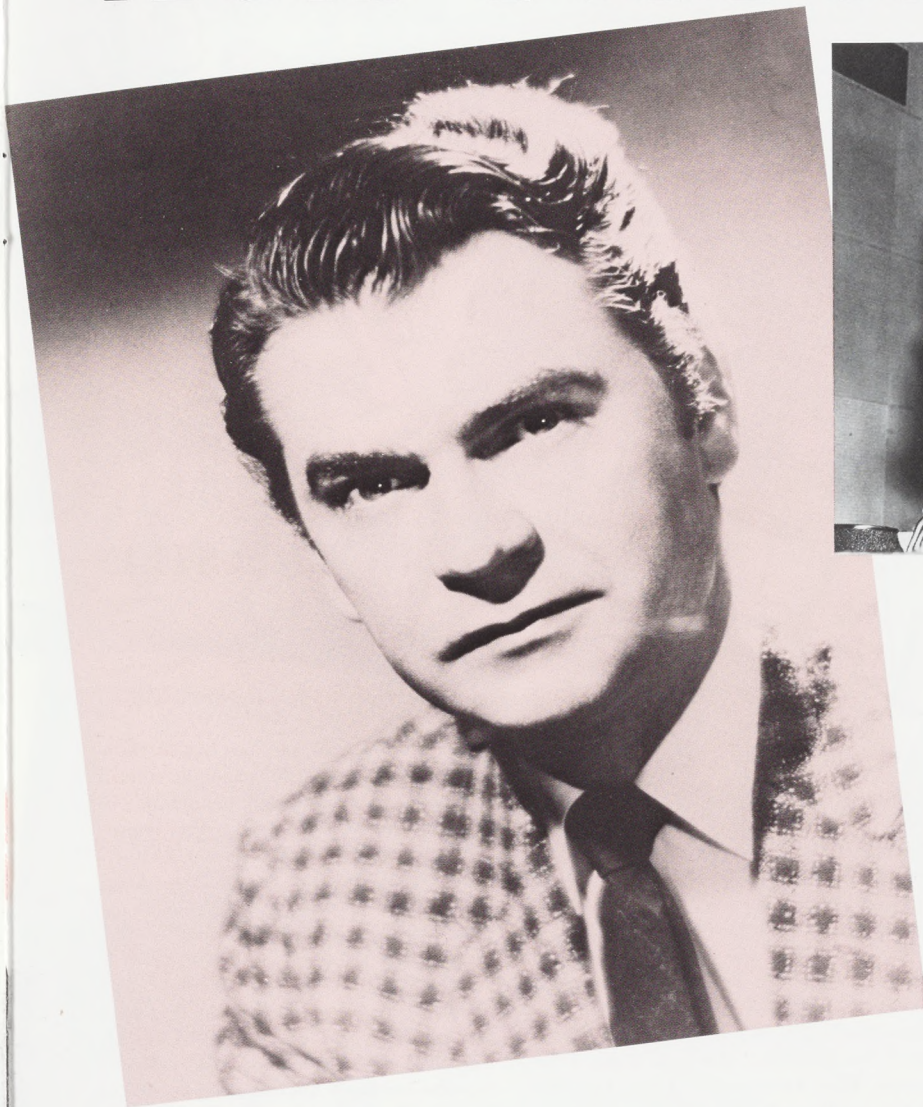


NON-PERFORMERS



SAM PHILLIPS
January 5th, 1923
Florence, Alabama

The sound of Sun Records was the epitome of rock and roll's origins. Owner Sam Phillips not only recorded the varied streams of ethnic music throughout the South, from blues to country, but was convinced he could bring them together in one irresistible pop package. It was at his Memphis Recording Service that he first succeeded in finding a white gospelized singer with "the Negro sound and the Negro feel" — Elvis Presley.

If Phillips had only discovered Presley, he would have earned a lasting place in history. But his Sun label was also home to Jerry Lee Lewis, Johnny Cash, Roy Orbison, Carl Perkins and an honor roll of the South's finest talent. Before he'd formed Sun, Sam was an

independent record producer, working with artists like Chester Burnett (a.k.a. Howlin' Wolf), B.B. King, Bobby "Blue" Bland and Roscoe Gordon. When he began Sun, his original roster consisted of bluesmen Little Junior Parker, Rufus Thomas and a group of inmates from the Tennessee State Penitentiary, the Prisonaires.

"It's one thing to watch musicians perform, and it's another to get that feeling of excitement onto a record," he said of his production philosophy. "But once you've got it, the color of a man's skin doesn't show on a record." To prove it, working through the early months of 1954, he hit upon the notion of trying Elvis on Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup's "That's All Right." For a flip side, he similarly modernized a country favorite, Bill Monroe's "Blue Moon of Kentucky." Sunlight broke through the clouds, heralding a brand-new day.



ALAN FREED
December 15th, 1922
Johnstown, Pennsylvania
Died January 20th, 1965
Palm Springs, California

Alan Freed was the most effective proselytizer rock and roll has ever known. Spreading the word from a radio pulpit that kicked off nightly to the strains of Freddie Mitchell's "Moondog Boogie," Freed kept time to the music by smashing his hand on a telephone book. He first conquered Cleveland over WJW, and then moved his show to New York's flagship WINS.

Alan not only spun the music; he wrote it, promoted it, starred in its early movies and became one of its first scapegoats. He discovered the Moonglows and helped bring countless other performers to prominence. Later, the tangled favors of this period would recoil against him in the payola scandals of the late Fifties. In the atmosphere of a witch hunt, arrested for "anarchy" and "inciting to riot" (in Boston), Freed maintained that he never played a record he didn't like. His stage shows remain the essential revues of the era.

He called it "rock 'n' roll" ("It seemed to suggest the rolling, surging beat of the music"), and his enthusiasm was infectious. Though he died before his forty-third birthday, exiled from the business he loved, his missionary spirit lives on.

"I hope you'll take my hand," he wrote on the back of one of his many oldies albums, "as we stroll together down our musical Memory Lane. 'The Big Beat in American Music' was here a hundred years ago — it will be here a thousand years after we are all gone.

"SO — LET'S ROCK 'N' ROLL!"

ROCK!

ROCK!

ROCK!



Mickey and Sylvia



Royal Teens



Screamin' Jay Hawkins

But I can't remember where or when . . . did rock and roll begin?

Was a new era dawning on July 5th, 1954, when Sam Phillips spoke the immortal words – “That’s fine, man. Hell, that’s different. That’s a pop song now” – to Elvis Presley over a studio intercom at 760 Union Avenue in Memphis?

