

## Pop-Rock of the 50s and 60s

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### INTRODUCTION

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Softer “pop” music styles have played important roles in the development of rock, especially from c1953 to 1966 and in the early 70s. □ Various pop-related styles in the 50s and early 60s include:

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- **Doo-Wop** (1950s and early ‘60s; combined Pop, Gospel and soft R & B elements)
- **Teen Idol “Crooners”** (late ‘50s/early ‘60s; Dick Clark early rock era; soft R & B)
- **Surf Music** (late ‘50s/early ‘60s)
- **Brill Building/Aldon Music** (‘60s pop; extension of “Tin Pan Alley” tradition)
- **Early Motown** (early 1960s; “Soul-pop” music)

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### I. THE CHANGING OF THE GUARD IN 50s ROCK

During the years 1957 to 1961, Rock & Roll lost the impact of at least ten of its most prominent trendsetters.

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- March 1956: While on his way to perform for *The Perry Como Show* in New York City, **Carl Perkins** was involved in a car crash in which he suffered a fractured shoulder and skull. Perkins lost his chance for major fame, and was soon overshadowed by the rise of Elvis Presley.
- October 1957: **Little Richard** renounced Rock and Roll for the ministry of the Seventh Day Adventist Church.
- November 1957: **Jerry Lee Lewis** married his 13-year-old third cousin (while “forgetting” to divorce his first wife.) The scandal that followed destroyed his career.
- March 1958: **Elvis Presley** was drafted into the army, serving in Germany until 1960.
- February 1959: a small-plane crash near Fargo, North Dakota killed **Buddy Holly**, J.P. “**The Big Bopper**” Richardson (“Chantilly Lace”) and the Latino rocker **Richie Valens** (“La Bamba”).
- April 1960: a limousine crash outside of London, England killed **Eddie Cochran** (“Summertime Blues”) and destroyed the career of **Gene Vincent** (although he survived the crash).
- October 1961: **Chuck Berry** was sentenced to two years in jail for transporting a 14-year-old girl (an alleged prostitute) across state lines for immoral purposes.

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Without the hard-edged sounds of these 50s giants, Rock & Roll was transformed by the conservative tastes of major record companies and rock promoters who sought to make rock more attractive to general audiences. □ The softer side of Rock & Roll was a direct decendent of light R & B and the “crooning” traditions of the 1930s-50s—trends that had already made their mark with Pat Boone’s “cover” versions of Little Richard/Fats Domino songs.

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## II. SOFT ROCK OF THE 1950s

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### ***R & B “Doo Wop” Vocal Groups***

In the 1940s and early 1950s, black vocal groups like the **Mills Brothers** and the **Ink Spots** promoted a smooth “crooning” ensemble style that blended jazz and pop. By the mid/late 1950s, a new generation of black “doo-wop” vocal groups such as **The Orioles, The Penguins, The Platters, The Coasters, Frankie Lymon and The Teenagers, The Silhouettes, The Drifters** added a more pronounced R&B and gospel feel.<sup>[1]</sup> In the early years of rock and roll (late 50s/early 60s), the style was widely imitated by white Doo-Wop groups such as **Danny and The Juniors, Dion and the Belmonts**, and **The Four Seasons** (featuring the high “falsetto” voice of Frankie Valli).

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### **Selected Examples of 1950s/60s DOO-WOP Vocal Groups**

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- **The Orioles**: “Crying in the Chapel” (1953)
- **The Penguins**: “Earth Angel” (1954)
- **The Platters**: “The Great Pretender” (1955)
- **Frankie Lymon and The Teenagers**: “Why Do Fools Fall in Love?” (1956)
- **The Coasters**: “Searchin” (1956)
- **Danny and the Juniors**: “At The Hop” (1957)
- **The Silhouettes**: “Get a Job” (1958)
- **The Drifters**: “There Goes My Baby” (1959)
- **Dion and the Belmonts**: “Teenager in Love” (1959),  
[solo hits for Dion=“Runaround Sue” (1962); “The Wanderer” (1962)]
- **The Four Seasons**: “Sherry” (1962)

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### ***R & B “Crooners”***

Following the trend of R & B/pop singers such as Nat “King” Cole, **Sam Cooke** (1931-64), **Ben E. King** (b. 1948), and other young black R & B singers enjoyed crossover successes with their soulful “crooning” styles.

