How We Got to Rockin' 'round the Clock

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How did we get to rockin’ ‘round the clock?

Tracing the origins of rock and roll from the 1200s to 1955

Note: Song snippets accompany many of the slides.
What is rock and roll?

• Alan Freed coined the term in 1951
  • Disc jockey on Cleveland station WJW

• Described it as a “river of music” in 1956
  • Rock and roll “absorbed many streams: rhythm and blues, jazz, ragtime, cowboy songs, country songs, folk songs” all contributing “to the big beat”

• An evolutionary process that rolls along
  • Heavy metal
  • Grunge
  • Hip-hop
  • Sampling
From Alan Freed’s list: Rhythm and Blues

• Term used to describe upbeat music performed mostly by African American artists
• First recognized by Billboard magazine in 1942
• Jerry Wexler coined the term in the late ‘40s
  • Replaced the phrase “race music”
  • Wexler had a long career as a music producer with Aretha Franklin, Wilson Pickett and many other R&B and rock stars including Led Zeppelin and Bob Dylan
Artists charting R&B hits

• Louis Jordan, R&B’s most popular artist of the 1940s
  • Choo Choo Ch’Boogie 1946
  • Ain’t Nobody Here but Us Chickens 1946
  • Saturday Night Fish Fry 1949 and School Days 1950
  • Featured in “soundies” — music clips that foreshadowed music videos

• Arthur “Big Boy” Crudup
  • That’s All Right 1946 influenced Elvis Presley
    • Covered by Marty Robbins, the Beatles, Rod Stewart
  • Toured with Bonnie Raitt in 1974

• Ivory Joe Hunter
  • Pretty Mama Blues 1948 and Since I Met You Baby 1956
Artists charting R&B hits

• Wynonie Harris
  • Good Rockin’ Tonight 1948

• John Lee Hooker
  • Boogie Chillen 1949
  • Soundclip in The Blues Brothers movie 1980 as the band travels to their appearance as the Good Old Boys at Bob’s Country Bunker

• Paul Williams and His Hucklebuckers
  • The Hucklebuck 1949 instrumental
  • Covered by Chubby Checker 1960 with lyrics “wiggle like a snake, waddle like a duck… that’s what you do when you do The Hucklebuck”
More R&B as a rock and roll tributary

• Ruth Brown
  • *Teardrops from My Eyes* 1950

• The Treniers
  • Their raucous stage shows in the early 1950s foreshadowed rock and roll
  • Appeared in movies *The Girl Can’t Help It* 1956; *Don’t Knock the Rock* 1956; *Calypso Heat Wave* 1957

• B.B. King
  • *You Upset Me Baby* 1954
  • “… Well I try to describe her. It’s hard to start. I better stop now because I got a very weak heart.. You upsets me, baby.”
  • Included in the three-CD *Roots of Rock and Roll* compilation covering 1946-54
Alan Freed: Jazz

• **Billie Holiday**, Louis Armstrong, Count Basie

• **Clyde McCoy**
  • Orchestra leader / jazz trumpeter who co-founded DownBeat Magazine in 1934
  • His trademark song *Sugar Blues* from 1930
    • Performed through the years by Ella Fitzgerald, Fats Waller, Bob Wills and others
    • Made Billboard’s country chart in 1941 illustrating music’s cross-over effect
  • Member of the Hatfield – McCoy feud

• **Nat King Cole**
  • Released 32 R&B chart hits 1942-53 including *Route 66* in 1946
    • This version by the late Glen Frey of The Eagles released in 2012

*Billie Holiday sings Summertime; Ella Fitzgerald Sugar Blues*
Alan Freed: Ragtime

• 1895-1918
• Scott Joplin
  • Maple Leaf Rag
  • The Entertainer featured by Marvin Hamlisch in The Sting 1973
• Jelly Roll Morton
  • His King Porter Stomp became popular with big bands
• George Botsford
  • Later became a Tin Pan Alley composer
  • Black and White Rag 1908
    • This version by Asleep at the Wheel 1992
Alan Freed: Cowboy songs

• Singing cowboys
  • The most famous: Gene Autry and Roy Rodgers
  • Tex Ritter version of Boll Weevil 1945 first recorded in the ‘20s and later by Burl Ives and Walter Brennan as well as by R&B artist Brook Benton 1961
  • Sons of the Pioneers Cool Water 1947
  • Dick Foran from Flemington, N.J.