Was it March 31st, 1955, when *The Blackboard Jungle* formally equated Bill Haley’s “Rock around the Clock” with juvenile delinquency, providing a theme song for adolescent rebellion?

Or was it the early Fifties crossover success of the Chords’ “Sh-Boom,” the Penguins’ “Earth Angel,” the Crows’ “Gee,” Big Joe Turner’s “Shake, Rattle and Roll” and a Cleveland disc jockey’s prescience in taking the “race records” known as rhythm and blues and changing their name to attract (or acknowledge) a multiracial audience?

The truth is that despite an all-too-human urge to define music in neat bloodlines, the roots of rock and roll remain frustratingly elusive. As much a self-conscious lifestyle as a collection of rhythms and melodies, it seemed to pick at will from the discards of other music forms, recycling scorned chords and pariah riffs.

This is not to say rock and rollers were

merely secondhand musicians – though that’s how they were generally regarded by their professional peers. Primitive or not, these were aware and deliberate creators – often driven visionaries – whose goal was simplicity instead of intricacy. Reacting against the passivity of audience-performer interaction, rock celebrated and indulged its subliminal urges. It cracked one beat in place of six and projected lyrics naked in their unadorned desire, along with melodic phrases so pointed they became mnemonic hooks, as America’s (and later the world’s) Top Forty charts would soon devastatingly learn.

The subculture offered was part Atomic Age and part Media Modern, stepping back from the siege mentality of postwar paranoia. Times were good in the mid-Fifties. Smokestack America was booming; the pay of a factory worker with three dependents averaged seventy dollars a week. *Time* magazine said that along with the highest Gross National Product in history, “bomb shelters were on sale in Los Angeles, and hardly anyone was buying them.” President Eisenhower heralded a return to confidence, while Davy Crockett was the national hero.

But did the public like Davy because he said things like “Be sure you’re right, then go ahead,” or because his coonskin cap and

sacrificial life-is-art swan song at the Alamo offered some grander purpose than mere prosperity? James Dean’s meteoric rise to fame in the six months between his March 1955 screen appearance in *East of Eden* and his own flaming demise (the self-fulfilling prophecy of *Rebel without a Cause*) promoted similar existential questions. It was only when the newly ubiquitous medium of television met rock’s first icon, Elvis Presley, that rock became something more than music. It went pop.

Projected into millions of unsuspecting living rooms, as important for what he couldn’t show (the famous waist bisection) as for what he did (gold records galore), Elvis not only combined the tangled musical strains of rock’s prehistory into a sultry whole, he took a mutated step forward. His was an inspirational leadership that came to embody the new music itself. Long live the King!

His – and, by extension, rock’s – was an electric sound, tilting the balance from amplification to AC current. You could hear it in the slapback echo with which Phillips surrounded Presley’s voice in “That’s All Right” and in the bite of Scotty Moore’s electric guitar. It seemed tailor-made for “Hi-Fi,” a car radio, a *live* stage show.

And yet, as much as rock and roll was



Chantels

“specialty” music, but certainly influential styles in their own right. Vocal techniques and improvisations from the blues; a hard, big-band swing; the call-and-response of gospel; the dance blues of New Orleans; the frantic bop of West Coast jazz; the twang of hillbilly boogie and western swing; the close-harmony serenade of groups like the Ink Spots and the Four Freshmen – all of these found their way into rock and roll. “Rock and roll was probably the first music with regional origins to be commercially



Moonglows

Roy Brown



successful on a nationwide scale,” writes Charlie Gillett in *The Sound of the City*, and small wonder, since it managed to touch so many reference points along the way.

Add to rock and roll the manic exhibitionism of youthful exuberance, the sense of contrariety that kept the music moving further out on its own limb of the family tree, and the outrage (and subsequent attraction) it could provoke, and the result was music that had an explosive impact on America in the Fifties. It would be a high-exclusive national phenomenon until the decade turned. At that point, it would be reflected back across the Atlantic with a vengeance by the British Invasion, and it would take over the pop charts to the extent that rock and roll became the dominant American music. *Billboard* acknowledged the transition when it

expanded its rock and roll record chart from 30 to 100 songs on November 12th, 1955 – not so coincidentally, the same month that Colonel Tom Parker signed Elvis to recording giant RCA-Victor.

Pop music’s older guard had initially tried to subvert rock’s emotional intensity with sanitized cover versions; they hoped that all this loud bravado would soon go away. But they never stood a chance. The swappfest between rhythm, blues, country, western and plain old Tin Pan Alley continued wildly apace. In the hands of maverick independent labels and their equally unruly artists, a marketplace free-for-all was initiated that harked back to the days of the frontier West.

“This is what makes rock and roll so intriguing,” Nick Tosches notes in his chronicle of the “dark and wild” years before Elvis, *Unsung Heroes of Rock ‘n’ Roll*. “Whether one regards it as art or as business, its history – one of greed and innocence, tastelessness and brilliance, the ridiculous and the sublime (not to mention sex, violence and pink silk suits) – is a fun-house-mirror reflection of the American dream gone gaga.”

If we can’t pinpoint our opening “where or when” question, the who, what and how that make up the raw materials of this Rock

presented as a strikingly original concept when it came along, it was a product of the same frantic bartering of style that has characterized American music since there was an American music to speak of. Elvis was hardly a surprise, given all that had come before. What was amazing was how much he foreshadowed all that was yet to come.

Beginning almost two centuries ago, social lines – be they drawn along class, racial or economic boundaries – have proved most porous where music is concerned. This melting pot of sound has brought vitality to American music – be it folk, jazz, country, western, blues or other – which sees styles evolve in a virulent democracy at a sometimes bewildering pace.

For those who think in terms of black and white, there are only shades of gray. Performance styles and rhythms imported directly from Africa found Anglo-Irish harmonies and melodies greeting them on their arrival to the new continent. Playing the game of one-upping dozens, rudiments of style were exchanged, helped along by a growth in mass communication that made once-regional styles accessible to a national audience.