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### **Selected Examples of 1950s R & B “Crooners”**

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- **Sam Cooke**: “You Send Me” (1953)
- **Ben E. King**: “Stand By Me” (1961)

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## III. Dick Clark and the Rising Teen Market

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### ***American Bandstand***

In July 1956, **Dick Clark** (b. 1929) became replacement host for a daily locally-televized Rock & Roll dance show called *Philadelphia Bandstand*. Though Clark initially understood little about up-and-coming Rock & Roll, he worked hard, and within a year his show had become the nationally-syndicated ABC-TV hit, ***American Bandstand***. In the wake of all the scandals and controversy surrounding late-50s Rock & Roll, Clark performed a minor miracle by infusing rock music with a “clean cut” image. In 1964, *Bandstand* was relocated to Los Angeles, and converted from a daily to a Saturday afternoon/weekly format that remained popular through the 1980s, both with teens and their parents.

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In the late 50s/early 60s, Clark promoted—and in many cases manufactured—a stable of mostly Italian-American/Philadelphia-based teen idol “crooners,” including **Paul Anka** (b. 1941), **Frankie Avalon** (Francis Avallone, b. 1939), **Bobby Rydell** (Robert Ridarelli, b. 1940), **Bobby Darin** (1936-73) and **Fabian** (Fabian Forte, b. 1943), who essentially updated the 50s Italian pop-crooner tradition of Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin and Perry Como. Perhaps Clark’s greatest manufactured success was **Chubby Checker** (Ernest Evans, b. 1941), who got teens—as well as the majority of adults—dancing to Rock & Roll with his famous rendition of Hank Ballard’s “The Twist.”<sup>[2]</sup>□Such mass promotion of Rock & Roll by Clark and others helped U.S. record sales to triple between 1950 and 1960.<sup>[3]</sup>

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#### **Selected Examples of 1950s *American Bandstand* Teen Idols**

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- **Bobby Darin**: “Splish, Splash” (1958)
- **Paul Anka**: “Lonely Boy” (1959)
- **Fabian**: “Turn Me Loose” (1959)
- **Chubby Checker**: “The Twist” (1960)

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#### ***The Payola Scandal***

As Dick Clark’s wealth rose with his success, he purchased the copyrights of over 150 Rock & Roll hits, as well as controlling interests in the record companies that recorded his artists. These potential conflicts of interest made **Clark** the target of a federal investigation during the so-called “**Payola Scandal**” of 1959-60.□The subsequent Congressional hearings looked at fraud on TV game shows, <sup>[4]</sup> and “pay-for-play” (“payola”) corruption between record promoters and disc jockeys. Clark survived the hearings with his reputation intact; however, **Alan Freed**’s career was destroyed when he was convicted of two counts of “payola” bribery in December 1962 and income tax evasion (relating to “payola” income) in March 1964.<sup>[5]</sup>

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#### **IV. Songwriters Take Control of the Rock & Roll Industry**

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As a direct result of the payola hearings, professional songwriters were in a position to make a calculated take-over of the Rock & Roll industry. □ From 1960-63, established composers in New York City's "Tin Pan Alley"—led by music publisher **Don Kirshner** (b. 1934)—masterminded a new type of sophisticated pop-rock, that soon outshined Dick Clark's Italian teen idols.

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### ***Aldon Music's Songwriting Duos***

In 1958, **Kirshner** and **Al Nevins** established **Aldon Music** in New York City across from the famous **Brill Building** (home of the music's major publishing firms). Aldon Music quickly rose to prominence by assembling a team of great songwriting duos, including:

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#### **□□□□ Carole King** (Klein) and **Gerry Goffin**

- **Neil Sedaka** and **Howie Greenfield**

- Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil

- Ellie Greenwich and Jeff Barry

In addition to his songwriting talents, **Neil Sedaka** (a singer and classical pianist; b. 1939) was also promoted as a teen idol by RCA, with such hits as "Calendar Girl," "Breaking Up Is Hard To Do," and "Happy Birthday, Sweet Sixteen" (all c1960).

