Monument label in the first half of the 1960s, when he sang lushly orchestrated pop-rock with operatic melancholia, though he could also rock out surprisingly hard on occasion. "Only the Lonely," "Oh, Pretty Woman," "Running Scared," "It's Over," and "In Dreams" are just some of them. This doesn't, however, have his earlier Sun rockabilly recordings, which are available on other reissues.

Gene Pitney, *25 All-Time Greatest Hits* (Varese Sarabande, 1999). Not as critically acclaimed as, say, Roy Orbison, Gene Pitney nonetheless had a similar flair for melodramatic, orchestrated pop-rock, though his hits and pinched voice projected more self-pity and more of a teen idol sensibility. The hits were plentiful in the first half of the 1960s, and they're all here, like "Town Without Pity," "It Hurts to Be in Love," "24 Hours from Tulsa," and "Only Love Can Break a Heart."

Elvis Presley, *Elvis' Golden Records Vol. 3* and *Elvis' Gold Records Vol. 4* (RCA, 1997). Elvis never matched the heights of his early career after the 1950s, but he still had some left in the tank in the first half of the 1960s, though his records dipped enormously in quality and consistency as the years went on. These two compilations have most of the major hits and album tracks from the period. Look for the 1997 CDs that have bonus tracks.

Del Shannon, *Greatest Hits* (Rhino, 1990). One of the most dynamic rockers of the early 1960s, and sometimes accurately described as a link between 1950s rock'n'roll and the British Invasion, though his hits (the first and best of which was "Runaway") weren't too varied in style. They're all here, including "Runaway," "Hats Off to Larry," "Keep Searchin'," and "Stranger in Town,"

though unfortunately this is missing his version of his composition "I Go to Pieces," covered for a hit by Peter & Gordon.

The Ventures, *Walk Don't Run: The Best of the Ventures* (1990, EMI). The Ventures' 1960 hit "Walk Don't Run" was monstrously seminal, pointing toward a more modern, menacing electric rock guitar sound and anticipating the dark mystery of surf music. Nothing else they did was as good, but they continued to put out some popular recordings throughout the 1960s (including the "Hawaii Five-O" theme), which are on this compilation. In Japan, they remain one of the most popular rock groups ever.

Link Wray, *Rumble! The Best of Link Wray* (Rhino, 1993). He only had one big hit ("Rumble," in the late 1950s), but this great guitarist did many fine, mostly instrumental records that were among the rawest of the late 1950s through the mid-1960s. Still underrated as an innovator of distortion, fuzz, and other effects on the electric guitar, his best records were some of the most menacing rock'n'roll laid down in any era. A good share of them are here, including "Rumble."

Various Artists, *Rock Instrumental Classics Vol. 1-5* (Rhino, 1994). With separate volumes for instrumentals of the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, soul, and surf, this is the definitive series of instrumental rock. If you just want to focus on the period between Buddy Holly's death and the British Invasion during which instrumental rock peaked, Varese Sarabande's *25 Rockin' Instrumentals* is a good if imperfect survey, and Ace's five-volume *Teen Series* a more in-depth collector-oriented one.

Various Artists, *Time Life The Rock 'N' Roll Era: Teen Idols* (Time Life, 1990). The teen idol genre might be derided more than any other significant movement in rock'n'roll history. Like it or not, however, teen idols sold a lot of records, helped define an era as the 1950s turned into the 1960s, and managed some catchy tunes, if rarely down-to-earth ones. This compilation has style-defining hits by Fabian, Frankie Avalon, Bobby Vee, Connie Francis, Pat Boone, Neil Sedaka, and others, though Bobby Rydell is missing for licensing reasons.

Recommended Books:

Careless Love: The Unmaking of Elvis Presley, by Peter Guralnick (Back Bay Books, 2000). The sequel to Guralnick's *Last Train to Memphis: The Rise of Elvis Presley* picks up the saga after his induction into the army in the late 1950s, ending with his 1977 death after a troubled journey through increasingly mediocre records and movies and a late-'60s comeback on disc and on stage.

