

FACT SHEET

Rock'n'roll artists

Chuck Berry

One of the first African American artists to achieve international success, Chuck Berry introduced many of the teenage-based lyrics such as 'ridin' around in my automobile' with 'baby beside me at the wheel', and topics such as drive-in movies, young love and teenage angst. He played rock guitar with great style, using blues lyrics, distortion and repetitive riffs. It was Berry who pioneered the rock'n'roll sound. (Lyrics from 'No Particular Place To Go' by Chuck Berry.)

Little Richard

Little Richard was a flamboyant piano playing singer who sang fast dance songs with great energy. He had a distinctive, rough vocal style which included a trademark falsetto 'waa-oo'. A colourful character, he renounced rock'n'roll at the height of his success. His hits include 'Tutti Frutti', 'Long Tall Sally' and 'Lucille'.

Jerry Lee Lewis

Jerry Lee Lewis was a wild and often uncontrollable performer who frequently played piano with his feet or jumped on the piano to sing. This earned him the nickname of 'Killer', as he pounded out the bass line in his left hand while glissandoing with his right. His hits include 'Great Balls Of Fire' and 'Whole Lotta Shakin'.

Buddy Holly

Buddy Holly and The Crickets' songs were more refined than those of many of their contemporaries. The songs were not as raw and many bordered on sentimental ballads or country songs, making Holly more respectable and acceptable to older audiences. Holly's career was tragically cut short in 1959 by a plane crash. His hits include 'Peggy Sue' and 'Raining In My Heart'.

Bill Haley

Bill Haley was originally a country music guitarist and singer. A DJ in the late 1940s who saw how much young people responded to the beat and energy of rhythm & blues, his re-recording of the 1952 song 'Rock Around The Clock' with his band The Comets eventually sold over 25 million copies. Haley followed up with 'Shake, Rattle & Roll' and 'See You Later Alligator', but he was already over 40 and unable to truly identify with the younger rock'n'roll generation.

Women in rock'n'roll

American society struggled to come to terms with the rebellious nature of rock'n'roll in the 1950s. While male artists slowly gained acceptance and were admired by teenagers, it was not a good time for young women to be seen as rebellious and empowered. Most people still viewed a women's place as being in the home, and this is why so few women featured in rock'n'roll. However, a few did enjoy limited success.

Connie Francis

Connie Francis had a string of hits from 1958 including 'Lipstick On Your Collar' and 'Stupid Cupid'. However, she was more of a mainstream singer whose songs occasionally contained a sanitised rock'n'roll edge. Because of this, she was not seen as threatening by the wider American audience.

Wanda Jackson

In contrast, Wanda Jackson was a true rock'n'roller. Originally a country singer, Elvis encouraged her to record in a rockabilly style. She had energy, charisma and talent, and her songs included 'Mean Mean Man' and 'Fujiyama Mama'. However, her records did not sell well. She was outspoken on issues of racial prejudice, and it is possible that American society was just not ready for a dynamic, feisty rock'n'roll lady. She returned to singing country songs.