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### ***60s Girl Groups***

The primary vehicles for Kirshner's success, were a series of pop-gospel black girl groups of the early 60s, including **The Shirelles**, **The Ronettes**, **The Crystals** and **The Chiffons**. This tradition reached its height in the mid-60s with early Motown-based soul-pop groups including **The Marvelettes**, **Martha and the Vandellas**, and **The Supremes** (see Section VI, below), and was copied by the emergence of white girl groups such as **The Angels**, and **The Shangri-Las**.

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#### **Selected Examples of early 60s Girl Groups**

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- **The Shirelles**: "Will You Love Me Tomorrow" (1961)

- **The Ronettes**: "Be My Baby" (1963)

- **The Crystals**: "Da Doo Run Run" (1963)

- **The Chiffons**: "He's So Fine" (1963)

- **The Angels**: "My Boyfriend's Back" (1963)

- **The Shangri-Las**: "Leader of the Pack" (1964)

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### ***Phil Spector's "Wall of Sound"***

Music producer, **Phil Spector** (b. 1940), revolutionized 60s pop-rock with his "**Wall of Sound**" (a sound-thickening recording technique created by employing thick echos, multi-layered percussion, and a rich orchestration with two or three of the same instruments on a part).<sup>[6]</sup> Spector's unique sound and autocratic production style

resulted in a long string of hits from the Aldon Music songwriting teams as performed by **The Ronettes**, **The Crystals**, and **The Righteous Brothers** (white “pop-Soul” music) in the early-mid 60s, as well as **Ike & Tina Turner** and **The Beatles** in the late 60s/early 70s.

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#### **Selected Example of Phil Spector’s “Wall of Sound”**

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- **The Righteous Brothers**: “You’ve Lost That Lovin’ Feelin’” (1965)

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#### ***Kirshner Goes West***

In 1963, Don Kirshner sold Aldon Music and moved to Hollywood to take a job at the Screen Gems Television division of Columbia, where he supervised its recording and music publishing aspects. In 1966-67, he masterminded the enormous commercial success of **The Monkees**, but left over salary and artistic-control disputes with The Monkees. Kirshner subsequently dreamed up **The Archies** (a comic book based cartoon rock band, that could not argue over their song rights!). □ In the 1970s, his syndicated ABC television show *Don Kirshner’s Rock Concert*, played a major role in the promotion of new talent during that decade.

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#### **V. The California Surf Sound**

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In the late 50s/early 60s, Hollywood films such as *Gidget* (1959) and dozens of follow-up beach-theme movies starring Frankie Avalon/Annette Funicello, Elvis Presley and others, glamorized the Southern California lifestyle. □ Surfing (and its associated Hot-Rods) became a West-Coast craze and a fantasy for teens across America. [7] □

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#### ***Instrumental Surf Bands***

In the late 50s, **Duane Eddy** (b. 1938) created a unique electric guitar style that became the hallmark surf sound. [8] □ Following Eddy’s lead came other instrumental surf bands including **The Ventures**, **Dick Dale and His Del-Tones**, [9] **The Chantays**, and **The Surfaris**.

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#### **Selected Examples of Instrumental Surf Bands (late 50s/early 60s)**

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- **Duane Eddy**: “Rebel-Rouser” (1959)
- **The Ventures**: “Walk Don’t Run” (1960)
- **Dick Dale and His Del-Tones**: “Miserlou” (1962)
- **The Chantays**: “Pipeline” (1963)
- **The Surfaris**: “Wipe Out” (1963)