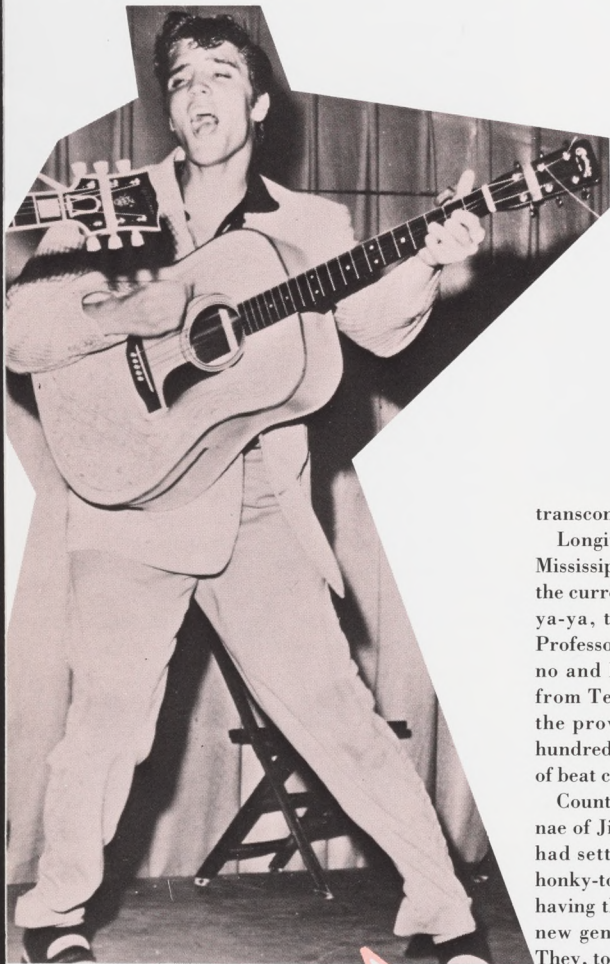
By the late Forties, this had resulted in several unique genres, most still considered



Diablos

Cleftones

ROCK! ROCK!



Elvis Presley

and Roll Hall of Fame are more readily available. Their names and faces, legendary hits and divine misses, not only prefigure the portraits on the walls, but are the very walls themselves. A guided tour of this labyrinth quickly loses its way along corridors that overlap and encircle. Luckily, you're never lost for long. You can pin the tail anywhere on the donkey of rock and roll.

In Chicago, the bedrock blues brought up from the deep Delta South gradually took on a more urban character. Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf begat Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley, while the church harmony of a thousand congregations took flight in the Moonglows or a "bird" group like the Flamingos (see also Orioles, Cardinals, Robins, Sparrows, Wrens, Meadowlarks, et al.).

On the West Coast, a lively rhythm and blues scene zoot-suited into Los Angeles "jump" blues and "cool" blues, the archetypal Fast Song and Slow Song: Amos Milburn backed with Charles Brown. Linking with the "Harlem Hit Parade" of Louis Jordan and Wynonie Harris that swept the Northeast, a golden spike was laid in the



Five Satins

transcontinental railway of a nascent rock.

Longitudinally, the music moved up the Mississippi River from New Orleans, against the current. From out of the heart of gumbo ya-ya, the insistent piano-roll triplets of Professor Longhair gave way to Fats Domino and Little Richard. An arc stretching from Texas across the Carolinas brought the proverbial bop that wouldn't stop to hundreds of thousands of fans — a crescent of beat centered on two and four.

Country music, tying together the personae of Jimmie Rodgers and Hank Williams, had settled its first pioneer generation in honky-tonkin' towns throughout the South, having their children and watching a whole new genealogy of musicians come of age. They, too, caught the amped-up fever of the times, sticking their dancing feet into Carl Perkins' "Blue Suede Shoes" and doing the "Be-Bop-a-Lula" to Gene Vincent. Under the generic name of rockabilly, it became a sound all its own, driven to unimaginable heights by Elvis, but part of the wet dream of every duck- and pony-tailed *yon' teenager* (as Philadelphia disc jockey Jerry Blavat would christen his listeners).

It was when all these intermarried musics met the pop process that rock and roll be-



Elegants

gan. In calling it rock and roll, a sensibility of separation was initiated that helped the bandwagon move under its own propulsive power. Disc jockey Alan Freed, tipped by record-store owner Leo Mintz of the across-the-board appeal of rhythm and blues, "officially" changed the music's name, in effect defining this new audience. Thus given its own fork in the road, rock proceeded to strike off resolutely on its own.

The catchall phrase Freed chose was a combination of two R&B slang expressions that had been around for at least three decades. Like jazz, it was yet another synonym for that most musical of interpersonal acts. Nick Tosches has traced it back to the fall of 1922, when blues singer Trixie Smith recorded "My Daddy Rocks Me (with One Steady Roll)" for Black Swan. By the Forties, "rock" (not to mention "roll") had become a full-fledged adjective denoting a hard, crisp, beat-oriented music on the order of "Good Rockin' Tonight" (Roy Brown), "All She Wants to Do Is Rock" (Wynonie Harris), "Rockin' the House" (Memphis Slim) and even Wild Bill Moore's "We're Gonna Rock."

The Fifties saw this rock slide become an avalanche: "Rockin' Blues" (Johnny Otis), "Rockin' Rhythm" (Pee Wee Barnum), "We're Gonna Rock" (Gunter Lee Carr, a.k.a. Cecil Gant), "Rock, Rock, Rock" (Amos Milburn) and, in keeping with the tempo of the times, "Rock, H-Bomb, Rock," by the irrepressible H-Bomb Ferguson.

What's more, the musical trade-off between material and style was becoming overt instead of covert. Already, hits on the rhythm and blues charts were being reversioned for country and western artists, and vice versa. The formerly inviolable pop charts were invaded by the new sound, exemplified by the Dominoes' "Sixty Minute Man," Bill Haley's "Crazy Man Crazy" and



Penguins



ROCK!



Skyliners



the Charms' "Hearts of Stone." If this was commercial, an event like Freed's Moondog Coronation Ball showed the tip of a demographic iceberg. Held in March 1952 at the Cleveland Arena, it allowed the audience to glimpse one another in the flesh and witness their own power. Instead of the expected capacity crowd of 10,000, there were 30,000 eager fans pouring through the turnstiles, which resulted in rock's first riot.

Once the floodgates were declared open, things began to, ah, roll. The public's imagination may have been captured by Elvis, but the vast legions of musicians and entrepreneurs were ready, willing and able to follow him through the pearly gates of entertainment paradise. Suddenly unleashed, rock burst over America in a great wave, carrying with it a grand sense of possibility, of the new taking over the old.

Perhaps that's the way it seems at the start of a revolution. Maybe a revolution always reacts against what came before, at once predictable and shocking. Surely, other radical fusions of form had taken place in American music. What made rock and roll so different was its sudden flaring into consciousness, heralded by a modern communications media with an ability to drum the message throughout the technological world.

