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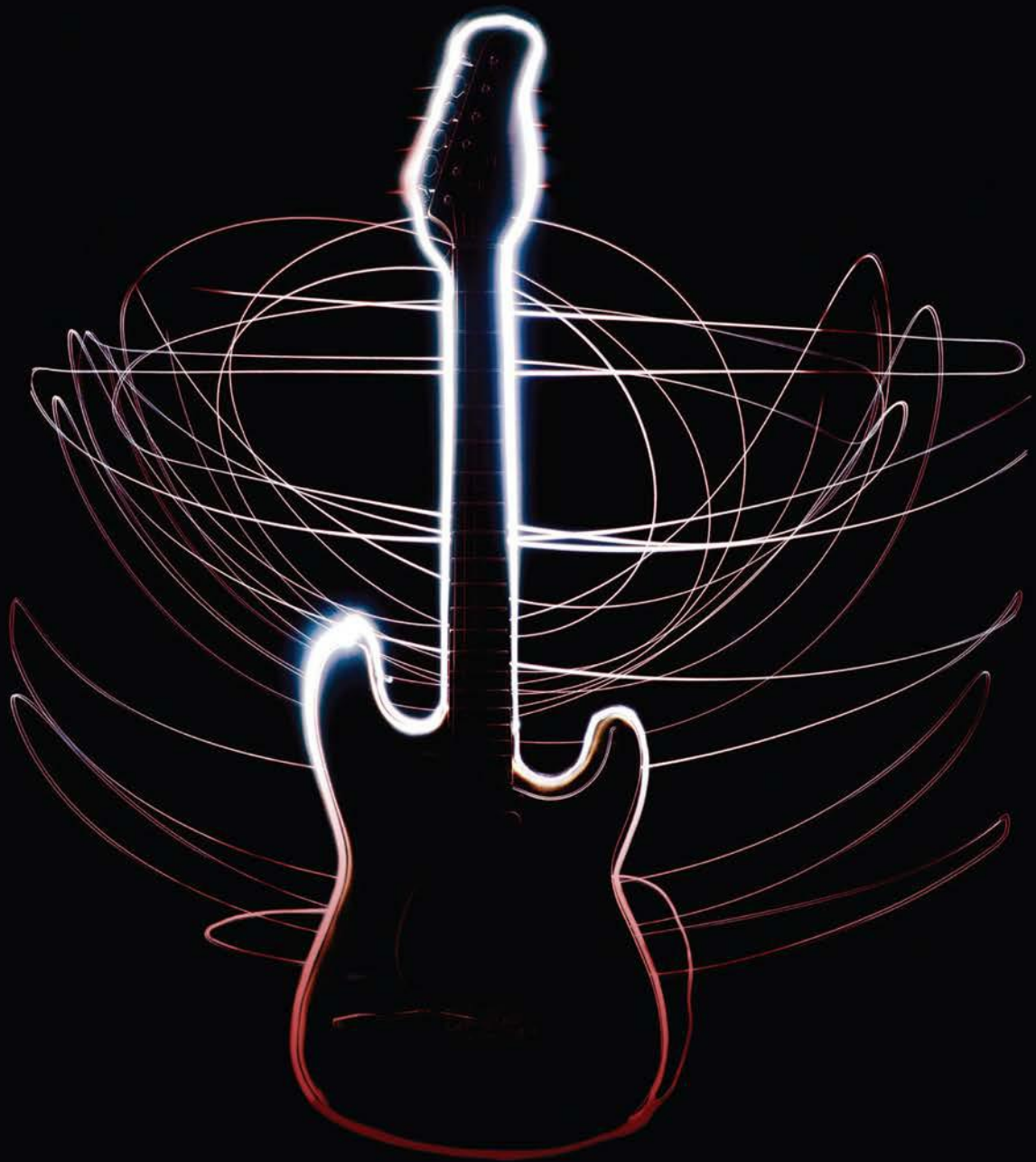
Rock & Roll

3rd edition

An Introduction



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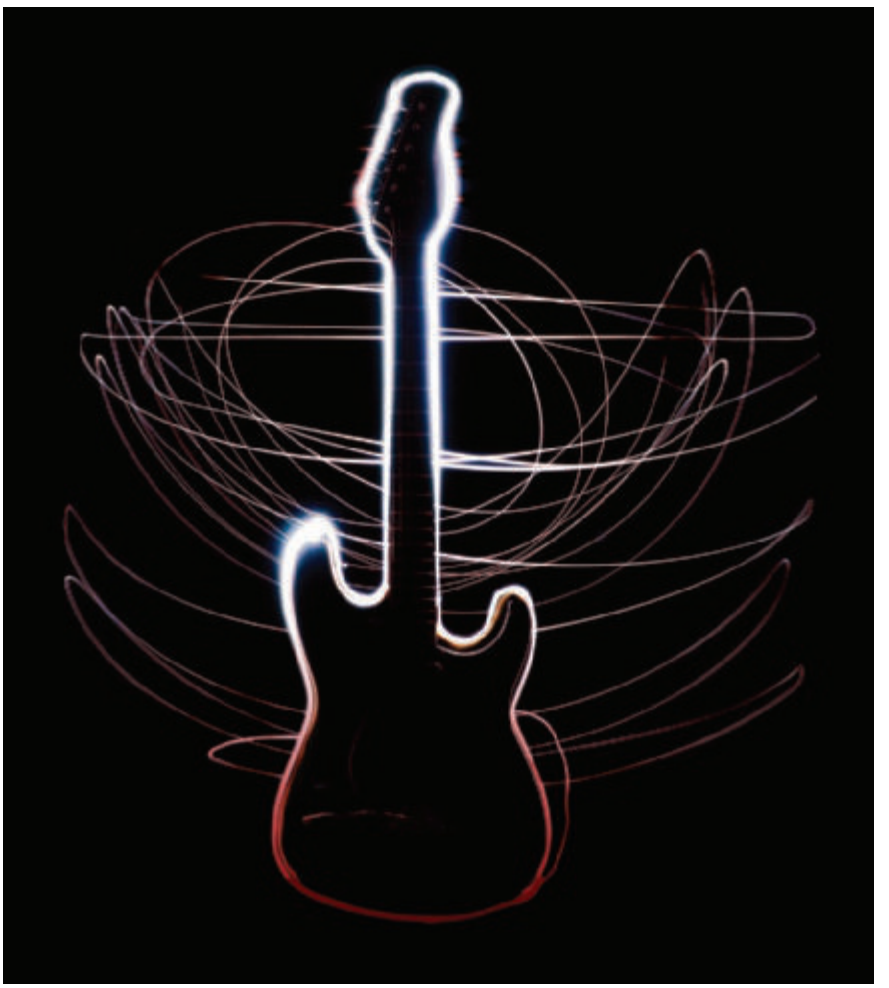