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### ***The Beach Boys***

Surf Music rose to its greatest heights with **The Beach Boys** (formed in 1961; comprised of Brian, Carl and Dennis Wilson (brothers), Mike Love (cousin), and Al Jardine. Their characteristic sound featured rich vocal harmonies modeled after **The Four Freshmen** and the **Hi-Lo's** (spectacular 50s/60s jazz-pop vocal quartets), with a surf-guitar style influenced by Chuck Berry, Duane Eddy and Dick Dale. The mastermind of **The Beach Boys** was singer-pianist-songwriter-arranger-producer **Brian Wilson** (b. 1942), who wrote several early hits when still a teenager. In 1962, the group signed with **Capitol Records** (which had previously signed Dick Dale and His Del-Tones). □ Soon after, Brian Wilson also teamed up with hot-rod lyricist **Roger Christian** (an LA disc jockey) to write car songs such as “Shut Down,” “Little Deuce Coupe,” and “Fun, Fun, Fun.” From 1962 to early 1966, The Beach Boys scored nearly twenty Top-40 hits,<sup>[10]</sup> but the pace of this success eventually took its toll on Brian Wilson, who suffered two nervous breakdowns and physical and mental problems stemming from manic-depression and severe drug-addiction. □ Because of these problems, Brian stopped touring with the group, which left him free to experiment in the recording studio. □ Through his efforts, in 1966, The Beach Boys made several major technological breakthroughs that established them as *the* major American rival to The Beatles.<sup>[11]</sup>

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In 1967, Brian's personal problems and new musical directions caused the band to split up. □ Soon after, **Dennis Wilson** began to emerge as a talented songwriter, but he was led into financial and personal ruin through a songwriting collaboration with **Charles Manson** (who became a notorious cult leader and mass murder in the 70s). In 1974, **Mike Love** compiled a double album of past Beach Boy hits entitled *Endless Summer*, which put the group back high on the charts for much of 1974-75 and led to various reunion tours (without Brian). When Dennis died in a boating accident in 1983, Brian was shaken out of his mental stupor and eventually returned to the stage. □ Despite the many legal battles between band members that ensued over their musical rights and profits, The Beach Boys remained one of the most popular live rock acts until the death of Carl in early 1998.

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### ***Jan and Dean***

Another successful surf-style group of the early 60s was **Jan and Dean**, featuring Jan Berry and Dean Torrence, who began singing soft pop-rock in 1959 with hits such as “Baby Talk,” “Heart and Soul,” and “Sunday Kind of Love.” □ The duo switched to surf music in 1962 after performing in concert with The Beach Boys. □ From 1963-64, Jan and Dean—in collaboration with Brian Wilson/Roger Christian and The Beach Boys—had several surf/hot rod hits, including those listed below:

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### **Selected Examples of 60s Surf/Hot Rod Hits**

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### **The Beach Boys**

□□□□ “Surfin’ Safari” (1962) • “Surfin’ USA” (1963) • “Warmth of the Sun” (1963)  
□□□□ “Surfer Girl” (1964) • “I Get Around” (1964) • “Fun, Fun. Fun” (1964)  
□□□□ “California Girls” (1965) • “God Only Knows” (1966) from *Pet Sounds*  
▤□□□ “Good Vibrations” (1966)

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### **Jan and Dean**

□□□□ “Surf City” (1963) • “Drag City” (1963) • “Dead Man’s Curve” (1963)[12]  
□□□□ “Ride the Wild Surf” (1964) • “Sidewalk Surfin’” (1964—skateboarding)

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## **VI. Motown’s Early Years (1960-65; “Soul-pop”)**

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In 1959, the songwriter-producer **Berry Gordy, Jr.**[13] founded **Motown Records** in Detroit. □Gordy—like Sam Phillips of Sun Records—began his venture solely as a recording studio that sent its tapes to be disc-pressed and distributed by other labels (such as Tamla and Chess). □In 1960, the singer/songwriter **William “Smokey” Robinson** (b. 1940) convinced Gordy to establish his own record label. □That year, “Shop Around” by **Smokey Robinson and The Miracles** was Motown’s first hit. In the early/mid 60s, Gordy assembled, mentored and polished top-notch black pop-Soul performers,[14] including **Mary Wells**, **The Marvelettes**, **The Supremes** (featuring Diana Ross), **The Temptations** (with David Ruffin), **Marvin Gaye**, as well as the deeper soul-oriented artists in the late 60s/early 70s such as **The Four Tops** (with Abdul Fakir), **Gladys Knight and the Pips**, **Stevie Wonder**, and **The Jackson 5**. [15] □ Much of their success was due to the famous songwriting team