• Western movies
  • Cowtown
  • Moonlight on the Prairie
  • Song of the Saddle
  • Melody Trail
Alan Freed: Country

• Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys known for Western swing

• Ernest Tubb *Walking the Floor Over You* 1941
  • Performed at St. Paul’s Fitzgerald Theater in the early 1980s

• Hank Snow *I’m Moving on* 1950
  • Covered by Ray Charles 1959 and Elvis Presley 1969

• Hank Williams *Cold Cold Heart* 1951
  •Covered by Dinah Washington (jazz) and Tony Bennett (pop)

• Johnny Cash *Hey Porter* 1954
  • Listed among both the top country *and* rock artists of all time
  • *I Will Rock and Roll with You (If I Have to)* 1994
Alan Freed: Folk songs

• John and Allan Lomax recordings in Texas, Appalachia and the Deep South
• The Carter Family recording in Virginia, Kentucky, Texas and Tennessee
• Woodie Guthrie / The Great Depression
• Activist Pete Seeger and The Weavers
  • Goodnight Irene 1950
  • Written by Huddie “Lead Belly” Ledbetter 1933 and recorded by the Lomaxes (as was the Boll Weevil song)
• Mexican
  • La Bamba popular wedding song from Veracruz
• Celtic and other regional folk music

• Mexican
To Alan Freed’s River of Music, let’s add

- Ethnic music
- Tin Pan Alley
- The Great American Songbook
- The big bands
- Swing and boogie
- Doo Wop
- Gospel
- Blues
Ethnic music

• African call and response chants heard in the farm fields of the south
• German with the button accordion played from Minnesota to South Texas
• French
  • Louisiana Cajun music rooted in the French-speaking Acadians in Canada
• Cuban
  • Ran Kan Kan by Tito Puente featured in 1992 The Mambo Kings movie set in the early 1950s with Desi Arnaz Jr. playing Desi Arnaz Sr.
  • Guantanamera protest song with lyrics taken from a poem by Cuban Jose Marti killed in battle against the Spanish in 1895; Celia Cruz’s version heard on The Mambo Kings soundtrack
Tin Pan Alley (late 1800s to early 1900s)

• Bill Bailey 1922 recorded by many artists over the years
  • Louis Armstrong
  • Ella Fitzgerald
  • Sarah Vaughn
  • Brenda Lee
  • Bobby Darin

• Glow Worm taken from a German operetta
  • Mills Brothers hit in 1952

• Way Down Yonder in New Orleans
  • From the Roaring Twenties to Freddie Cannon’s #3 hit on the Billboard chart in 1959
The Great American Songbook

• Harold Arlen
  • *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*
    • First recorded by Cab Calloway 1931
    • George Harrison version released posthumously on Brainwashed album 2002

• Irving Berlin
  • *Dancing Cheek to Cheek* 1935;
    • Recorded by Lady Gaga and Tony Bennett in 2014

• Johnny Mercer
  • *Goody Goody* recorded by Benny Goodman and his Orchestra 1936
    • On Chicago’s Night and Day Big Band album 1995

• Other composers include George Gershwin; Rogers and Hart; Jerome Kern; Cole Porter; Sammy Kahn
The big bands

• Swing and Sway with Sammy Kaye; Benny Goodman; Glenn Miller

• Tommy Dorsey; Jimmy Dorsey Green Eyes 1941

• Lionel Hampton
  • Hey! Ba-Ba-Re-Bop 1946 charted on R&B and pop lists

• Cab Calloway
  • Everybody Eats When They Come to My House 1948
  • Calloway’s theme Minnie the Moocher featured in The Blues Brothers movie based on a traditional folk song Willy the Weeper released in 1931

• Guy Lombardo and the Royal Canadians Enjoy Yourself 1949

• Duke Ellington saluted by Stevie Wonder’s Sir Duke 1976
Swing and boogie

• *It Don’t Mean a Thing (If It Ain’t Got That Swing)* 1931
  • Ernestine Anderson version of Duke Ellington’s hit on her 1960 album *My Kind of Swing*