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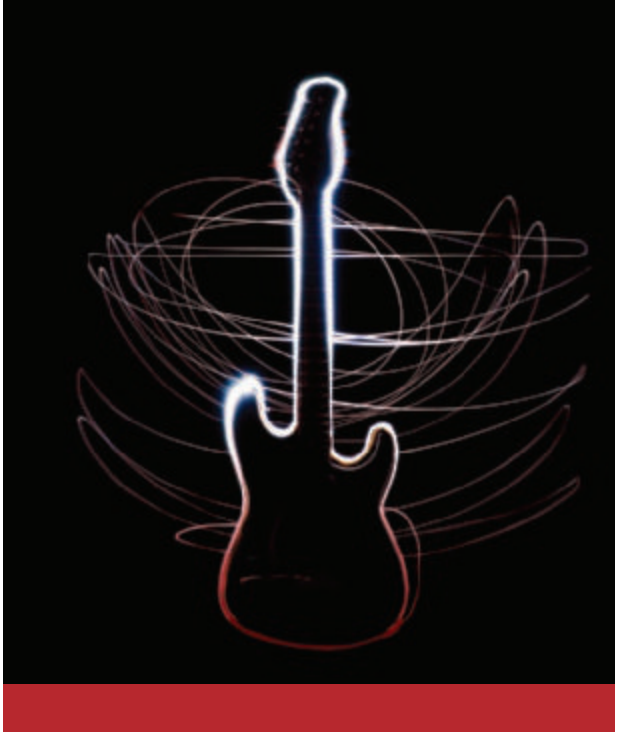

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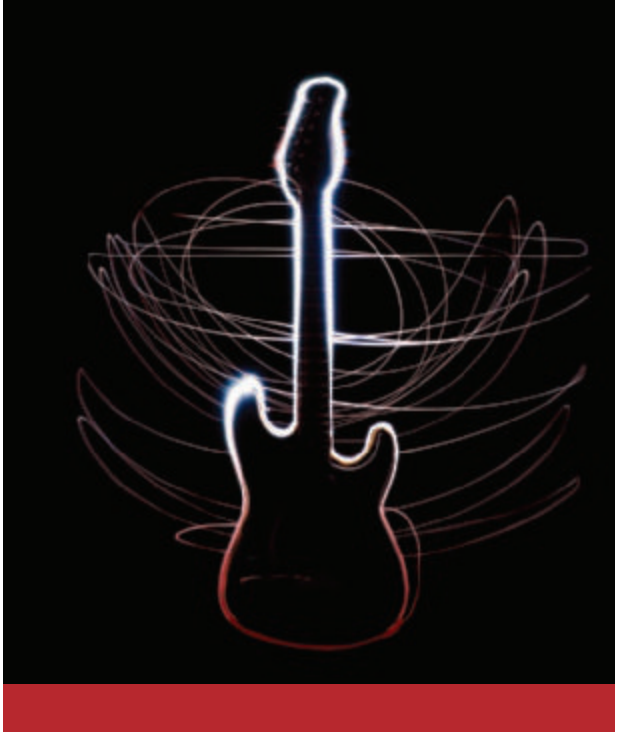


PREFACE

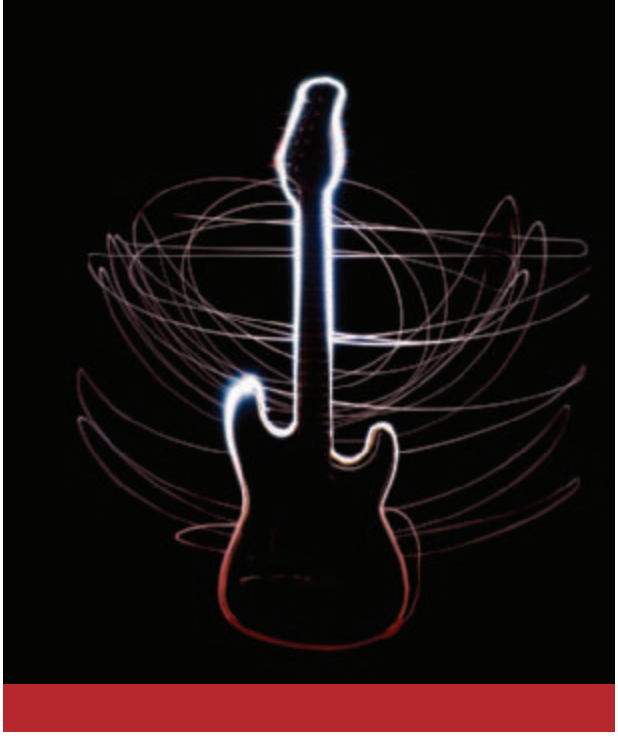
Hello! I'm Michael Campbell, the author of *Rock and Roll: An Introduction*. I'm an emeritus professor of music at Western Illinois University (I retired in 2003), and also the author of two other college texts, *Popular Music in America* and *MUSIC*. Since 2009, I have been an adjunct faculty member at Arizona State University, where I've been teaching a two-semester rock music survey from my home in Rhode Island. I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce myself to you, thank you for using my text, and tell you a little bit about what's in store for you.

What you're holding in your hands is a print companion to the MindTap version of *Rock and Roll: An Introduction 3e*. It's useful for those occasions when you simply want to read from a book rather than a mobile device or computer screen. However, for just about everything else, you may well prefer to use MindTap. For me as a user, it has been a big step up, and it should be for you as well. Here are some of the reasons:

- *It's convenient*. Everything is in one place: text, music, video, resources (including an aural glossary), organization—including your calendar, and assignments. Having almost everything to do with the course a click or two away really streamlines your workflow.
- *It's customized for your class*. Your instructor can modify MindTap so that it shows only what you need to see. The days of "read pages 15–22 in Chapter 2" are over.
- *It integrates multimedia*. For me—and I hope for you as well—this is the real breakthrough. It's made connecting the sounds—and at times, the look—of the music with the words that describe them easier and more meaningful.