**Holland—Dozier—Holland** (Brian Holland, Eddie Holland and Lamont Dozier)—the famous songwriting team that wrote dozens of Motown hits between 1963-68.[16] □As a reflection of its crossracial success, Motown became known as “The Sound of Young America,” and its studio was nicknamed “Hitsville U.S.A.” □In particular, The Supremes emerged as the most popular rock-related act in America, standing second behind The Beatles during the critical years of The British Invasion (1964-66).[17]

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### **Selected Examples of Early 1960s Motown Artists**

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- **Smokey Robinson and The Miracles**: “Shop Around” (1960), □□□□ “Ooh, Baby, Baby” (1965), “The Tracks of My Tears” (1965)
- **Martha and the Vandellas**: “Heat Wave” (1963), “Dancing in the Streets” (1964)
- **The Marvelettes**: “Please, Mr. Postman” (1964)
- **Mary Wells**: “My Guy” (1964)
- **The Temptations**: “The Way You Do The Things You Do” (1963), “My Girl” (1965)
- **The Supremes**: “Come See About Me” (1964), “Can’t Hurry Love” (1965), □□□□ “Where Did Our Love Go?” (1965)



- The Penguins: “Earth Angel” [w] (1954)
- The Platters: “The Great Pretender” (1955)
- Frankie Lymon and The Teenagers: “Why Do Fools Fall in Love?” [w] (1956)
- The Coasters: “Searchin’” (1957); “Yakety Yak” [w] (1958)
- Danny and the Juniors: “At The Hop” [w] (1957; Time-Life Video 2)
- The Silhouettes: “Get a Job” [w] (1958)
- The Drifters: “There Goes My Baby” [w] (1959)
- Dion and the Belmonts: “Teenager in Love” (1959),  
[doo-wop solo hits for Dion: “Runaround Sue” [w] and “The Wanderer” [w]—(1962)]
- The Four Seasons: “Sherry” [w] (1962)
- Sam Cooke: “You Send Me” [w] (1957; Time-Life Video 2)
- Ben E. King: “Stand By Me” [w] (1961; Time-Life Video 2)

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#### **TEEN IDOLS** (late 50s/early 60s):

- Neil Sedaka: “Calendar Girl” (c1959)
- Paul Anka: “Lonely Boy” [w] (1959; Dick Clark *American Bandstand* Video)
- Chubby Checker: “The Twist” (1960; written by Hank Ballard)

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#### **EARLY 60s GIRL GROUPS**

- The Shirelles: “Will You Love Me Tomorrow” (1961)
- The Chiffons: “He’s So Fine” [w] (1963)
- The Ronettes: “Be My Baby” [w] (1963; Time-Life Video 2)
- The Angels: “My Boyfriend’s Back” [w] (1963)
- The Shangri-Las: “Leader of the Pack” [w] (1964)

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#### **SURF MUSIC**

- Duane Eddy: “Rebel-Rouser” [w] (1959)
- The Ventures: “Walk, Don’t Run” [w] (1960)
- Dick Dale and his Del-Tones: “Miserlou” [w] (1962)
- The Chantays: “Pipeline” [w] (1963)
- The Surfariis: “Wipe Out” [w] (1963)
- Jan and Dean: “Surf City” [w] (1963)
- The Beach Boys: “Surfin’ USA” [w] (1963), “Surfer Girl” [w] (1963; Time-Life Video 4),  
“Warmth of the Sun” [w] (1963), “I Get Around” [w] (1964; Time-Life Video 3),  
“God Only Knows” from the *Pet Sounds* album [w] (1966), “Good Vibrations” [w] (1966)