• *Rock ‘n’ Rye* 2007
  • Dave Berger and the Sultans of Swing featured in *The Great Debaters* movie set in the ‘30s

• *Boogie at Midnight* 1949
  • Roy Brown also had *Rockin’ at Midnight* 1949

• *Cupid’s Boogie* 1950
  • Johnny Otis and Orchestra featuring Little Esther
    • Greek American band leader known for *Willie and the Hand Jive* 1958 with its gestures and claps featured in *Grease* with the Born to Hand Jive scene
    • Esther Phillips charted with R&B hits 1950-83 (*Release Me* 1962)
Doo Wop

• “Street corner” groups popular from the 1930s – ’50s featuring vocal harmonies

• Sh-Boom 1954 by the Chords and covered by the Crew-Cuts

• Bird groups
  • The Ravens with Old Man River 1948 (written by Jerome Kern for Showboat 1927)
  • The Flamingoes formed in Chicago 1952
  • The Orioles Crying in the Chapel 1953
    • Recorded by Elvis Presley 1960 and released in ‘65
  • The Crows Gee 1954 featured in the movie American Graffitti
  • The Penguins Earth Angel 1954 featured in the movie Last Vegas with Michael Douglas, Robert De Niro and Morgan Freeman in 2013
Gospel

• Songs with religious fervor usually sung by church choirs
  • The Old Landmark covered by James Brown as Rev. Cleophus James in The Blues Brothers movie

• Artists with commercial success
  • Rock and Roll Hall of Famer Sister Rosetta Tharpe reached R&B #6 with her Gospel song Up Above My Head 1948
  • Mahalia Jackson Go Tell It On the Mountain 1950
  • Sam Cooke with the Soul Stirrers in the early 1950s
  • Aretha Franklin in her minister-father’s church choir
Blues

• Lyrics generally with A A B format
  • Me and the devil was walking side by side
  • Me and the devil (whooo) was walking side by side
  • And I’m going to see my woman until I get satisfied

• Clarksdale, Mississippi -- birthplace of the blues
  • Robert Johnson Me and the Devil Blues 1938 at the crossroads
    • His Sweet Home Chicago covered by Eric Clapton and by the Blues Brothers
  • Morgan Freeman’s Ground Zero Blues Club restaurant; Delta Blues Museum
  • Annual juke joint festival held there

• Muddy Waters in 1957 sang “the blues had a baby and they named the baby rock and roll”
The wide influence of the blues

• **Memphis**
  - W.C. Handy “Father of the Blues” traveled the Mississippi Delta in early 1900s
    - Settled in Memphis and performed on Beale Street
  - W.C. Handy Home and Museum, Blues Hall of Fame (and other music museums)

• **Chicago**
  - Chess Records and artists including Howlin’ Wolf *How Many More Years* 1951
  - Chess label also the home of Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, Lee Andrews and the Hearts

• **England**
  - Young British musicians influenced by African-American GIs
  - Eric Clapton’s *Me and Mr. Johnson* 2004 album sold 2,000,000 copies worldwide
  - Rolling Stones’ *Blue and Lonesome* 2017 Grammy Award-winning album in the traditional blues category
Sharing the sounds

• Concerts and tours
  • Performances: the minstrels; the National Honor Band formed in 1798; the Rolling Stones still touring today
  • Venues: the Surf Ballroom in Iowa; the Lambertville Music Circus in New Jersey which transitioned to rock and roll in the late 1950s and ‘60s

• Sheet music notations
  • The hocket (late 1200s); shape notes; the printing press

• Player pianos

• Recorded music
  • Thomas Edison’s phonograph 1877
  • 78 rpm record debuted in 1898

The National Honor Band performs the Washington Post March
Publications sharing the words

• The Gray Book of Favorite Songs 1914
• DownBeat magazine
  • First published in 1934 by Clyde McCoy
  • Dedicated to “jazz, blues and beyond”
  • Now available in print and electronic versions
• Song Hits 1937
  • Launched in 1937
  • Sub-heading noted it offered “correct lyrics by permission of copyright owners”
• Hit Parader
  • Founded in 1942
  • Provided lyrics to “top tunes”
The influence of 20th Century technology