Everybody wanted to be a rocker, and the distinction between fan and performer was blurred by the music's accessibility. Three chords and stardom. Throughout America, each geographic region contributed a particular legacy to the rock and roll mythos. In New York, a doo-wop group held court on every street corner in the five boroughs - whether the Harptones or Frankie

Lymon and the Teenagers, from upper Manhattan; the Cletones, from Jamaica, Queens; Dion and the Belmonts, from the Belmont Avenue subway station in the Bronx; the Mystics, the Passions and the Paragons, from Brooklyn; or the Elegants from Staten Island. Their "hitting notes" were shaped to nonsense chants and chimed thirds, bass through high tenor.

They were heard by the tunesmiths of the Brill Building on Broadway, who sculpted for them songs whose pantheonic scrollwork was astonishing. These pop masterminds instantly turned to packaging a Teen Idol prototype, though fittingly enough it was in Philadelphia, home of Dick Clark's televised *American Bandstand*, that the Fabians and Frankie Avalons were launched toward a heartthrobbing multitude. Along with the cheese-steak hero, Philly was also

famous for its falsetto singing groups. Let us now praise the Capris ("God Only Knows") and the Castelles.

Southern Gothic reared its head in rockabilly, which wreaked havoc below the Mason-Dixon line. Elvis' sound was regional for these gone cats and hillbillies on speed, and they created a momentum so headlong that it would come back to haunt them a quarter of a century later with a full-blown revival. Bill Haley provided the formal definition when he put the big beat of rhythm and blues in a western swing setting and recorded it in New York's Pythian Temple to give it a rim-shot edge; and it was carried to breathless extremes by such train-kept-a-rollin' ravers as the Johnny Burnette Trio, Wanda Jackson ("Fujiyama Mama") and Billy Lee Riley ("Flying Saucers Rock 'n' Roll").

The air of supernatural possession was best summed up by Screamin' Jay Hawkins' "I Put a Spell on You," from 1956. By then, rock and roll was doubling back on itself, influencing its source musics, a dizzying cloverleaf that never did find a straightaway. As pop music had opened to rhythm and blues and country, these styles in turn opened to pop, the tension of their compromise broadening the struggle between real and surreal, lost and found.

Groups like the Coasters and the Drifters; solo artists like Clyde McPhatter, Jackie Wilson and Ben E. King; instrumentalists like Duane Eddy and King Curtis; resolute bluesmen like B.B. King and Bobby "Blue" Bland; superb voices like La Vern Baker and Joe Turner; teen idols like Ricky Nelson and Dion; Hank Ballard's blue side of rhythm; Johnny Otis' rhythm side of blues; the "C.C. Rider" of Chuck Willis and the "Sleep" of Little Willie John; the orchestrated heads-and-tails of Bobby Darin and Roy Orbison; the yet-to-come of Marvin Gaye and Smokey Robinson; the live-fast-die-young of Eddie Cochran and Johnny Ace; Ruth Brown, Lloyd Price, Jimmy Reed. . . .

The list could go on and on. And still does.

Welcome to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.



Wynonie Harris



Gene Vincent and his Blue Caps

Major companies have seemed to control the industry, almost from the dawn of recorded music – as far back as cylinder recordings, when Edison Bell had a virtual monopoly on the market. Yet of the 41 artists nominated for induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, only two began their recording careers on a major label (Buddy Holly on Coral, a subsidiary of Decca, and Gene Vincent on Capitol). The remaining 39 artists were discovered and signed by the small independent labels which began to emerge just after World War II and which, by the early Fifties, were flourishing in cities throughout the United States.

With the introduction of the flat-disc gramophone, the tendency of the majors to control the marketplace continued. Within ten years, the Victor Talking Machine Company and American Gramophone (Columbia) dominated the American marketplace, with the Gramophone Company (HMV) and its then-subsiary, Deutsche-Gramophone, in control of the U.K. and Germany respectively. A similar situation existed with Pathé in France.



INDEPENDENTS 39, MAJORS 2

BY SEYMOUR STEIN

Today, the world record market is virtually controlled by six major multinationals and their subsidiaries. But for about a dozen years, from the early Fifties to the mid-Sixties, things were different.

There were scores of small companies in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Houston and just about every major American city, and they collectively reigned over the music scene. These independent labels nurtured rock and roll and set the trends, paving the way for a new musical era.

To comprehend this phenomenon, we must go back to the years just following World War II and the decline of the big bands. The majors – RCA Victor, Columbia, Decca and Capitol – retained virtual control of the industry, although certain well-financed new labels, such as Mercury in Chicago, MGM (the first film company to enter the record sweepstakes) and London (owned by Sir Edward Lewis, of British Decca), were gaining a foothold in the pop market.

The big bands may have gone, but many of the pop stars who'd been featured vocalists with these ensembles back in the Thirties and Forties – Perry Como, Frank Sinatra, Jo Stafford, Dinah Shore and Vaughn Monroe – remained on the scene. These art-

ists – along with Nat King Cole, the Mills Brothers, the Ink Spots, the Andrews Sisters, Louis Jordan and Eddy Howard – were among the most consistent pop sellers of the postwar years. However, new musical trends were beginning to take root as a result of developments that date back to the early Thirties, when the Depression caused a great migration of Southern rural blacks and whites to the industrial cities, taking their music with them. The economic boom after World War II not only accelerated this shift in population, but brought records and phonographs within the reach of more people than ever.

Although the independent labels were active in all areas of music, the vast majority specialized in "race" or rhythm and blues recordings. The majors, for the most part, ignored this field, especially the up-and-coming artists whose music had a new beat.

As the Fifties began, the big labels' rosters had swelled to include pop mainstays like Patti Page, Eddie Fisher, Les Paul and Mary Ford, Guy Mitchell, Teresa Brewer, the Ames Brothers, the Four Aces, Joni James, Tony Bennett, Doris Day, Frankie Laine and Mario Lanza. Victor and Columbia, the two largest companies, survived a battle of the speeds, with both Victor's 45 rpm and Columbia's 33-1/3 rpm accepted. But the death knell had sounded for the 78.

Record sales hit an all-time high, with no end in sight. Sales for country and western and for rhythm and blues had increased to the point that *Billboard* and *Cashbox* were devoting weekly sections and compiling best-seller charts in both categories. The majors had maintained control of the pop and country fields, and were little bothered that rhythm and blues music was now totally in the hands of the indies.

These early R&B leaders are responsible for 23 of the 41 nominees. Atlantic leads the way with 11, followed by King with 4, Chess with 3, Specialty and Imperial with 2 apiece, and Modern and Savoy each with 1. Although none of their artists was nominated, Alladin, Apollo and Jubilee were also

important early leaders and are worthy of mention.