My overarching objective as a teacher and author is to help students become more aware as listeners—for life. I've worked to create materials that hone your listening skills—not only in the music presented here, but also with any rock-related music that you listen to. This should in turn enable you to gain a better understanding of style and history in rock-era music.

I hope that you enjoy the book and encourage to discover these and other resources in MindTap.



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: ROCK IS . . .

Learning Objectives:

1) Discuss the various definitions of the musical term "rock."

2) Explain the relationship between **beat**, **rhythm**, **measure**, and **tempo**.

3) Audibly identify an **eight-beat rhythm** in a musical example.

4) Compare and contrast **beat**, **backbeat**, and **syncopation**.

5) Describe the musical roles of the core instruments in a rock band.

6) List the musical form used in a core rock song.

Chapter Introduction

The 963rd issue of *Rolling Stone*, published December 9, 2004, features a list of the "500 Greatest Songs of All Time." "All Time" apparently refers to the rock era, as only one song on the list—by Hank Williams—predates 1950. And it also refers mainly to rock and rock-related music: no Barbra Streisand or Miles Davis. The number one song on the list was—almost inevitably—Bob Dylan's "**Like a Rolling Stone**." The order of the remaining 499 songs seems almost arbitrary, as if the distinguished group that assembled the list dumped all but Dylan's song into a tumbler and pulled the titles out without looking. Certainly, other critics have questioned the choice and ranking of songs on the list. And the list has the definite bias of rock's first generation; over three quarters of the tracks—and 44 out of the top 50—predate 1975. (See MINDTAP)

Despite what seem, in retrospect, serious lapses in judgment—no James Brown, for example—the top 50 songs on the list are a useful tool for addressing the question, "What is rock?" It can help us bring its center—the core features that most readily and emphatically define it—into focus and convey some sense of its range.

1-1 Rock Is . . .

The most brutal, ugly, desperate, vicious form of expression it has been my misfortune to hear.

Frank Sinatra

A type of sensuous music unfit for impressionable minds.

Tip O'neill, former Speaker of the House

Experience an interactive version of this era in MINDTAP

A combination of good ideas dried up by fads, terrible junk, hideous failings in taste and judgment, gullibility and manipulation, moments of unbelievable clarity and invention, pleasure, fun, vulgarity, excess, novelty, and utter enervation.

Greil Marcus, noted rock critic

Dead. The attitude isn't dead, but the music is no longer vital. It doesn't have the same meaning. The attitude, though, is still very much alive—and it still informs other kinds of music.

David Byrne

Not so much a question of electric guitars as it is [of] striped pants.

David Lee Roth

To dress up to.

Frank Zappa

[A music that] can change things. I know that it changed our lives.

Bono

"a style of popular music that derives in part from blues and folk music and is marked by a heavily accented beat and a simple, repetitive phrase structure."

Before it is anything else, rock is music. Everything else that is part of its world—the attitudes it communicates, its cultural impact, the musicians from around the world who continue to produce it, and the comparably broad audiences who listen to it—grows out of this inescapable fact. From our twenty-first-century perspective, rock is a rich musical tradition over half a century old. In the deeply interwoven relationships among its numerous and disparate forms, it resembles an extended family that spans several generations and includes all of the in-laws. Rock can be vocal or instrumental, soft or loud, acoustic or electric, cobbled together in a garage or generated on a computer. It can stimulate your brain, touch your heart, and move your hips and feet.

Defining "rock" musically is a challenge because the term has several distinct, if interrelated, connotations. Four are briefly described below; each identifies an increasingly specific body of music.

1. **The music of the rock era.** This includes virtually all music from the fifties to the present that has some element of rock style. Early in the rock era, this included rock elements trickling in to established styles: pop rock, rock musicals, country rock, jazz rock. It has also included styles that were offshoots of it (e.g., reggae, disco, eighties pop).
2. **Music created or performed by rock musicians.** This includes not only rock but also music that may lack some or even all of the more prominent features of the core rock style: the Beatles' "**Michelle**" is a familiar example.
3. **Music by (mostly) white musicians.** Although Chuck Berry's music decisively differentiated rock and roll from rhythm and blues, and Jimi Hendrix set the bar for rock guitar playing, rock has been largely music performed by white musicians. Most of the rock-era music of black musicians, from fifties R&B to rap, is related to rock but discernibly different. Without question, there has been considerable intermingling between the two rock-era musical streams, but in the sixties, it was rock vs. soul, and now it's alternative or classic rock vs. hip hop.
4. **"Dictionary definition" rock:** the core rock style, undiluted and unfiltered.

We begin on our path to a broad understanding of what rock is with a discussion of the core rock style and how we describe it.

1–2 Talking About Rock: The Core Rock Style

In 2008, the Australian band AC/DC released *Black Ice*, their first since 2000. It fulfilled a pent-up demand for their music, as the album quickly went to the top of the charts in 29 countries. Among the tracks on the album was "**Rock 'n' Roll Train**."

Please watch this video of AC/DC's "Rock 'n' Roll Train", then read this description of the introduction to the song: (See MINDTAP)

> AC/DC's "Rock 'n' Roll Train" begins with guitarist Angus Young playing a **syncopated** five-note **riff**. The sound of his guitar is loud and distorted. Each note of the riff is **harmonized** with a power chord. After a short pause, Young resumes with a longer statement that ends on a syncopation. As he repeats the riff and response, the rest of the band—Angus's brother Malcolm (guitar), bassist Cliff Williams, and drummer Phil Rudd—joins in. Malcolm and Williams reinforce the riff and response with lines that use the same rhythm, while Rudd lays down a **rock beat** with a loud bass drum thump on the first and third beats, a strong **backbeat**, and light marking of the 8-beat rhythm on a cymbal. With the rest of band playing, it's easier to determine the **tempo**, which is 119 beats per minute (bpm). All four repeat the riff and response two more times. As they do, they move in time to the beat. So does the crowd; for them, the song has a great beat.

riff A short (two to seven pitches), rhythmically interesting melodic idea.

rock beat Eight evenly spaced sounds per measure (or two per beat) over a strong backbeat.

backbeat A percussive accent occurring regularly on the second beat of beat pairs: 1 2 1 2 or 1 2 3 4.

tempo The speed of the beat.