- Radio
  - KDKA in Pittsburgh in 1920
- The transistor developed in the 1940s
- Television
  - Ted Mack’s Amateur Hour in 1948
- Electric guitar
  - Les Paul and the solid body electric guitar in the 1940s
    - First used multi-track recording: e.g. How High the Moon 1951 with Mary Ford
- 33 1/3 rpm LP introduced by Columbia in 1948
- 45 rpm record introduced by RCA Victor in 1949
Popular radio and television shows

• Your Hit Parade
  • Frank Sinatra
  • Doris Day
  • Dick Haymes
  • Dinah Shore

• Grand Ole Opry and Louisiana Hayride
  • Bill Monroe
  • Hank Williams
  • Patsy Cline
  • Floyd Cramer
  • Jerry Lee Lewis
  • Elvis Presley

Frank Sinatra sings Young at Heart; Dinah Shore, Buttons and Bows; Bill Monroe, Blue Moon over Kentucky
1948: Rock and Roll emerges

• The first rock and roll record?
  • Good Rocking Tonight 1948
  • Written by Roy Brown, an originator of the New Orleans rhythm and blues sound
  • Released on New Jersey’s De Luxe label noted for its R&B and early rock recordings
  • The second song recorded by Elvis Presley
  • Also recorded by Wynonie Harris, Wanda Jackson, Ricky Nelson and many others
1951: Rock and Roll emerges

• The first rock and roll record?
  • **Rocket 88** 1951 #1 R&B hit
  • Entered the charts May 12; #1 for five weeks
  • By Jackie Brentson with His Delta Cats
  • Brentson was credited rather than saxophonist Ike Turner and his band
  • Recorded at Sam Phillips’ studio in Memphis
  • Phillips later becomes a central figure in rock history as owner of Sun Records
1952: Rock and Roll emerges

- Life Magazine special issue on rock history published in 2002 to note the genre’s 50-year anniversary
- Dick Clark essay
  - Reference to WFIL-TV’s Bandstand in Philadelphia hosted initially by Bob Horn and Lee Stewart
  - “It was instantly popular”
  - “I could tell something was happening in 1952”
- Lloyd Price *Lawdy Miss Clawdy* 1952 R&B #1
R&B in the early ‘50s

• Big Mama Thornton **Hound Dog** 1953  R&B #1
  • Her only hit on the R&B charts
  • Backed by “Kansas City Bill” and Orchestra aka band leader Johnny Otis who toured in the early ‘50s with the Rhythm and Blues Caravan
  • Written by Lieber and Stoller who also wrote Jailhouse Rock, Kansas City, Ruby Baby, Stand by Me, Spanish Harlem, Love Potion Number Nine

• Big Joe Turner **Honey Hush** 1953; **Shake, Rattle and Roll** 1954

• Hank Ballard and the Midnighters **Work with Me Annie** 1954
  • Later wrote and had the original recording of The Twist 1960
1955: Rockin’ ‘round the clock

• Bill Haley and His Comets
  • *Rock Around the Clock* May 1955 Billboard #1 8 weeks
  • Considered by Fred Bronson in his *Book of Number One* to be the first rock and roll record

• Followed at #1 on Billboard charts by 8 middle of the road pop artists totaling 24 weeks
  • Mitch Miller *The Yellow Rose of Texas* 6 weeks
  • The Four Aces *Love Is a Many Splendor Thing* 2 weeks
  • Dean Martin *Memories Are Made of This* 5 weeks
  • Tennessee Ernie Ford *Sixteen Tons* 7 weeks and #1 on Billboard’s country charts
  • Roger Williams, Nelson Riddle, Kay Starr, Les Baxter
1956: *Now we’re rockin’ ‘round the clock*

- Elvis Presley at Sun Records in Memphis
  - That’s All Right Mama 1954; Good Rockin’ Tonight
  - First #1 hit April 21, 1956 with *Heartbreak Hotel*
    - 8 weeks on top of the Billboard charts
  - Hound Dog / Don’t Be Cruel among his five #1s in ‘56
  - The King of Rock and Roll on a “forever stamp” 2015

- Thank you, Elvis!