The country field, too, has had its share of great indies. King, for example, started as a country label, before branching out more successfully into R&B. Other important early country labels were Abbott, which discovered Jim Reeves; Four Star, whose roster included Webb Pierce, Rose Maddox and T. Texas Tyler; and Starday, whose founders discovered George Jones.

ATLANTIC was set apart from its competitors in that it was indeed the first truly professionally run indie in the R&B field. The label was founded in 1948 by Ahmet Ertegun and Herb Abramson – joined later by Jerry Wexler, and later still by Nesuhi Ertegun – at a time when older, more established indies like Savoy, King and Aladdin dominated the R&B scene. They boldly printed on the backs of their singles sleeves the statement "Atlantic leads the field in rhythm and blues," along with caricatures of their major artists. Merely a boast in 1950, this became reality in 1954 and certainly remained true well into the Sixties. In addition to Atlantic's 11 nominees – Ray Charles, La Vern Baker, Ruth Brown, the Coasters, King Curtis, Bobby Darin, the Drifters, Ben E. King, Clyde McPhatter, Joe Turner and Chuck Willis – the label's other great stars of that period included Ivory Joe Hunter, the Clovers and the Cardinals. Atlantic was also perhaps the first company to recognize the benefit of independent production through its groundbreaking deals with Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller and, later, Phil Spector, Bert Berns,



Clockwise:

Lester Sill, Duane Eddy and Lee Hazelwood

Alan Freed...in the beginning

Henry Glover

Hank Ballard and Syd Nathan

Morty Kraft of Melba Records

Dave Miller (Essex Records), Martin Block and Don Howard. Martin Block promised to eat a record if it became a hit.

Ahmet Ertegun, Joe Turner and Jerry Wexler

Martin Block, one of WAFB's New York disk jockeys, who said he would eat the record if anything ever happened to "96 Hopper" (left), looking on, exposing the secret to Dave Miller, who was satisfied with Block's promise. It was Dave Miller, not Block, who was satisfied with Block's promise. It was Dave Miller, not Block, who was satisfied with Block's promise.

INDEPENDENTS 39

Jim Stewart and Al Bell of Stax, and Buddy Killen of Dial Records.

SAVOY was the first and one of the oldest R&B labels to consistently come up with hit product. Savoy was founded in Newark in 1942 by Herman Lubinsky, whose strong will and tenacity were rivaled only by fellow pioneer Sydney Nathan of King Records. The label's golden years were from 1949 to 1951, when they virtually monopolized the R&B charts with hits by Hall of Fame nominee Johnny Otis ("Double Crossing Blues," "Mistrustin' Blues," "Deceivin' Blues"), as well as "The Hucklebuck," by Paul Williams, and "Deacon's Hop," by Big Jay McNeely. In later years, Savoy became more prominent in the gospel field, with artists like James Cleveland and Marion Williams.

APOLLO, the same vintage as Savoy, was operated by Ike and Bess Berman. Although Apollo first recorded one of the field's top groups, the Five Royales, and later recorded Solomon Burke, the label will always be best remembered for discovering the legendary gospel artist Mahalia Jackson.

KING RECORDS, begun in 1945, was the first self-contained independent. Based in Cincinnati, label founder Sydney Nathan set up his own fiefdom, which included pressing, plating and studio facilities. King was also the first nonmajor with a network of company-owned branches. During its peak years, there were 32 of these branches spread across the country. King pioneered the system of A&R label and product managers in the early Fifties. Henry Glover ran King, Ralph Bass oversaw Federal, and Henry Stone guided the DeLuxe label. In addition to nominees James Brown, Hank Ballard and Little Willie John, the King roster's most active names over the years included Billy Ward and the Dominoes (the group that spawned nominees Jackie Wilson and Clyde McPhatter), Wynonie Harris, Bill Doggett, Earl Bostic, Bullmoose Jackson, Otis Williams and the Charms and Freddy King.

SPECIALTY, one of the older and more successful Los Angeles-based indies, was founded in 1945 by Art Rupe and had its first success with R&B artists like Joe Liggins ("Pink Champagne," "The Honeydripper") and Roy Milton. It was Specialty's more rock-oriented artists, however, who gave the label its reputation. The first of these was nominee Lloyd Price, whose "Lawdy Miss Clawdy" was a Number One smash in 1952. In 1955, the label broke the pop/R&B barrier with a string of hits by inductee Little Richard, starting with "Tutti-Frutti" and "Long Tall Sally." Another great Specialty artist was Larry Williams. The label had an equally impressive gospel roster. Perhaps the most viable of these acts was the Soul Stirrers, whose lead singer, Sam Cooke, went on to fame and immortality.

ALADDIN, although best remembered

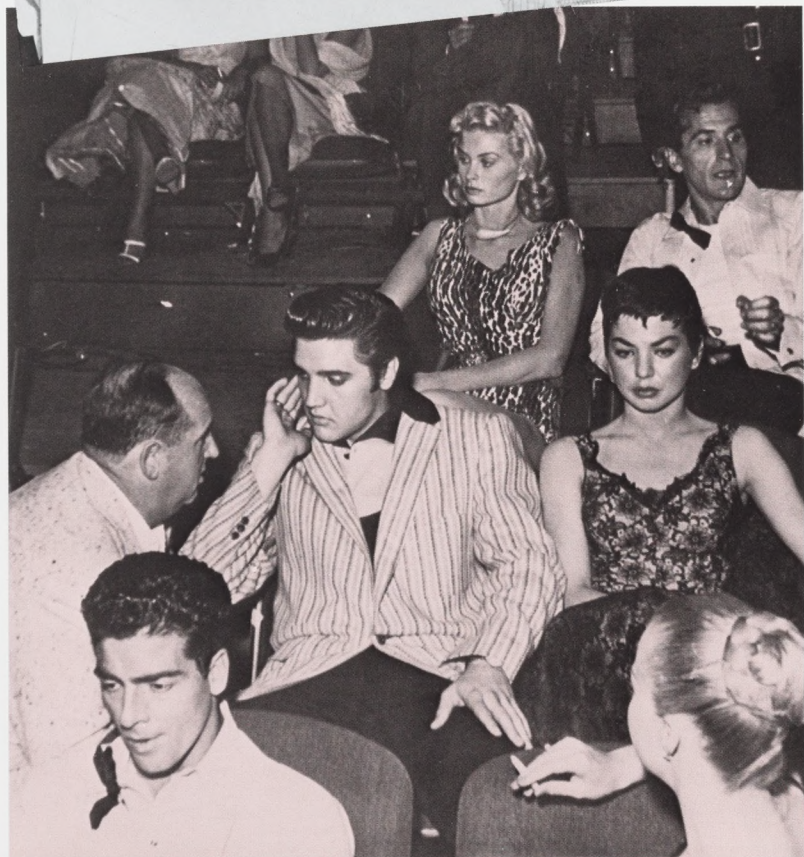


Leonard Chess



Al Bell and Jim Stewart

Seymour Stein, Susan Goldner, Johnny Rivers, George Goldner and songwriter Toni Wine



Elvis Presley with Col. Tom Parker

9, MAJORS 2

for its mid-Fifties crossover hits like "Let the Good Times Roll," by Shirley and Lee, and "Little Bitty Pretty One," by Thurston Harris, was actually founded in 1945 by Eddie and Leo Mesner. Their early successes included classic hits by Peppermint Harris, Charles Brown and Amos Milburn, as well as the Five Keys.

