

ROCK'N'ROLL'S 1ST DECADE

Week Seven: Rock in the Early 1960s: Surf and Girl Groups

Recommended Listening:

Burt Bacharach, *The Look of Love: The Burt Bacharach Collection* (Rhino, 1998). This might seem like a strange inclusion, as most of the 75 tracks on this three-CD box were done by artists other than Burt Bacharach; Bacharach is sometimes thought of more as a pop or easy listening figure than a rock one; his success stretched throughout the 1960s, way past the British Invasion; and as he usually wrote with lyricists, especially Hal David, rather than working alone. Still, the Bacharach-David songwriting team was one of the great Brill Building collaborations, and vital to pop-rock's evolution into new melodic and lyrical directions. This box has hits and rarities by Dionne Warwick (the most frequent beneficiary of Bacharach-David's compositions and production), Gene Pitney, the Shirelles, the Drifters, Chuck Jackson, and many others.

The Beach Boys, *Greatest Hits Vol. 1 & 2* (Capitol, 1999). Although these miss a few of their more notable songs (including their first single, "Surfin'"), these two twenty-song CDs contain virtually all of their 1960s hits and most famous non-hits. They span both their surf/hot rod-oriented pre-1965 material and their more mature sound of the last half of the 1960s.

Dick Dale, *King of the Surf Guitar: The Best of Dick Dale* (Rhino, 1989). While he didn't have any national hits, Dick Dale was the most innovative and exciting instrumental surf music guitarist. This has his best early-'60s recordings, including "Misirlou," made famous by its use in *Pulp Fiction*, and covered by the Beach Boys on their second album, on which they also covered Dale's "Let's Go Trippin'."

The Four Seasons, *The Very Best of Frankie Valli & the Four Seasons* (Rhino, 2003). The biggest rock group in the US except the Beach Boys just before the Beatles hit, the Four Seasons have not been as critically acclaimed as those two bands, some finding the falsetto vocals too shrill and the modernized doo wop

too corny. They were still a major bridge between the sounds of the 1950s and those of the 1960s, and this compilation has all of their big hits, most of them predating 1970.

Lesley Gore, *Sunshine, Lollipops & Rainbows: The Best of Lesley Gore* (Rhino, 1998). The most commercially successful solo singer identified with the girl group sound, whose hits were almost archetypes of white teenage female adolescence in the last years of post-war innocence and affluence. "It's My Party," "Maybe I Know," "She's a Fool," "You Don't Know Me," "Look of Love," and other (usually lesser) hits are all here. The two-CD compilation *It's My Party: The Mercury Anthology* is surprisingly solid, and has some worthwhile material that doesn't appear here.

Jan & Dean, *Surf City: The Best of Jan & Dean* (EMI, 1990). The best vocal surf/hot rod group except the Beach Boys, whom they sometimes resembled (and whose Brian Wilson co-wrote and sings on their biggest hit, "Surf City"), though with a goofier sense of humor. This has most of their big hits, though it's missing the late-'50s doo wop-oriented ones, which are on the more comprehensive two-CD anthology *All the Hits from Surf City to Drag City*.

The Shangri-Las, *Myrmidons of Melodrama* (RPM, 1994). Technically speaking, the Shangri-Las are of a later era than the other artists listed here, not getting their first hit until 1964. They are so tied to the girl group sound, however, that it makes more sense to include them here than in a subsequent session. Perhaps the most flamboyant and indeed melodramatic of the girl group stars, they had quite a few great songs, most famously "The Leader of the Pack," though some of their other recordings were as or almost as good. This CD has almost all of them; a very similar selection, also including all of their most renowned tracks, is on Mercury's *The Best of the Shangri-Las*.

The Shirelles, *25 All-Time Greatest Hits* (Varese Sarabande, 1999). Arguably the best and certainly the most popular of the girl groups, both for their vulnerable singing and first-class material, which was sometimes supplied by the Brill Building's finest. All of their hits are here, as well as the original versions of a couple of

songs popularized by British Invasion bands ("Boys," by the Beatles, and "Sha La La," by Manfred Mann).

Phil Spector, *Wall of Sound: The Very Best of Phil Spector, 1961-1966* (Sony, 2011). All of the biggest hits Spector produced for the Crystals, the Ronettes, the Righteous Brothers, and others, also throwing in Ike & Tina Turner's "River Deep, Mountain High." These were the densest, most elaborate rock productions of the early (and sometimes mid-) 1960s, and made a huge impact both on other musicians and the way the studio was used to record popular music.