Then watch the breakdown of the instrumental introduction and try to connect the words in bold with what you're hearing. (See MINDTAP)

The main objective of this exercise is to help you connect the sounds you hear to words that can describe them well enough that when you read a term that describes a musical feature, you can call to mind instances of the sounds that it represents. The materials that follow define these terms and highlight their use in "Rock 'n' Roll Train." We begin with the beat.

1–3 The Rhythms of Rock

By the mid-fifties, Jimmie Rodgers Snow, the son of country legend Hank Snow, seemed well on his way to country music stardom. He'd released a few singles on RCA, and he moved in the same circles as Elvis, Buddy Holly, and other legendary rock and roll stars. However, in a search for "lasting peace," he answered a calling to the ministry.

In one of his early sermons he preached with great fervor about the evils of rock and roll. Speaking directly from his personal experience, he tells the congregation that he knows how it feels to be drawn into the music. Then he asks rhetorically what it is about rock and roll that makes it so seductive to young people, and immediately answers his own question by shouting "The BEAT! The BEAT! The BEAT!" while pounding the pulpit in time to his words. Of course, he was right. It *was* the beat that drew teens to rock and roll during the fifties, and it has continued to draw listeners to rock ever since. The beat is at the heart of our experience not only of rock rhythm but also of rock music. It is the music's most compelling feature, as Snow so vigorously pointed out. Chances are that it would take a conscious

decision for you to resist tapping your foot, bobbing your head, or otherwise moving your body to "Rock 'n' Roll Train," as the audience did in the band's official video.

In this most meaningful way, we all know what the **beat** is—it is that aspect of the music that makes you want to move. This meaning of *beat* is much the same as that used by teens on the "Rate-a-Record" segment of Dick Clark's *American Bandstand*, as in "I give it an 85 (out of 98) . . . it has a nice beat to it."

This qualitative meaning of beat is one of three common meanings of "beat" in popular music. The other two meanings are more quantitative. The differences among them are implicit in these three sentences:

- The tempo of "Rock 'n' Roll Train" is about 119 bpm.
- "Rock 'n' Roll Train" has an eight-beat rhythm or, alternatively, a rock beat.
- "Rock 'n' Roll Train" has a great beat; it makes you want to move to the groove.

The meaning of *beat* in each of these sentences is distinct from the other two. The first refers to the regular measure of time, the second refers to the rhythmic foundation of the style, and the third refers to the interaction of other rhythms with the regular measure of time and the rock beat. We consider each in turn. (See MINDTAP)

beat (1) The rhythmic quality of a piece of music that invites a physical response ("that song has a good beat"). (2) The (usually) regular marking of time at walking/dancing/moving speed (usually between 72 and 144 beats per minute). (3) The rhythmic foundation of a style or substyle, distinguished by the consistent use of regular rhythms and rhythmic patterns: a two-beat, a rock beat, a shuffle beat.

1–3a "Timekeeping" Beat

Listen to the beginning of "Rock 'n' Roll Train" and start tapping your foot as soon as you find the beat. Once you find it, you will probably notice that you are marking off time at regular intervals, in time with the music. In other words, the time between foot taps is the same from one beat to the next. This rhythm moves at a steady pace, rather than speeding up or slowing down.

Beat and Rhythm

In this context, beat refers to a regular rhythm that moves at a speed to which you can comfortably respond with physical movement. A regular **rhythm** is a rhythm that measures time in equal increments. The tapping of your foot is a regular rhythm because the time that elapses between one tap and the next is always the same. In "Rock 'n' Roll Train" there are other regular rhythms, both faster and slower than the beat, but we identify this particular regular rhythm as the beat because it lies in our physical comfort zone. It is the rhythm to which we time our movements when we dance, exercise, or simply tap our foot or bob our head in time with the song.

rhythm The time dimension of music. The cumulative result of musical events as they happen over time.

Tempo

We use the word **tempo** to refer to the *speed* of the beat. We generally measure tempo in bpm: the tempo of "Rock 'n' Roll Train" is 119 bpm. In rock songs, tempos generally range between 110 and 140 bpm. Tempos outside this range may connect powerfully to the musical message: the frenetic tempos of punk (often around 160 to 170 bpm) reinforce the confrontational nature of the style; by contrast, the languid tempos (often between 60 and 70 bpm) of so many doo-wop songs (such as "**I Only Have Eyes for You**") encourage the slow dancing that is often the prelude to the romance expressed in the lyrics.

The Measure

In rock, beats almost always coalesce into groups of four, although other groups—2, 3, or even 5—are also possible. We call a consistent grouping of beats a **measure**, or **bar**. The measure represents a slower regular rhythm. And because it is slower, it is a more convenient form of rhythmic reference for longer timespans: we refer to a 12-bar blues, for instance, rather than a 48-beat blues.

In "Rock 'n' Roll Train," we can hear the relationship between beat and measure when drummer Phil Rudd enters. The most prominent element in his playing is the

measure A consistent grouping of beats. A waltz has measures containing three beats; a march has measures with two beats. Also called bar.

alternation between the bass drum thump and the sharp rap on the snare drum. The bass drum thump sounds on the first and third beat, the rap on the second and fourth.

So far we have identified the most generic meaning of *beat*, which could be applied to a wide range of music—rock, pop, jazz, classical, and any other music with a steady pulse. (So do the terms *tempo, measure*, and *bar*.) We consider next a more specific meaning of *beat*.

1–3b "Number" Beat

"Rock 'n' Roll Train" begins with a guitar riff that seems to float in time. The continuation creates a more consistent rhythmic flow, but not until the rest of the band joins in, as Young repeats the pattern, do we hear Rudd's persistent tap on the hi-hat. As the band joins in as Young repeats the riff and response, we can notice three features of the rhythm:

1. The cymbal tap marks a regular rhythm moving twice as fast as the beat, or eight times per measure.
2. This regular rhythm is the fastest regular rhythm heard in the song
3. The rhythms in the other parts—guitars, bass—align with this fast-moving regular rhythm.

In effect, the beat, backbeat (more on that shortly), and faster rhythm serve as a template for the rhythmic organization of the song. This template has two widely used names: eight-beat rhythm or rock beat/rock rhythm. It is called an eight-beat rhythm because the rhythm that divides the measure into eight equal segments is the fastest regular rhythm and because most of the rhythmic activity and interest map onto this layer of the template, rather than the beat. It is called a rock beat, because it is—more than any other musical element—the defining feature of rock. Most rock songs have a rock beat; popular music before rock did not.

