

IN APPRECIATION OF... ROCK 'N' ROLL

STORY BY JASON HARDY

ILLUSTRATION BY MATT HANEY

BY JASON HARDY
Senior Reporter

It's 1952 and Alan Freed sits in a sweaty Cleveland radio station. He plays music that is strange and scary to some, but is exciting and new to others. He calls it rock 'n' roll.

After the 1950s, the musical world was never the same. A new sound had emerged from the South and taken America by storm. It was a wild combination of a number of musical traditions, mainly rhythm and blues and country and western. Kids everywhere were entranced by its boogie beats and its racy lyrics.

From there, rock 'n' roll commercially exploded and turned into an economically viable investment. Legends were made, and history was written. Rock 'n' roll was born.

Randall Snyder, professor of theory and composition at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's School of Music, said rock 'n' roll had deep roots in different Southern styles of music.

"It was the coming together of black and white traditions that was the catalyst to start it off," Snyder said.

He said R&B was the most important ingredient in the creation of rock 'n' roll. Early musicians like Muddy Waters and Louis Jordan received airplay on black radio stations and they started to reach young white audiences. From there, R&B

evolved into rock 'n' roll.

"It's really quite clear that most rock is a form of white imitation of black music," Snyder said.

He said rock 'n' roll came from the streets of the poor Southern neighborhoods.

"This music incubated in the South where you had a large black community next to a poor white one," Snyder said.

He said rock 'n' roll was in part the lyrical honesty of the blues combined with country music.

Paul Burlison, former member of The Johnny Burnett Rock 'n' Roll Trio, said he remembered growing up in Memphis, Tenn., where he first started playing blues licks.

"My momma wouldn't let me bring the blues stuff into the house," Burlison said. "So I just

played the blues licks and put it to country music." Burlison said the Rock 'n' Roll Trio, who recorded an album on Coral Records in 1956, was among the first groups to play rock 'n' roll, which to them was just "good-time music."

"We didn't really know what was going to happen," Burlison said. "We were just having a good time."

He said the '50s provided a perfect setting for a rock 'n' roll explosion because people were ready for something new and fun.

"I came along during the Depression and everything was gloom," Burlison said. "We came out of that and went right into World War II, and it was still gloom."

"The '50s came along and that was the only time anybody had any money to do anything, so people started playing good-time music. You come out with something that people could dance to and people would buy it."

Burlison said that he went to New York with the Rock 'n' Roll Trio in 1956 where the band got a spot on a nationally televised talent show. It wasn't long before the boys got a record deal and they began to notice rock 'n' roll taking off.

"We could see it going on all around us,"

Burlison said. "It was very exciting. I mean, here we are, three country boys in New York at our first recording session, and the record company sends us a 32-piece orchestra."

"They said they didn't know anything about rock 'n' roll, but that they'd do what we wanted them to, so we said, 'We'll take your drummer.'"

Burlison said that before the band started going places, he had worked at Crown Electric Company in Memphis. It was there that he met a young man named Elvis Presley.

"I was an electrician, and when we needed something Elvis would bring it out," Burlison said. "If he would've kept on, he'd have been a pretty good electrician."

Thanks to Sam Phillips and Sun Studios in Memphis, Elvis traded in his work boots for some blue suede shoes.

Phillips founded Sun Studios in 1952 and first recorded the likes of Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins, Johnny Cash, Roy Orbison and, of course, Elvis. Snyder said Phillips saw the economic potential of rock 'n' roll and laid its foundations with Elvis.

"Elvis is huge," Snyder said. "He became the quintessential rock hero."

He said that aside from bringing black and white traditions together, Elvis brought a sexuality to the music, and along with Buddy Holly, Chuck Berry and Bill Haley, really made rock 'n' roll famous.

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FORMER MEMBER OF 'THE
JOHNNY BURNETT ROCK 'N'
ROLL TRIO

HUNTING AND COLLECTING

With the advent of compact discs, finding versions of original songs and albums has become increasingly easy. From smaller record shops like Homer's to big-time electronic stores like Best Buy, box sets and greatest hits albums can be found on disc. However, original recordings aren't quite as easily available. Here are some shops that do contain classic albums.

In Omaha, **Dirt Cheap Records**, 1026 Jackson St., and **Harry O's Groovie Records**, 6208 Maple St., are good places to find vintage vinyl.

In Lincoln, **Recycled Sounds**, 1211 O St., and **Backtrack Records**, 3833 S. 48th St., are both stockpiled with countless albums that won't be found in Best Buy.

Kanesville Collectables, 530 S. Fourth St., in Council Bluffs, has a reputation for cheap, classic albums and employees who know almost everything there is to know about music.

PRINTED MATTER

Writings about rock 'n' roll abound

Most libraries have a number of books about rock 'n' roll, and just about any newsstand has magazines dedicated to music. Here are a few of the better available choices.

"**What Was the First Rock and Roll Record?**" by Jim Dawson and Steve Propes (Faber & Faber, 1992) is a rather interesting work that is the result of years of research directed at answering the widely debated questions surrounding rock 'n' roll's origins. Besides its historical significance, the book is an entertaining read.

