

Starr-Waterman

American Popular Music

Chapter 8: “Rock Around the Clock”: Rock ’n’ Roll, 1954–1959

Key People

Alan Freed (1922–1965): Disc jockey who discovered in the early 1950s that increasing numbers of young white kids were listening to and requesting rhythm & blues records played on his *Moondog Show*.

Antoine “Fats” Domino (b. 1928): Singer, pianist, and songwriter, who was an established presence on the rhythm & blues charts for several years by the time he scored his first large-scale pop breakthrough with “Ain’t It a Shame” in 1955 and ultimately became the second best-selling artist of the 1950s.

Barbra Streisand (b. 1942): Impactful recording artist who has delighted audiences on Broadway, in movies, and in concert, also known for her successful LP sales.

Big Joe Turner (1911–1985): Vocalist who began his career as a singing bartender in the Depression era nightclubs of Kansas City; one of Atlantic Records’ early stars, and recorded the original “Shake, Rattle, and Roll.”

Bill Black (1926–1965): String bassist who recorded with Scotty Moore and Elvis Presley for Sun Records.

Bill Haley and the Comets: Influential rock ’n’ roll band influenced by western swing music who recorded the first number one rock ’n’ roll hit “Rock around the Clock.”

Brenda Lee (Brenda Mae Tarpley) (b. 1944): Recording artist of the early 1960s known as “Little Miss Dynamite” who sang hits like “Sweet Nothin’s.”

Buddy Holly (Charles Hardin Holley) (1936–1959): Clean-cut, lanky, and bespectacled singer, songwriter, and guitarist of the 1950s who, along with his band, the Crickets, recorded influential hits like “That’ll Be the Day” and made frequent use of double-tracking.

Charles Edward Anderson (“Chuck”) Berry (1926–2017) Pioneering singer, songwriter, and guitarist who synthesized diverse influences from R&B and country music in rock ’n’ roll songs about teenage life like “Maybellene.”

Connie Francis (Concetta Rosa Maria Franconero) (b. 1938): Mainstream pop singer emerging in the late 1950s who appreciated the importance of appealing to the new young audience and occasionally performed bona fide rockers like “Stupid Cupid” and “Lipstick on Your Collar.”

Elvis Presley (1935–1977): The biggest star of the rock ’n’roll era (and arguably of the entire history of American popular music) who made his most influential recordings early

in his career for Sam Philips and Sun Records.

Harry Belafonte: Folk singer of Jamaican and West Indian parentage who popularized calypso music in the mid-1950s.

Herman (“Little Junior”) Parker (1927–1971): Singer, songwriter, and harmonica player who achieved some success with his rhythm & blues band Little Junior’s Blue Flames.

Janis Martin (1940–2007): Recording artist signed by RCA at the age of sixteen and marketed as the female Elvis.

Jerry Leiber (b.1933–2011): Influential songwriter and producer who, along with Mike Stoller, crafted hit songs for Elvis Presley, the Coasters, and many other artists.

Jo-Ann Campbell (b. 1938) R&B-influenced recording artist, showcased by disk jockey Alan Freed as “the blonde bombshell,” who failed to achieve commercial success.

Johnny Mathis (b. 1935): Latter-day crooner and best-selling recording artist who appealed as much to the rock ’n’ roll generation as he did to their parents.

The Kingston Trio: Folk-inspired pop trio composed of Dave Guard, Nick Reynolds, and Bob Shane known for hit LPs and the single “Tom Dooley,” which were released in the 1950s.

Little Richard (Richard Wayne Penniman) (b. 1932): Singer, songwriter, boogie-woogie influenced pianist, and cultivator of a deliberately outrageous performance style that appealed on the basis of its strangeness, novelty, and sexual ambiguity.

Lorrie (Lawrencine) Collins (b. 1942): Female rock ’n’ roll artist who was half of the duo Collins Kids who, despite their scintillating rockabilly records, failed to make the charts.

Mike Stoller (b. 1933): Influential songwriter and producer who, along with Jerry Lieber, crafted hit songs for Elvis Presley, the Coasters, and many other artists.

Professor Longhair (Henry Roeland Byrd) (1918–1980): Rhythm & blues pianist whose real name was Henry Roeland Byrd who strongly influenced Fats Domino.

Ricky Nelson (1940–1985): Popular teenaged musician in the 1950s who was marketed to teenagers as a “rock ’n’ roll” artist.

Ritchie Valens (Richard Valenzuela) (1941–1959): Short recording career helped create a distinctive Los Angeles rock ’n’ roll sound, influenced by Mexican and country and western music, as well as rhythm & blues groups.

Scotty Moore (1931–2016): Influential guitarist who recorded influential music for Sun Records in the 1950s with bassist Bill Black and Elvis Presley.

Wanda Jackson (b. 1937): The most remarkable of the pioneering rock 'n' roll women in the 1950s who recorded fierce, unapologetic rockers like “Hot Dog! That Made Him Mad,” “Fujiyama Mama,” “Let’s Have a Party,” and her own “Mean Mean Man,” yet failed to achieve mainstream popular success in that style.