Frequency of rhythmic templates in the top 50 of *Rolling Stone's* 500 greatest songs of all time.

The Backbeat

There is one other regular rhythm in "Rock 'n' Roll Train": the backbeat. The **backbeat** is a sharp, percussive sound on the second of each pair of beats. After Young's riff and response, Rudd brings the band in on the backbeat with a strong rap on his snare drum. It's the loudest sound that he produces.

In rock-era music, the backbeat is typically even more pervasive than the rock-defining rhythmic layer. Virtually every rock song has a backbeat. As Chuck Berry sang in "**Rock 'n' Roll Music**", "It's got a backbeat, you can't lose it." The backbeat is all but universal, even in those songs that do not use a rock beat. Together, the backbeat and the rock rhythmic layer (which moves twice as fast as the beat) form the foundation of rock rhythm. (See MINDTAP)

1–3c "Good" Beat

Among the most popular segments on *American Bandstand*, the television show that brought rock and roll into millions of homes from 1957 (when ABC began to broadcast the show nationally) to 1990 (when it finally went off the air), was "Rate-a-Record." In this segment, three participants would listen to a new song while the others danced, then give the song a numerical rating somewhere between 35 and 98. Ratings were often based on the perceived quality of the beat: when asked why a song received a high rating, one of the participants might answer something like "It has a good beat, and you can dance to it." "Rock 'n' Roll Train"

has a good beat, and you can dance to it. Indeed, it makes you—and the crowds that flock to AC/DC concerts—want to dance or at least move to the beat. Why? What is it about the rhythm of the song that invites us to respond physically? To address that question, we introduce another common feature of rock rhythm: syncopation.

Syncopation: "It Has a Good Beat, and You Can Dance to It"

A **syncopation** is a rhythm or accent that does not line up in an expected way with the beat or other regular rhythm. We hear two syncopations in Young's opening riff, and another at the very end of the response. They are even more prominent in the chorus: "train," "-ning," "-ight" (when it slides down), and "track." All of this activity conflicts with the regular rock rhythm in the rhythm guitar and drums. The tension created by the interplay between the regular rhythms and the rhythms that fall off the beat, creates much of the rhythmic interest in the song. More than any other aspect of the rhythm, it is what gives the song a "good beat." (See MINDTAP)

This meaning of *beat* is more subjective and less precise than either of the other two meanings. Those we can quantify easily enough, and they will be the same to every listener: the tempo is 119 bpm, and the drummer is marking off a rock beat. However, listeners may differ regarding what defines a good beat. Still, just about any consensus opinion regarding the quality of the beat in a group of rock songs will favor more syncopated rhythms.

Rock is about rhythm, and rhythm in rock starts with the beat, in all three of its meanings. The time-measuring beat is at the center of our rhythmic experience, in mind and body. The number beat is the rhythmic template of the music and the source of much of its power, as we will discover again and again during our survey of rock-era music. And a good beat is one of the elements that can draw us to the music. "Rock 'n' Roll Train" offers clear illustrations of all three meanings of *beat*. Its rhythms serve as an ideal starting point for further explorations of rock and roll.

1–4 The Sounds of the Core Rock Style

Since the days of Buddy Holly and the Crickets, the instrumentation of the core rock band has been two electric guitars (lead and rhythm), bass, and drums. By the time of the British Invasion of the early sixties, the electric bass had replaced the acoustic bass, and by the time the Rolling Stones became the "world's greatest rock 'n' roll band," this instrumentation was firmly established as the norm. There were a few important "power trios" (e.g., Jimi Hendrix Experience, Cream, Led Zeppelin), but even these groups occasionally overdubbed rhythm guitar parts underneath guitar solos. Some bands augmented this nucleus: pianist Ian Stewart regularly contributed to Rolling Stones recordings. Other instruments, such as saxophones, extra percussion, or even a third guitar, were optional; the sound of unfiltered rock was complete with just a vocalist and the four core instruments.

The instruments play loudly in live performance—so loudly that what ex-AC/DC singer Brian Johnson called "industrial noise" contributed significantly to the hearing loss that ended his career with the band.

The song, like many AC/DC hits, projects a dense, dark sound mainly for three reasons:

1. Both pitched (guitars, bass) and unpitched (drums) instruments generally operate in a low and midrange—Johnson's vocal line is often among the highest sounds, and harmonizing the riff adds more low tones.
2. The distortion thickens the sound considerably.
3. Harmonizing the accompanying guitar lines with power chords adds more low-register sound.

And of course the high volume level (heard live or with the sound up) augments the already dense sound. The dark sound of the core dates back to the mid-sixties, just as rock and roll was morphing into rock. Songs like "**(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction**" and the Kinks "**You Really Got Me**" are the antecedents of the music of groups like AC/DC. (See MINDTAP)

1-5 Riffs and Chords: Melody and Harmony in the Core Rock Style

When AC/DC reaches the chorus of "Rock 'n' Roll Train," the rest of the band and many in the audience join Johnson in singing: "Runaway train, running right off the track." When simply spoken, the lyric has no particular cadence or rhythm. But when sung in this song, the phrase is broken up into four short segments, containing from one to four syllables. All end with a syncopation, and are separated from the next segment by the length of the last note or silence.

1-5a Riffs

These segments are straightforward examples of **riffs**. A riff is a melodic idea that is:

1. *Short*—typically no more than six or seven notes
2. *Separated*—either by silence or by a long note
3. *Syncopated*—syncopation isn't essential to a riff in rock-era music, but it is customary.

All three characteristics are heard in the chorus of "Rock 'n' Roll Train." The first phrase has four notes: it's essentially the sung version of the opening guitar riff, minus the last note. As you have heard (and can see below), it's short, separated from the next part with silence, and syncopated. The second phrase has the other three segments, which together add up to seven notes. ("Right" is sung to two different pitches.) There are good reasons that riffs typically have these qualities. Their brevity makes them easy to remember, the silence (or long note) defines their boundaries, and the syncopation adds musical interest. And to make sure that listeners remember it, riffs are almost always repeated many times during the course of the song—that's certainly the case in "Rock 'n' Roll Train."