MODERN, another of the early California indies, can be credited with launching the career of Rock and Roll Hall of Fame nominee B.B. King back in 1951. Modern and its subsidiaries — RPM, Flair, Crown and Kent — were run by the Bihari family, with brothers Jules and Saul most active in the early years. Blues artists who got their start with Modern include Pee Wee Crayton and John Lee Hooker. Later, between 1955 and 1957, Modern released some of the most important pop/R&B records from the West Coast, including "Why Don't You Write Me?" by the Jacks; "Eddie My Love," by the Teen Queens; "Goodnight, My Love," by Jesse Belvin; and the classic "Stranded in the Jungle," by the Cadets. They were also the first to record Etta James' version of "Dance with Me, Henry," back in 1955.

CHESS, the great Chicago-based indie founded by brothers Leonard and Phil Chess, will be remembered for popularizing blues nominee Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Little Walter and Elmore James, together with such rhythm and blues mainstays as inductee Chuck Berry and nominee Bo Diddley. Other important Chess acts included Harvey Fuqua and the Moonglows, the Flamingos, Lee Andrews and the Hearts, Billy Stewart and Etta James.

JUBILEE was founded in 1948 by Jerry Blaine, a pioneer of independent distribution. (His Cosnat operation was the first chain of distributors, stretching from New York to the Midwest.) Although not among the nominees, Jubilee's Sonny Til and the Orioles were one of the earliest doo-wop groups and were the first R&B group to enter the pop charts, with "Crying in the Chapel" in 1953. Other Jubilee artists included the Ravens, the Cadillacs, Bobby Freeman, Don Rondo and Della Reese.

Although **IMPERIAL** dates almost back as far as the other L.A.-based indies, its early years were devoted entirely to the release of Mexican recordings. In the early Fifties, the label's president, Lew Chudd, hired R&B writer-producer Dave Bartholomew, who found and recorded inductee Fats Domino, as well as Smiley Lewis. Imperial always maintained a small roster, which included country artist Slim Whitman and teen-idol nominee Rick Nelson.

Despite the apparent popularity of rhythm and blues music, which, by the early Fifties was on the radio in almost every major market in the country, the pop-music scene remained virtually unchanged at the majors. A&R chiefs like Victor's Hugo Winterhalter and Columbia's Mitch Miller were

routinely covering hit country songs like "Any Time" and "Cold, Cold Heart." Another country classic — "Tennessee Waltz," by Patti Page — was perhaps one of the most successful early multitrack recordings, as high-fidelity sound took a major step forward. As the Fifties progressed, R&B eclipsed country and became an even more frequent target of pop covers like "Sh-Boom," "Dance with Me, Henry," "Ko Ko Mo," "Tweedle Dee," "Hearts of Stone" and "Ain't That a Shame."

For the most part, however, the majors continued to ignore R&B artists, despite their growing appeal among young pop-record buyers. The two companies most successful at covering R&B hits were Mercury, by now a full-fledged major label, and Dot, the first of a new wave of pop companies formed in the early Fifties. Most of the small companies of the Forties that tried to compete directly with the majors found it impossible, but pop music, influenced by both rhythm and blues and country, was beginning to undergo dramatic changes. Other early pop labels included Essex, Cadence, Liberty, Kapp and Era. Between them, these companies account for three nominees.

New companies specializing in rhythm and blues were cropping up all over the country. Among them were Herald, Oldtown, Rama, Melba and Baton in New York; Duke/Peacock in Houston; Excello in Nashville; Ace in Jackson, Mississippi; and Vee Jay in Chicago. These companies account for four Hall of Fame nominees.

DOT was founded by Randy Wood as an offshoot of his highly successful mail-order and record-shop operation in Gallatin, Tennessee. After initial success with Billy Vaughn and the Hilltoppers, Dot launched the career of Pat Boone, one of the biggest pop stars of the Fifties. Boone's first seven hits were R&B covers — e.g., "Ain't That a Shame" (Fats Domino) and "Long Tall Sally" (Little Richard). Dot's skillful use of cover material was also successful in the careers of Gale Storm and the Fontane Sisters. In retrospect, these covers, while lacking the fervor and authenticity of the originals, were instrumental in bringing rhythm and blues music to the attention of many young, white consumers. Only Mercury was able to match Dot's ability in this field, with successful covers by Georgia Gibbs, the Diamonds and the Crew Cuts, whose cover of "Sh-Boom" held the Number One position on the pop charts for two months in 1954.

CADENCE — spawned in New York in the mid-Fifties and owned and operated by Archie Bleyer, musical director of the successful Arthur Godfrey radio and TV shows — was most definitely a straight-ahead pop-record company, with artists like the Chordettes, Julius La Rosa, Bill Hayes and, later, Andy Williams. Still, Cadence will always be remembered for signing and developing rock's greatest duo, Hall of Fame inductees



George Goldner



Art Sheridan, Count Basie, Vivian and Jimmy Bracken



Herman Lubinsky, president of Savoy Records, Newark, New Jersey

INDEPENDENTS 39

the Everly Brothers.

ESSEX RECORDS was just one of a string of labels started in the early Fifties by Dave Miller of Philadelphia. The first of these labels, Victoria, debuted the Four Aces' hit "(It's No) Sin." The Aces left soon after for Decca. A year later, Miller was back on the scene with another Number One smash, "Here in My Heart," by Al Martino, on Miller's BBS label. Martino also left after one record to sign with Capitol. Miller tried again a year later, this time with the Essex label and Bill Haley and the Comets. Their first record, "Crazy Man Crazy," barely reached the Top Fifteen, though it signaled imminent changes in pop music. Haley, too, left Essex for Decca. Earlier in 1952, Essex released "Oh Happy Day," by Don Howard, which made it to Number Three and was regarded by many as an important transitional record between the pop and rock era of the early Fifties.