Dark Star: The Roy Orbison Story, by Ellis Amburn (Lyle Stuart). The basics of Orbison's journey from West Texas rockabilly to operatic Nashville-produced pop-rock, and a long period in the commercial dumps prior to a comeback just before his death in the late 1980s. Orbison was not the most colorful figure, and some of of his life's melodrama might be a little amplified by this account, though on the whole it's adequate.

Recommended DVDs:

Roy Orbison, *The Monument Concert (1965)* (Legacy, 2011). Filmed in Holland just a tad after his commercial peak, this live 25-minute concert features about half of his biggest hits, including "Only the Lonely," "Running Scared," "Crying," "Dream Baby," "Mean Woman Blues," "It's Over," and "Oh, Pretty Woman." Available only as part of the three-disc set *The Monument Singles Collection (1960-1964)*, which has two CDs of tracks that appeared on Orbison singles on the Monument label.

Notable Figures (Excluding Star Musicians):

Owen Bradley: Record producer key to establishing the country-pop Nashville sound. Although he primarily worked with country artists, he did some rock records too, notably with Brenda Lee.

Fred Foster: Head of the Monument label, and producer of Roy Orbison's early-to-mid-1960s hits, which were underrated landmarks in orchestral pop-rock production.

Oren Harris: Arkansas congressman who headed the Subcommittee on Legislative Oversight, which conducted hearings on payola in the music business in 1960.

Lee Hazlewood: Producer (and often, with Eddy, co-writer) of Duane Eddy's hits, and instrumental in helping to create their echoey sound. In the mid-to-late-1960s, noted as producer and songwriter for Nancy Sinatra (with whom he sometimes duetted), as well as putting out numerous idiosyncratic country-pop-folk-rock records as a solo artist.

Notable Places:

Bradley's Barn: Nashville studio of Owen Bradley, where many country stars and some rock stars recorded.

Graceland: The Memphis mansion where Elvis Presley made his home starting in the late 1950s, becoming something of a recluse with the protection of friends known as the Memphis Mafia. After his death Graceland became a museum, and remains one of the most popular tourist attractions in the world.

Important Record Labels:

Liberty: Experiencing its first major success near the end of the 1950s with Eddie Cochran, Liberty continued to be a front-line independent pop-rock-oriented label in the early 1960s with Jan & Dean, teen idols Bobby Vee and Johnny Burnette, and pop-soul acts Gene McDaniels and the Rivingtons.

Warner Brothers: Initially founded as a sideline to Warner Brothers' motion picture interests, it quickly grew into a major label over the course of the 1960s, at first with the Everly Brothers and then popular folk (Peter, Paul & Mary) and comedy LPs.

Audiovisual Clips:

Fabian: Turn Me Loose (video)

Frankie Avalon: Venus (video)

Bobby Rydell: Kissin' Time (video)

Paul Anka: Lonely Boy (video)
Annette Funicello: Tall Paul (video)
Hayley Mills: Let's Get Together (video)
Bobby Vee: The Idol (video)
Ricky Nelson: Teenage Idol (video)
Ricky Nelson: Hello Mary Lou (video)
Brenda Lee: Dum Dum (video)
Brenda Lee: All Alone Am I (video)
Dion: The Wanderer (video)
Dion: Runaround Sue (video)
Gene Pitney: Town Without Pity (video)
Gene Pitney: Last Exit to Brooklyn (video)
Roy Orbison: Running Scared (video)
Roy Orbison: Oh Pretty Woman (video)
Del Shannon: Runaway (video)
Everly Brothers: Cathy's Clown (video)
Everly Brothers: Walk Right Back (video)
Elvis Presley: Little Sister (audio)
Elvis Presley: Return to Sender (video)
Link Wray: Rumble (audio)
Link Wray: Fatback (audio)
Ventures: Walk Don't Run (video)
The Shadows: Apache (video)
Tornados: Telstar (audio)