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#### **EARLY 60s MOTOWN**

- Smokey Robinson and The Miracles: “Shop Around” [w] (1960),  
“Tracks of My Tears” [w] (1965), “Ooh Baby Baby” (1965; Time-Life Video 5)
- Martha and the Vandellas: “Heat Wave” [w] (‘63), “Dancing in the Street” [w] (‘64)
- The Marvelettes: “Please, Mr. Postman” [w] (1964)
- Mary Wells: “My Guy” [w] (1964)
- The Temptations: “The Way You Do The Things You Do” [w] (1963; Time-Life Video 3)

“My Girl” [w] (1965; Time-Life Video 5)

- The Supremes: “Come See About Me” [w] (1964; Time-Life Video 5)
- Marvin Gaye: “How Sweet It Is” [w] (1964), “Ain’t That Peculiar” [w] (1965)

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[1] □ The somewhat humorous term “doo-wop” refers to the unusual sounds that are sung by background singers in this style, which originated on the streets of New York City.

[2] □ When Hank Ballard recorded “The Twist” in 1959, it received little interest. □ But the following year, Dick Clark—after noticing a black couple dancing in a twisting motion during his show—enlisted Evans (a schoolmate of Fabian’s and Rydell’s) to record a “cover” version of the song. □ Through Clark’s massive promotion of this song on *American Bandstand*, “The Twist” became a national sensation both in 1960 and during its re-release in 1962.

[3] □ Record sales in 1950 were approximately \$190 million vs. over \$600 million in 1960. Three-fourths of this market was controlled by four major record companies: **RCA Victor, Columbia, Decca, Capitol.**

[4] □ Several TV quiz shows, including “The Price is Right” and “The \$64,000 Question” were taken off the air after it was determined that selected contestants on NBC’s “Twenty One” had been given answers in advance.

[5] □ While Freed admitted to accepting over \$30,000 in bribes, Clark stated that he “never agreed to pay a record in return for payment” and that he “did not *consciously* favor” artists who recorded for companies in which he owned an interest. A year after his tax-evasion conviction, Freed died of complications from alcoholism.

[6] □ Spector was a great admirer of the German Romantic operatic composer, Richard Wagner (1813-83), who used massive orchestral doublings, powerful brass and percussion in his theatrical scores.

[7] □ Surfing (“The sport of Kings”) was first introduced from Hawaii around 1900.

[8] □ Eddy used a flatpick next to the bridge of the guitar (where the strings are tightest) to produce a twangy sound.

[9] □ Dick Dale (who worked with Leo Fender to improve the reverb of the Showman amp), used dense reverb with tremolo (rapid repeated notes) and glissando (sliding) effects— sounds more commonly used on Middle Eastern plucked string instruments such as the Sitar.

[10] □ See chart of The Beach Boys' early hits in the "Annotated Outline" of *The Time-Life History of Rock and Roll*, Volume 4; see Workbook/Resource Guide p. 66)

[11] □ For more specific information on The Beach Boys accomplishments in 1966, see Chapter 3, Section VI, below.

[12] □ Ironically, in an accident similar to the one described in this song, Jan Berry suffered severe brain damage when he slammed his Stingray into a parked truck, while speeding at over 60 MPH on an LA surface street.

[13] □ Gordy (a former Detroit auto assembly worker) began Motown with \$800 that he borrowed from his family.

[14] □ Gordy strictly controlled the finances, appearance and the personal lives of all his acts, and he hired Maxine Powell (a modeling/finishing school director) and Cholly Atkins (choreographer/dancer) to refine them.

[15] □ These later Motown artists are discussed in the larger context of "Soul Music" in Chapter 4.

[16] □ Holland—Dozier—Holland left Motown in 1968 because of a royalty dispute with Berry Gordy.

[17] □ See chart of "Top Groups in the U.S.—1964-66" (on p. 60 of the Workbook/Resource Guide)

[18] □ In November 1964, Johnson was elected to a full term.

[19] □ In 1964, Congress also passed the 24th Amendment, which outlaws Poll Taxes in federal elections.

[20] □ "Soul Music" is the focus of Chapter 4, below.