LIBERTY, under the direction of Al Bennett and Si Waronker, was the first important label to be launched in Los Angeles since Capitol's debut more than a decade earlier. Liberty was also the first label to develop a truly West Coast, teen-oriented sound. In addition to nominee Eddie Cochran, the label boasted the services of such pop-rock greats as Johnny Burnette, Bobby Vee, Jan and Dean and, on their Dolton label, the Fleetwoods and the Ventures.

RAMA and GEE RECORDS grew out of the Tico label, one of the most influential Latin record companies. They were founded in the early Fifties by George Goldner, who in 1954 discovered the Crows and recorded "Gee," regarded by many as the first rock and roll record. That success led to regional hits with New York groups like the Cleftones and the Valentines. In 1956, Goldner scored big with the nationwide smash "Why Do Fools Fall in Love?," by Hall of Fame nominee Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers. Goldner later helped form Roulette Records with Morris Levy; launched his own Gone and End labels; and, finally, worked alongside Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller at Red Bird Records.

HERALD/EMBER RECORDS, founded by Al Silver, was another influential New York R&B indie in the Fifties. Their first major success was with Faye Adams, who had three Number One R&B hits in a row, starting with "Shake a Hand" in 1954. The labels were among the leading exponents of the doo-wop sound, with artists like the Nutmegs, the Turbans and the Five Satins, whose "I'll Remember (In the Still of the Night)" remains a doo-wop classic.

VEE JAY, one of the great Chicago-based indies, was also the first black-owned and -operated label to achieve sustained success both in the pop and R&B fields. Formed in 1953 by James Bracken and his wife, Vivian Carter, the label had early success with Chicago-based groups like the Spaniels, the Dells and the El Dorados. They rivaled their

older, more established neighbor, Chess, for control of the blues market with acts like Hall of Fame nominee Jimmy Reed, John Lee Hooker, Gene Allison and Roscoe Gordon.

DUKE/PEACOCK, another black-owned indie, operated out of the Southwest during the early Fifties. The labels, founded by Don Robey, first gained national attention in 1953 with the Number One hit "Hound Dog," by Willie Mae Thornton. One of Duke's greatest stars was nominee Johnny Ace, who three times in 1955 hit the Number One spot on the R&B charts with "My Song," "The Clock" and "Pledging My Love." In later years, Duke would discover nominee Bobby "Blue" Bland, Little Junior Parker and O.V. Wright. Like many other R&B companies, Duke/Peacock was a major force in the gospel field, with names like the Dixie Hummingbirds, the Sensational Nightingales and the Five Blind Boys of Mississippi.

EXCELLO RECORDS, another Southern indie with strong roots in R&B and gospel, was founded by Ernie Young as an adjunct to his record-shop operation in Nashville.

ACE, founded by Johnny Vincent and run out of Jackson, Mississippi, was responsible for discovering such artists as Huey "Piano" Smith and Frankie Ford.

SUN RECORDS was the legendary Memphis-based company founded by Sam Phillips, who discovered and recorded Hall of Fame inductees Elvis Presley and Jerry Lee Lewis and nominee Roy Orbison, as well as Carl Perkins, Johnny Cash, Charlie Rich, Billy Justis and countless other country and rockabilly greats. Equally at home with rhythm and blues, Phillips also produced the first sessions by Little Milton, Rufus Thomas and Little Junior Parker. Many of these early R&B recordings, including the sensational "Rocket 88," by Jackie Brenston, were licensed to the Chess label. What King, Chess, Atlantic, Vee Jay and others did collectively to break down the barriers between R&B and pop, Sun achieved single-handedly with country and pop.

Cover recordings gave rock and roll its initial popularity in 1954. By 1955, original recordings by artists like Fats Domino, Chuck Berry, the Penguins, and the Moonglows and others began to appear regularly on the *Billboard* charts. During this period, most of the major companies chose to sit back, figuring rock and roll (a.k.a. "the big beat") was just a fad that would run its course.

The majors' continued aloofness was somewhat understandable. During the early Fifties, many new pop names were launched, and a large number of them sustained themselves with a steady string of best sellers. It was only natural for their labels to remain solidly behind them. In addition, albums began to account for a large percentage of the total volume of sales, as



9, MAJORS 2

Sydney Nathan (King Records), Carl Haverlin (president, BMI) and Herman Lubinsky (Savoy Records) at a BMI Awards dinner

Hy Weiss with Arthur Prysock

Archie Bleyer with the Everly Brothers

George and Susan Goldner, Sydney Nathan, Seymour Stein

Top Row: Buddy Johnson, Norman Orleck of *Cashbox* magazine, Ella Johnson, Joe Turner, Lou-Willie Turner, Jackie Freed

Bottom Row: Jerry Wexler, Alan Freed, Ahmet Ertegun

Lester Sill and the Coasters accepting a gold record for "Yakety Yak"



evidenced by the formation of the Columbia Record Club in 1955.

Of the majors, Decca was perhaps the most attuned to what was happening in rock and roll through the success of Bill Haley and the Comets. By mid-1955, they had become rock's hottest attraction. "Rock around the Clock," although not a hit the first time out in 1954, was given a new lease on life with the release of the film *The Blackboard Jungle*. "Rock around the Clock" was the summer hit of 1955, enjoying an eight-week stay at the top of the charts.

Finally, in late 1955, RCA made its big move with the purchase, for less than \$40,000, of Elvis Presley's contract and masters from Sam Phillips. The other majors, most notably Columbia, remained almost totally committed to their pop rosters. Without question, 1956 was a monumental year for rock. It was the year of Elvis Presley and "Heartbreak Hotel," "I Want You, I Need You, I Love You" and probably the greatest two-sided single of all time, "Don't Be Cruel" and "Hound Dog."

Other country-rock stars had their initial breakthrough in 1956, among them Gene Vincent, Johnny Cash and Carl Perkins. This paved the way for country-pop cross-overs one year later by established country stars like Jim Reeves, Patsy Cline, Marty Robbins and Bobby Helms. It heralded the breakthrough of country-rock acts like the Everly Brothers and Brenda Lee as well. Rhythm and blues became established in the pop field with the success of such artists as the Platters, Little Richard, Fats Domino, Clyde McPhatter and the Drifters, Little Willie John, Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers and many more. More indie labels than ever were scoring high on the charts, and many new indies came into existence as well, including Roulette, Cameo and Chancellor.

By 1957, there was no looking back. Each year produced new independents like Laurie, Fire/Fury, Sue, Carlton, Scepter, Jamie, Swan, Del-Fi, Challenge, Keen, Monument, Philles, Hickory, Motown, Minit, Canadian American, Coed, Musicor, Fraternity and Stax/Volt. These labels account for the remaining indie-company record nominees to the Hall of Fame.