"**Unsung Heroes of Rock and Roll**" by Nick Tosches (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1984) provides a worthwhile look at the lives and careers of rock's lesser-known heroes, as well as the music's pre-Elvis origins.

"**The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock & Roll**" by Anthony DeCurtis and James Henke with Holly George-Warren (Random House, Inc., 1992) is a compilation of essays written by some of the world's most respected rock critics and authors, including Robert Christgau, Peter Guralnick and Robert Palmer.

For publications, one of the best places to turn to is the original publication, which means **Rolling Stone**. This biweekly magazine pretty much covers everything in music today and is a pretty good source for modern music news. It can be found anywhere magazines are sold.

Spin stands with **Rolling Stone** as one of America's top music publications. Similar to its competition, this monthly publication includes interviews and stories about modern music, with a little more irreverent attitude than its predecessor.

For news on rock 'n' roll outside of America's borders, **Q** magazine is a reasonable primer. Published monthly in England, it takes a rather tongue-in-cheek approach to music news and gossip, but the magazine's writers make up for their lack of straight-laced professionalism with genuine talent and respect for rock music's historical significance. **Q** magazine is available at Barnes and Noble Booksellers, 5150 O St.

ARTISTS

Elvis Presley: Known to the world as the "King of Rock 'n' Roll," Elvis was influenced early on by Jimmie Rodgers and Muddy Waters. He first started recording at Sun Studios in 1954 and later signed with RCA, releasing a string of hits including "Heartbreak Hotel," "Blue Suede Shoes" and "Don't Be Cruel." Elvis was among the first to combine country and western with rhythm and blues while incorporating the vocal styles of gospel, blues and pop with techniques like stutters and hiccups. His historic hips made choreography an important part of rock performances. Some of Elvis' best recordings are "Elvis: The Complete Sun Sessions" (1987, RCA); and "The King of Rock 'n' Roll: Complete '50s Masters" (1992, RCA), a five-CD boxed set that includes every studio recording Elvis made from 1954-58.

Buddy Holly: Though his career spanned only two years, Holly composed seven top 10 hits, and with his band the Crickets, set the standard for rock 'n' roll groups that followed. Unlike Elvis, who sang mostly covers, Holly was an excellent composer. Some of his best recordings include "From the Original Master Tapes" (1985, MCA), a 20-track collection of Holly's best work; and "The Buddy Holly Collection" (1993, MCA), a two-disc collection that is the first comprehensive retrospective of Holly's music and includes early tracks recorded in the Holly family garage.

Jerry Lee Lewis: Known as "The Killer" for his crazy performance style, Lewis soared to the top of the country and western charts as well as the R&B charts in 1957 with songs like "Whole Lot of Shakin'" and "Great Balls of Fire." Lewis, another performer on the Sun record label, was heading to the top, but in 1958 he married his second cousin, Myra Brown, and his career vanished overnight. Without access to big tours, TV shows and radio stations, Lewis was left to play one-night gigs in dives across America. However, his characteristic piano-pounding backbeat and the lust and

lewdness of his lyrics made Lewis a legend of rock 'n' roll. Some of the best Jerry Lee Lewis recordings are "All Killer, No Filler: The Anthology" (1993, Rhino), a two-disc retrospective of Lewis' career that features all of his rock and country hits; and "18 Original Sun Greatest Hits" (1984, Rhino), a single-disc collection that features all of Lewis' hits that got him into the Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame.

Fats Domino: In the '50s, many R&B artists found themselves evolving into what is now considered rock 'n' roll. Domino was one of the early artists who had a large crossover appeal, mostly due to his relaxed vocal style. With hits like "Blueberry Hill" and "I'm Walkin'," Domino sold 65 million records. Some of his best releases are "My Blue Heaven: Best of Fats Domino" (1990, EMI America), a solid sounding, well-thought-out collection of Domino's best work; and "They Call Me the Fat Man: The Legendary Imperial Recordings" (1991, EMI America), a four-disc, 100-song compilation that includes every hit Domino had.

Little Richard: Also primarily considered a mostly R&B artist, Little Richard reigned in popularity by combining gospel-style singing with high energy and fast tempos. He was unique, in the '50s especially, for having a rather androgynous stage appearance. But his hits, like "Tutti Frutti," "Long Tall Sally" and "Good Golly Miss Molly" set him apart immediately. Some good releases include "18 Greatest Hits" (1985, Rhino), a package that contains many of his most popular works; and "The Georgia Peach" (1991, Specialty), which has been called the best of Little Richard's greatest hits compilations.

Chuck Berry: Berry was the first man

elected to the Rock 'n'

Roll Hall of Fame, and deservedly so. He added country and western to R&B for a big crossover audience and was the first important rock 'n' roll composer. Before going to prison in 1959 for a violation of the Mann Act, Berry released rock 'n' roll classics such as "Jonny B. Goode" and "Roll Over Beethoven." Some of his best releases are "The Great Twenty-Eight" (1982, Chess), a single-disc compilation that includes all of Berry's original Chess Records hits like "Maybellene" and "Sweet Little Sixteen"; and "The Chess Box" (1988, Chess), a three-disc set that follows Berry's career from his '50s classics to his '70s hits, covering everything in between.