Various Artists, *Brill Building Sound* (Era, 1993).

Unfortunately this doesn't include any Phil Spector productions due to licensing restrictions, but otherwise this four-CD box set contains a wealth of songs written by the top pop-rock songwriters from New York's Brill Building crowd. Those include the teams of Gerry Goffin and Carole King, Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil, Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, and Jeff Barry and Ellie Greenwich, along with other notable composers. They brought a new level of melodic sophistication and romantic lyricism to pop-rock, and were extremely influential on the Beatles (especially Goffin-King).

Various Artists, *The Best of the Girl Groups Vol. 1 & 2*

(Rhino, 1990). Most of the biggest and best girl group hits of the early and mid-1960s are on these two collections, other than those produced by Phil Spector, including smashes by the Shirelles, Chiffons, Shangri-Las, and Dixie Cups, as well as one-shots like the Jaynetts' "Sally Go Round the Roses." A full four-CD box set of interesting non-familiar girl group '60s recordings, *One Kiss Can Lead to Another: Girl Group Sounds, Lost & Found*, is also available on Rhino.

Various Artists, *The Scepter Records Story* (Capricorn, 1992).

Three-CD box set of the most important material recorded in the 1960s by the independent Scepter label (and its Wand subsidiary), including hits by the Shirelles, Dionne Warwick, Chuck Jackson, Maxine Brown, the Isley Brothers, and B.J. Thomas.

Various Artists, *Surfin' Hits* (Rhino, 1989). A mix of the biggest, and often best, vocal and instrumental surf hits by the Beach Boys, Jan & Dean, Dick Dale, and great one-shot singles like the Surfari's "Wipe Out" and the Trashmen's "Surfin' Bird." If you want to focus on the instrumental guitar-oriented side of surf, with some more obscure records thrown in, check out Ace's *The Birth of Surf Vol. 1 & 2*; Rhino's *Guitar Player Presents Legends of Guitar – Surf, Vol. 1*; and Rhino's *Rock Instrumental Classics Vol. 5: Surf*. Rhino also put out the four-CD *Cowabunga! The Surf Box*, whose value is dampened by a disc of post-1960s surf revival acts.

Recommended Books:

Always Magic in the Air: The Bomp and Brilliance of the Brill Building Era, by Ken Emerson (Penguin, 2005). Excellent, in-depth volume about the Brill Building sound, focusing on the songwriting teams of Gerry Goffin & Carole King, Jeff Barry and Ellie Greenwich, Barry Mann & Cynthia Weil, Burt Bacharach & Hal David, Jerry Leiber & Mike Stoller, Neil Sedaka & Howard Greenfield, and Doc Pomus & Mort Shuman.

Anyone Who Had a Heart: My Life and Music, by Burt Bacharach with Robert Greenfield (Harper, 2013). Interesting and reasonably candid memoir that pays much attention to his music, and especially his songwriting partnership with Hal David, though it gets much less worthy of attention after passing the early 1970s.

The Beach Boys, by David Leaf (Courage Books, 1985). There have been a good number of Beach Boys biographies, but although subsequent ones have uncovered more details (and dirt) about their career, the earliest comprehensive one remains the best overview. It might be overly enthusiastic and forgiving when critically assessing their music, but does not shy away from the controversies and family turmoil rocking the band.

Catch a Wave: The Rise, Fall, and Redemption of the Beach Boys' Brian Wilson, by Peter Ames Carlin (Rodale Books, 2007). Thorough biography of the Beach Boys' gifted but troubled leader Brian Wilson. Though it covers his whole life, the work he did with

the Beach Boys in the 1960s is inevitably the most important section.

Girl Groups: The Story of a Sound, by Alan Betrock (Delilah Books, 1982). It's hard to find now, but this is one of the best books devoted to a single rock genre. The evolution and heyday of the girl groups is covered from all angles, including the songwriters, producers, and labels behind the records, and it's bountifully illustrated.

Good Vibrations: My Life As a Beach Boy, by Mike Love with James S. Hirsch (Blue Rider Press, 2016). The autobiography of the Beach Boys' most frequent lead singer (though Brian Wilson took about as many lead parts) has a pretty thorough overview of their career from his perspective. Love is not the most popular rock star due to accusations he helped thwart Brian Wilson's creativity by objecting to his more ambitious ideas, though he rebuts these to some degree in this book.