In rock-era music, riffs are often building blocks for melody. In this song, we hear three common strategies for developing a riff into longer melodic units. The guitar introduction shows one: expand the riff into a longer statement by varying some feature of the riff. In this case, what's varied is the pattern of rise and fall. The verse shows another: answer the riff with a different riff. Here, that's personified by the exchanges between Young and Johnson during the verse of the song. The third option is to repeat the riff several times, which is what happens in the chorus. (See MINDTAP)

1-5b Chords

In their most obvious form, **chords** are groups of notes that sound together. Most of the chords in "Rock 'n' Roll Train" are "power chords": Power chords are not chords as they had been understood in pre-rock music, and they don't function like these more traditional chords. Instead, their primary purpose seems to be thickening the sound by supporting riffs and accompanying patterns from below. The extra notes, distortion, and high volume make power chords powerful indeed.

Chords of all kinds typically perform at least two functions. First, they provide a point of departure and return: a harmonic round trip. The very first chord of

chords A group of pitches considered as a single unit. The notes of a chord may be played simultaneously, or they may be played in a series as an arpeggio.

Young's introductory riff is also the first chord of the verse and the first chord of the chorus, as well as the last chord of his response, the last chord of the chorus—which lasts for a while—and the last chord of the song. Second, they outline a slower-moving rhythm as they change every few beats. In "Rock 'n' Roll Train," the opening riff and the chorus have the same basic chords in the same rhythm. These slower and more predictable patterns help outline the form of a song.

Listening to chords is the opposite of listening to melody. More often than not, melody is either the highest part, or among the highest parts. That's the case in "Rock 'n' Roll Train" during the vocal sections and the guitar solo. By contrast, when we listen to chords, we want to first seek out the lowest note—the bass—because chords are built from the bottom up.

1–6 The Form of a Core Rock Song

"Rock 'n' Roll Train" lasts four minutes and twenty seconds. In that time span, there are three statements of the form of the song, plus an introduction, a guitar solo, and other shorter interpolations.

Each statement of the form contains three sections: **verse**, **bridge**, and **chorus**.

1. **The verse** is the opening section. Its primary function is to relate a chunk of the story. The focus is generally on the words, which are different in each statement of the form. As a result, this section tends to be the most low-key section of the form.
2. **The bridge** is the transition from the verse to the chorus. Its purpose is build up from the more low-key verse to the chorus, which is the high point of the song. Typically, the music becomes more active and goal-oriented—the goal being the arrival at the chorus.
3. **The chorus** typically features a melodic hook repeated several times, and sung to the same lyric each time. The lyric of the chorus embodies the main point in the story, and the riff to which it's sung is the melodic hook that listeners remember.

This sequence of musical events is not only the template for "Rock 'n' Roll Train," but also the structure of an almost uncountable and ever-expanding number of rock-era songs.

The beauty of this template is its ability to combine familiarity with flexibility. The broad outline of the form is well established, but there is no set length for any of the sections, and no limitation on the kinds of musical materials that are included beyond the general prescription outlined above—and even that can be altered. To cite just one of several examples in "Rock 'n' Roll Train," AC/DC extends the chord just before the chorus to build up suspense. Both the sequence and likely musical features of the three sections are predictable enough on a general level that even first-time listeners can navigate through a song, yet they can be potentially different and distinctive on a more detailed level. (See MINDTAP)

1–6a It's Only Rock 'n' Roll

AC/DC bills themselves as a "rock and roll" band. Judging by this and dozens of other songs—they have been mining a mother lode of riffs and rhythms for decades—playing what they consider rock and roll involves these key features:

- Including two electric guitars (with some but not excessive distortion), bass, and drums backing a lead singer who sings in a high range
- Having the sound way up
- Laying down a strong rock beat with the entire band

- Creating a foundation for the vocal line from a syncopated riff, which they repeat several times
- Supporting the riff with a series of three power chords, which run through the entire song
- Marking off large sections with an exchange of simple but syncopated vocal riffs, in which both words and music are repeated several times

Collectively, these features describe prominent musical attributes of AC/DC's songs and, by extension, the "old time rock and roll" that is the core rock style. This sound is our central reference point for a broader discussion of rock-era music. We continue by examining the diverse roots of this core rock style.

1–7 Talking About Rock: The Roots of Rock; Routes to Rock

Among the briefest and best known accounts of the provenance of rock is Muddy Waters's line: "The blues had a baby and they called it rock and roll." It's a great-sounding line, and it does highlight the central role of the blues in the shaping of rock and roll (and rock). But it oversimplifies the connection between blues and rock. It was not the straightforward lineage that Waters's remark suggested, but rather many blues styles shaping multiple generations and styles of early rock-era music. And it doesn't account for the other genres—for example, country, gospel, pop, folk, Afro-Cuban music, jazz—that also contributed to the sounds of rock. We present a more comprehensive take on the roots of rock, and the route by which popular music evolved into rock.

1–7a The Roots of Rock

Like almost all twentieth-century popular music, rock's deepest roots are in two musical traditions so unlike each other that there is virtually no common ground, musical or otherwise. One tradition was a product of the white upper class and the middle class that emulated them; they based their music on European models or imported it directly from Europe, usually by way of England. The other tradition was the music of sub-Saharan Africa that the slaves brought with them. They reconstructed what they could of their music; they were limited to a great extent because slave owners banned drums throughout the South. Rock is one family of styles that resulted from the interaction of the two traditions.

If we contrast secular song in the United States during the early nineteenth century with music from Africa and the African diaspora that demonstrates no influence of European music, we can grasp how dissimilar the traditions are. (See MINDTAP)

Despite these pronounced differences, musical exchanges between white and black musicians did occur. Anecdotal evidence suggests that both whites and blacks interpreted the music of the other in terms of their own tradition. Slaves learned the Christian hymns of their masters, but accounts of early nineteenth-century religious revivals indicate they had very different ways of singing them. The banjo is associated with traditional country music, but scholars believe that it is an adaptation of a west African plucked instrument. Early on, the white takes on black music were certainly more superficial than the black takes on white music. To cite just one example, T. D. Rice's "Jump Jim Crow" (1828), his wildly popular mimicking of a black stevedore's song and dance, shows no evidence of traditional African musical features. That would change—slowly but surely—over the next several decades. The creative friction between the two traditions would drive the evolution of popular music to, and through, rock.

1–7b Routes to Rock

Our brief account of the long route to rock begins early in the nineteenth century, a time when the music industry in the United States was beginning to take shape, and before there was a distinctively American popular music. Our starting point is the European-derived music outlined above, as exemplified in the parlor songs that remained popular in genteel households for much of the century.