The first two singles on ROULETTE — "Party Doll," by Buddy Knox, and "I'm Stickin' with You," by Jimmy Bowen — were hits. Roulette was fortunate to have so many talented people involved early on, including George Goldner, founder-president Morris Levy and A&R men Hugo and Luigi.

CAMEO, started in 1956 by Bernie Lowe, and its PARKWAY subsidiary benefited more than any of the other Philadelphia labels from a close association with *American Bandstand* and the various dance crazes that emanated from that city in the late Fifties and early Sixties. Their first success, however, was with "Butterfly," by

INDEPENDENTS 39, MAJORS 2

Charlie Gracie, in 1957.

CHANCELLOR, also based in Philadelphia, was run by Bob Marcucci and Pete de Angelis. It scored with two of the biggest male vocalists of the teen-idol period, Frankie Avalon and Fabian.

Of the Philadelphia companies of the late Fifties, JAMIE — initially operated by Harold Lipsius and Harry Finfer — will be remembered most as the label that guided the career of Hall of Fame nominee Duane Eddy. Eddy was brought to the label by producers Lee Hazlewood and Lester Sill. Sill, former manager of the Coasters, was an original partner with Phil Spector in the Philles label, and Jamie was the label's national distributor in its early days.

SWAN, the last of the Philadelphia quartet of record companies of this period, was run by Bernie Binnick and Tony Mammarella. The label's earliest hits were by Billy and Lillie, and included "La Dee Dah" and "Lucky Ladybug." Swan struck real pay dirt in 1959, however, with the release of "Tallahassee Lassie," by Freddy Cannon, whose hit streak continued well into the Sixties.

LAURIE, one of the most important New York indies of the late Fifties, was run by Gene Schwartz. It first gained national prominence in 1958 with the release of "I Wonder Why," by Dion and the Belmonts. Hall of Fame nominee Dion had a hit streak, both with and without the Belmonts, that continued well into the Sixties.

CARLTON, also based in New York, was formed by music-industry veteran Joe Carlton and is best remembered for Jack Scott, who first scored in 1958 with hits like "My True Love" and "Goodbye Baby."

COED, run by Marvin Caine, was a New York label whose roster included local groups like the Crests, the Rivas and the Duprees.

MUSICOR, run by former Mercury A&R chief Art Talmadge, was responsible for more than 20 chart records by Gene Pitney.

BIG TOP RECORDS was an adjunct of the Hill and Range publishing company, whose biggest artist was Del Shannon, certainly a contender for future Hall of Fame honors.

SUE, along with the FIRE and FURY labels, were among the first successful black-owned-and-operated labels in New York. Founded by Henry "Juggy" Murray in the mid-Fifties, Sue was the first to record Ike and Tina Turner. Fire and Fury and a host of other labels, including Whirlin' Disc, Holiday and Enjoy, were started by Bobby and Danny Robinson as an outgrowth of their small record shops on 125th Street in Harlem. Among the first to record with the Robinsons were the Teen Chords (a group fronted by Frankie Lymon's younger brother Louis), the Kodaks, the Channels and the Charts. The company's greatest hit single was the Number One dual-market smash "Kansas City," by Wilbert Harrison, in 1959.

SCEPTER RECORDS was formed in early 1959 by Florence Greenberg, primarily as a vehicle for her group, the Shirelles. The group's and the label's success were phenomenal. Other Scepter acts from that period were Chuck Jackson and Maxine Brown. As the label grew, Marv Schlachter was brought in as a partner, and the company enjoyed even greater success in the early Sixties.

MOTOWN, the first label whose name described a musical style, was formed by Berry Gordy Jr. in 1960. Gordy actually started as a songwriter-producer years before for R&B great Jackie Wilson. Next, Gordy wrote for and produced Marv Johnson for United Artists. For a short time in 1959, he was involved with the Anna label, whose one major hit was the Gordy composition "Money," by Barrett Strong. Among Motown's earliest successes were the Miracles and Marvin Gaye, both Hall of Fame nominees, as well as Mary Wells, the Marvelettes and, later, the Supremes, the Temptations, Stevie Wonder and a long list of stars.

STAX/VOLT turned the whole world on to the Memphis soul sound. The label, initially called Satellite because of its distribution arrangement with Atlantic, started producing hits in the early sixties with Carla Thomas and the Mar-Keys, although, like Motown, they really flourished later in the decade.

The MONUMENT label was founded in Nashville in 1958 by Fred Foster. Although Hall of Fame nominee Roy Orbison first recorded for Sam Phillips' Sun label, he had his greatest success on Monument. The label's earliest hit was the country rocker "Gotta Travel On," by Billy Grammer.

DEL-FI, owned by Bob Keene, was another Los Angeles-based indie. Its main artist, Ritchie Valens, had two hit singles — "C'mon, Let's Go" and "Donna" — before a tragic plane crash killed him, along with Buddy Holly and the Big Bopper, in 1959.

Keene was also the first to make successful pop records with Sam Cooke as a solo artist. Such hits as "You Send Me," "Only Sixteen" and "Wonderful World" appeared on his Keen label.

Although PHILLES was more legendary in the Sixties, it is impossible to exclude mention of Phil Spector, whose career dates back to the mid-Fifties, most notably for the Number One smash "To Know Him Is to Love Him," which he wrote and produced for the Teddy Bears in 1958.

In choosing inductees for the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, the nominating committee was restricted to artists who were successful in the Fifties, or who had at least one record released prior to December 31st, 1959. It is for this reason that this article has focused on companies active before the Sixties.

Along with the main Hall of Fame category, and the one for pioneering artists active prior to 1950, the Foundation has chosen to honor nonperformers as well. Although this category includes disc jockeys, record producers, songwriters and managers, it is not surprising that the vast majority of people considered this year came from the ranks of independent record companies. These entrepreneurs of R&B, rockabilly, rock and roll, gospel and pop were our industry's closest equivalent to the early movie moguls of Hollywood. Their careers closely paralleled and continually entwined with their artists, including those nominated for induction. Moreover, these independent companies, and those that followed in the Sixties and Seventies, have been both on the periphery and at the forefront of almost every new trend, creative change and development in pop music over the past 35 years. They built their companies with music the majors had little or no time for, proving that the esoteric, indigenous and segregated music of one decade can rapidly evolve into the mainstream popular music of the next.



Phil Spector with the Ronettes

Earl Bostic does an early "in store" at B&M Records on 125th Street in Harlem.