He's a Rebel, by Mark Ribowsky (E.P. Dutton, 1989). Mick Brown's subsequent Phil Spector bio *Tearing Down the Wall of Sound* (see below) uncovered more stories about the legendary producer, but this earlier book is also valuable for its research into his recording career and troubled personal life.

I Am Brian Wilson: A Memoir, by Brian Wilson with Ben Greenman (Da Capo). Going back and forth in time like serial posts in a blog, Wilson's book isn't as informative about the Beach Boys career as singer Mike Love's (see listing above). But it does have many comments about the creation of songs from the group's prime, as well as more disturbing recollections about his abusive father and psychologist, contributing to his bouts with mental illness.

Lonely Avenue: The Unlikely Life & Times of Doc Pomus, by Alex Halberstadt (Da Capo Press, 2007). Aptly titled biography of one of the key Brill Building songwriters, who did not let his disability from polio prevent him from becoming arguably the first white R&B singer, and then a top pop-rock songwriter.

Sound Explosion: Inside L.A.'s Studio Factory with the Wrecking Crew, by Ken Sharp (Wrecking Crew LLC). As kind of a companion to the well-received documentary *The Wrecking Crew!* (see DVD section), this paperback coffee-table book is an oral history of the Los Angeles studio musicians who played on countless 1960s rock records. It also includes many cool period photos and rare graphics and documents, as well as a section with detailed stories about several dozen 1962-70 hits on which the Wrecking Crew participated.

Surf City: The Jan & Dean Story, by Dean Torrence (SelectBooks, 2016). The memoir of half of Jan & Dean is a fun, informative recount of the life and times of the most popular surf'n'hot rod act besides the Beach Boys. The careers of the two acts often intersected, though Jan & Dean's career was curtailed when Jan Berry suffered brain damage in a 1966 car accident.

Tearing Down the Wall of Sound: The Rise and Fall of Phil Spector, by Mick Brown (Vintage, 2008). In-depth Spector bio covers both his studio artistry and his controversial personal demons, all the way through the 2003 murder for which he's currently serving a prison sentence.

Recommended DVDs:

The Beach Boys, *Brian Wilson Songwriter 1962-1969* (Sexy Intellectual, 2010). Though this doesn't have first-hand participation from Wilson or most of the Beach Boys, this double DVD is still an interesting critical review of his peak work, drawing from archive footage and interviews with associates and music critics.

The Beach Boys, *Endless Harmony: The Beach Boys Story* (Capitol, 2000). Though Beach Boys-authorized products inevitably put a more positive spin on the more turbulent aspects of their career than outside biographies, this does cover their story via first-hand interviews with surviving members of the band, as well as a lot of vintage footage.

On VHS only:

Girl Groups (MGM, 1983). Fine hour-long documentary mixing '60s footage of some of the best girl group acts (including the Ronettes, the Shangri-Las, the Dixie Cups, Mary Wells) with interviews done for the project with girl group artists and key songwriters like Jerry Leiber, Mike Stoller, and Ellie Greenwich.

Notable Figures (Excluding Star Musicians):

Jeff Barry/Ellie Greenwich: Brill Building songwriting team responsible (sometimes working with Phil Spector) for classics like "Be My Baby," "Da Doo Ron Ron," "Leader of the Pack," "River Deep, Mountain High," and "Chapel of Love." Though their marriage ended shortly afterward, they continued to work together for a while and were involved with Neil Diamond's early career, with Jeff Barry subsequently writing and producing for the Monkees and the Archies.

Bob Crewe: Producer of the Four Seasons, and co-writer of their big hits. Worked with numerous other pop-rock acts, most notably blue-eyed soul group Mitch Ryder & the Detroit Wheels.

Hal David: Lyricist in the Burt Bacharach-Hal David songwriting partnership, which also served as producer for Dionne Warwick in the 1960s.

Gerry Goffin/Carole King: Perhaps the most famous Brill Building songwriting team (starting their work a decade before King became a star recording artist). Some of their most famous songs include "Will You Love Me Tomorrow," "The Loco-Motion," "One Fine Day," "Up on the Roof," and "Chains," the last of which was covered on the first album of the Beatles, whose John Lennon and Paul McCartney cited Goffin-King as a major influence on their composing. Although Goffin and King's marriage split up, they continued to work together for a while after the mid-1960s, writing Aretha Franklin's "(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman" and the Monkees' "Pleasant Valley Sunday."