As we compare songs like "Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair" to "Rock 'n' Roll Train," we can wonder whether there's any common ground between the two. However, there are two features of AC/DC's song not found in the African tradition that trace back in popular music to songs like these. (See MINDTAP)

1–7c Minstrelsy

Minstrelsy, introduced by the Virginia Minstrels in 1843 and a sensation almost overnight, was an all-around entertainment: singing, playing instruments, dancing, acting out skits, telling jokes, and more. Before the Civil War, it was presented only by white performers in blackface; after the Civil War, blacks also performed as minstrels—also in blackface.

The music for the early minstrel show was the first American popular music—it was a sound without precedent in European music. Although the minstrels purported to be black and adopted a clumsy imitation of black speech (if song lyrics are any indication), music for the minstrel show owes more to folk music from the British Isles than black music. Still, there are three features that moved popular music closer to rock.

1–7d Ragtime

Ragtime began as music for piano: essentially, rags are syncopated marches for piano. Ragtime caught on around the turn of the twentieth century, despite fierce opposition from society's self-appointed moral guardians. Ragtime was the first authentic African-American music that could be conveyed in musical notation, so it gave those who could read music the opportunity to experience a core element of African music. (See MINDTAP)

1–7e The Early Fox-Trot Song

The syncopated rhythms of ragtime helped transform popular song: as the 1910s began, popular song began to feature melodies built around riffs. These more conversational melodies were supported by the rhythms of the most popular social dance of the early twentieth century, the fox-trot. The syncopated melodies over a march-influenced rhythmic foundation were clear signals that a shift toward a more modern style was underway.

1–7f Jazz and "Jazz," Blues and "Blues"

The first published blues songs hit the market in the early teens; the all-white Original Dixieland Jazz Band made the first recordings of jazz in 1917. Both were sensations that filtered down into more mainstream music. During the twenties, musicians and more adventurous listeners heard black jazz and blues musicians live in ballrooms, theaters, and speakeasies; they and others also heard them on record. This music brought revolutionary new sounds and rhythms to mainstream popular music.

1–7g Swing

Swing crossed over to the mainstream in the latter half of the thirties and continued through World War II. It was swing vs. sweet for the decade, bringing popular

music a big step closer to rock. For a brief period, jazz was a popular music, and the influence of the blues deepened.

1–7h Fast Blues, Deep Blues

Two sharply contrasting blues styles that profoundly influenced rock left a recorded legacy. Fast boogie-woogie is the direct antecedent of Chuck Berry's rock-defining rhythm guitar patterns, and the "deep" blues of Delta bluesmen inspired a generation of rock guitarists.

1–8 The Route to Rock and the Transmutation of Popular Music

We pause our tour along the route to rock in 1945, about the time that the new sounds that became rhythm and blues began to take shape. The reshaping of mainstream popular music from parlor songs to big band swing was comprehensive, and so radical that it's difficult to hear the connection between the two without the intervening steps. These steps outline the process that transmuted parlor songs into swing: an ongoing cycle of African-American interpretation of existing European practice, the reinterpretation of African-American versions by whites, and the subsequent reinterpretation of the white versions by black musicians. It's a process that continued throughout the twentieth century. The arrival at the core rock style was a milestone along this evolutionary path, but not an endpoint.

To return to Waters's statement about the lineage of rock and roll: it's clear that the blues—not one but several styles (including some discussed later)—played a key role in birthing both rock and roll and, a decade later, the core rock style. However, rock-era music encompasses much more than just this sound. We preview our account of this music by sketching the outline of rock's multiple genres and generations.

1–9 Talking about Rock: The Rock Era, 1945–

"Old Time Rock and Roll"—the core rock style—has become a timeless sound. It remains much the same today as it was in the mid-sixties, when it took shape in the music of the Rolling Stones and other like-minded bands. In this respect, it is unlike rock-era music, which has been evolving for more than seven decades and is far more diverse and inclusive.

The gestation of rock began after World War II, principally through two bodies of black music: more rhythmic and/or bluesy versions of swing, and gospel-influenced versions of pop songs, both old and new. By the mid-fifties, rock-era music had achieved a distinctive identity as (real) rock and roll through a new approach to rhythm and sound. By the mid-sixties, rock-era music was a mature music; its stylistic conventions were established and widely understood. And even as its core coalesced into what would become its timeless form, it simultaneously became a far more diverse music. Its range extended from an array of hybrid styles created through the interplay with other kinds of music (e.g., folk rock, pop rock, southern rock, art rock, jazz rock/fusion), to innovative new directions (Motown, heavy metal, soul, late Beatles). During this same period, rock-related music became commercially and culturally dominant. It replaced pre-rock pop at the top of both the singles and album charts and on radio, and it forced established styles—pop, musical theater, country, jazz—to embrace rock, at least to some extent, or be perceived as out of step with the times.

Punk/new wave, and disco and funk, two important new directions in the latter half of the seventies, signaled the emergence of a new generation of rock-era music. The two new styles represent contrary directions. In its purest form, punk was a reactionary trend. It was the Everclear of rock, a distillation and intensification of its sounds and rhythms. By contrast, disco continued the evolution of rock-era music: it brought an array of synthesized sounds and the more active 16-beat rhythms into the mainstream. Along with funk, a related but less commercially important style, it provided a foundation for new directions in post-eighties rock, pop, and R&B. The new sounds of the early eighties included music that continued a single approach (e.g., early alternative, techno) and music that synthesized the two trends in myriad, often inventive ways (e.g., the music of Michael Jackson). In the latter part of the decade, these new syntheses moved beyond the dance floor, most notably in significant music by U2 and Prince. The other significant development of the latter part of the 1980 was the growing commercial and cultural impact of rap. Meanwhile, new acts working in the rock and R&B styles of the previous generation found fresh approaches (e.g., the music of Nirvana).

By the mid-nineties, it was clear that the rock era, and more broadly, twentieth-century popular music, had reached the end point of a long evolutionary cycle that had begun with ragtime. The ongoing interaction of European and African music had swung the stylistic pendulum from melody to rhythm. Songs with flowing melodies were dominant in popular music at the beginning of the twentieth century. By the end, the voice had become a percussion instrument and a further doubling of the number of beats would have rendered the rhythm unintelligible and unplayable at dance tempos.