Florence Greenberg: Head of Scepter Records, whose successful girl group and pop-soul artists included the Shirelles, Dionne Warwick, Maxine Brown, and Chuck Jackson.

Howard Greenfield: Brill Building songwriting partner with Neil Sedaka, who had a long string of teen idol hits in the early 1960s with "Calendar Girl," "Breaking Up Is Hard to Do," "Happy Birthday Sweet Sixteen," and other songs.

Don Kirshner: As co-owner of powerful publishing company Aldon Music, the most powerful Brill Building publisher. Later a key figure in the early career of the Monkees, and in the 1970s, host of the long-running network television series *Don Kirshner's Rock Concert*.

Barry Mann/Cynthia Weil: Another major husband-wife Brill Building songwriting team, whose big successes included "On Broadway," "You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'," "Walking in the Rain," "We've Gotta Get Out of This Place," and "Kicks."

Doc Pomus/Mort Shuman: Brill Building songwriters responsible for "A Teenager in Love," "Save the Last Dance for Me," Elvis Presley's "(Marie's the Name) His Latest Flame" and "Little Sister," "Hushabye," "This Magic Moment," and other hits.

Shadow Morton: Imaginatively unconventional producer for the Shangri-Las, and writer or co-writer of some of their hits. Later produced Janis Ian, Vanilla Fudge, and the New York Dolls.

The Wrecking Crew: Informal name given to the close-knit floating group of Hollywood studio musicians who played on many hit pop-rock records in the 1960s, including ones by Phil Spector, the Beach Boys, the Mamas & the Papas, and many others. Among the more notable members were drummers Hal Blaine and Earl Palmer; bassist Carol Kaye; guitarists Glen Campbell and James Burton; saxophonist Steve Douglas; keyboardist Leon Russell; and arranger Jack Nitzsche.

Notable Places:

The Brill Building: The office building at 1619 Broadway where many pop-rock publishers and songwriters worked, giving rise to the term "Brill Building Sound" for the most outstanding product of that scene in the early 1960s. Other buildings on the same block of

Broadway, however, were also the bases for much publishing/production/songwriting activity of this style.

Dead Man's Curve: Title of one of Jan & Dean's hot rod hits, named after a dangerous stretch of Sunset Boulevard. Though its grisly accident was played for laughs, Jan Berry would sustain serious brain injuries in an accident on Sunset Boulevard not far from the actual Dead Man's Curve in 1966.

Gold Star Studios: Hollywood studio that might be most noted as the site where many of the hits by Phil Spector and the Beach Boys were recorded, though many other rock artists used the studio, including Eddie Cochran, Ritchie Valens, and Buffalo Springfield.

Important Record Labels:

Philles: Phil Spector's label was a vehicle for his productions by the Crystals, the Ronettes, the Righteous Brothers, and a few others.

Red Bird: Founded by Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, this eclectic pop-soul-oriented label had its greatest success with girl groups, especially the Shangri-Las, the Dixie Cups, the Jelly Beans, and the Ad Libs.

Scepter: Home of the Shirelles and what was labeled "uptown" New York pop-soul by Dionne Warwick, Chuck Jackson, and Maxine Brown.

Audiovisual Clips:

Dick Dale: Miserlou (video)

The Chantays: Pipeline (video)

The Pyramids: Penetration (video)

The Beach Boys: Surfin' Surfari (video)

Duane Eddy: Movin' 'n' Groovin' (audio)

Chuck Berry: Sweet Little Sixteen (audio)

The Beach Boys: Surfin' USA (video)

The Beach Boys: Surfer Girl (video)

Jan & Dean: Surf City (video)

Jan & Dean: Little Old Lady from Pasadena (video)

The Beach Boys: I Get Around (video)
The Four Seasons: Candy Girl (audio)
The Four Seasons: Rag Doll (video)
The Chantels: Maybe (audio)
The Shirelles: Will You Love Me Tomorrow (video)
The Shirelles: Foolish Little Girl (audio)
The Ronettes: Be My Baby (video)
Crystals: He's a Rebel (video)
Little Eva: Locomotion (video)
The Exciters: Tell Him (video)
The Angels: My Boyfriend's Back (video)
Lesley Gore: Maybe I Know (video)
Lesley Gore: You Don't Own Me (video)
The Dixie Cups: The Chapel of Love (video)
The Shangri-Las: The Leader of the Pack (video)
The Marvelettes: Please Mr. Postman (video)