Those searching for melody frequently turned to country music or tuneful classic rock—the re-release of The Beatles' No. 1 hits was the best-selling album of both 2000 and the first decade of the twenty-first century. Many rock-era acts continued to work in first- and second-generation styles. Most evidenced mastery of the conventions, and some found imaginative new sounds, but the change from earlier rock-era music was incremental, not revolutionary.

For most seeking a new direction, sound became the dominant element. This approach involved two complementary strategies: finding and exploiting new sounds and sound combinations, especially those made possible by digital technology, and minimizing interest in other musical elements: melody, harmony, and rhythm. Critically acclaimed acts, most notably Radiohead, led the way in this regard. Not surprisingly, there was a trickle-down effect from the music of these sound explorers. Less radical versions of these strategies have played a key role in creating a distinctive twenty-first-century popular music, and at the same time creating an extraordinarily diverse musical landscape, one that easily accommodates both Adele and Drake.

We remain in the rock era almost by default, because there has been no similarly disruptive sequel to the rock revolution of the sixtie—no new style that takes over the mind and the market and renders rock-era music out of date. Instead, music of many genres and several generations divvy up the market for popular music, with older music, and music in older styles, outselling even much critically acclaimed new music. We have unprecedented access to music in multiple genres and from several generations. There's something for everyone, and it's available almost any time at the tap of a finger.

Our outline of the rock era complements our closer examination of its core style: the latter defines its heart, the former sketches its temporal boundaries and hints at the range of the music over several generations. In the chapters ahead, we chart the evolution, revolution, and even devolution of rock-era music and explore its remarkable diversity. (See MINDTAP)

PART I

Becoming Rock: The Rock Era, 1945–1965

Part Introduction

Among the favorite pastimes of rock critics has been making a case for the first rock and roll record. In their book, *What Was the First Rock 'N' Roll Record,* Jim Dawson and Steve Propes nominate 50 recordings, making a case for each one. If one defines "rock 'n' roll" as the music that led directly to rock, then only Little Richard's 1955 recording "Tutti Frutti" (No. 48 on their list) would seem to qualify. The first song on their list, Illiois Jacquet's 1944 live performance of "Blues 2," belongs to the swing era, despite Jacquet's impassioned playing. However, most of the tracks from the latter half of the forties are a new sound: more rhythmic than pre-war blues, and more bluesy than swing. Before 1949, this music had no name and little popular presence, and those who performed it recorded their music on small independent labels rather than Columbia or RCA. "Rock and roll" referred to activity between the sheets rather than on the bandstand. Still, this new black music was the beginning of rock-era music, even if it wasn't yet rock 'n' roll.

The first part of our survey of rock-era music begins just after the end of World War II and ends about two decades later, just before the rock revolution began in earnest. The development of this music from early rhythm and blues to the black pop and rock of the early sixties unfolded in four stages, each lasting about five years, and each characterized by increased musical diversity and commercial presence. The black music that would become rhythm and blues by the mid-fifties included not two but three distinct, if often, intermingling streams. The most rhythmic was a more bluesy form of swing, performed by small groups instead of big bands. The most bluesy was a more powerful version of Delta blues through the use of an amplified guitar and other rhythm instruments. However, there was also a new kind of pop singing by black groups influenced by earlier black vocal groups (e.g., the Mills Brothers, the Ink Spots) and gospel. All three made clear that what was now called rhythm and blues was different from the pop and jazz of other

black artists. And all three marked starting points for trends that would produce soul, hard rock, and Motown in the sixties.

All three streams continued into the fifties, and were slightly augmented by Latin/blues fusions. Two major developments in rhythm and blues involved the response to this music, rather than new musical developments. One was the greater awareness of this music, first by those in the music business (e.g., musicians, DJs, those involved with record companies), followed by expansion of the audience for rhythm and blues among both blacks and whites. The other was a series of white takes on black music, from rockabilly to cover versions of early doo-wop. This laid the groundwork for the performer who made "rock and roll" a household expression.

In 1955, rock and roll began its commercial ascent and started to separate from rhythm and blues musically as well as racially. Almost overnight, Elvis took over all three singles charts—pop, country and western, and rhythm and blues—then took on Hollywood before his induction into the Army. He was early rock and roll's singular commercial presence; no one else came close to his impact. Even as Elvis fascinated teenagers and horrified their parents, Little Richard and Chuck Berry were working out the rhythmic foundation for rock and roll—the new beat that would distinguish it from R&B and lead to rock. During this brief five-year period, rock and roll went from a white take on rhythm and blues to a new dance music and ultimately a new rhythmic template for a wide range of music—fast and slow, loud and soft. The major musical innovations in rhythm and blues were the fusion of blues, gospel, and pop elements into a new, more soulful sound. By the end of the decade, there was a clear musical difference between R&B and rock and roll.

The first half of the sixties was the adolescence of both rock and roll and rhythm and blues. By mid-decade, rock and roll had become rock, as a new generation of rock and rollers adapted Chuck Berry's approach to rhythm and sound on the guitar to the rest of the band. The British Invasion by the Beatles and a host of other acts from the United Kingdom made rock an international music as they conquered the US charts. Doo-wop morphed into distinctive new—and popular—black pop styles: girl groups, Motown, and more. Rhythm and blues got a rock beat, and funneled the passion and grittiness of the blues into soul. A folk revival that began in the late fifties as a sincere attempt to bring old songs to life turned topical in the early sixties, as Bob Dylan and others set powerful, even confrontational, lyrics to simple melodies and accompaniments. Collectively, these developments fomented a revolution—musical, commercial, and cultural. It was well under way by 1965.

Pop before the Rock Revolution

The conventional wisdom about winners writing history certainly seems to apply to popular music. Ask the proverbial person on the street to name the top acts in popular music during the fifties, and you're likely to get a list that reads like the maiden class of inductees into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame: Chuck Berry, Ray Charles, Sam Cooke, Fats Domino, the Everly Brothers, Buddy Holly, Jerry Lee Lewis, Elvis Presley, Little Richard. Mention Perry Como, Frankie Laine, Patti Page, or Eddie Fisher, and you may elicit only a quizzical glance or a fleeting memory—Perry Como, didn't he have a TV show? Eddie Fisher, wasn't he married to Liz Taylor?

The actual state of affairs was quite different. Of these first-generation rock stars, only Elvis topped the singles charts on a regular basis. Albums were largely the province of classical music, musical theater, jazz, and what we now call "easy listening." For much of the fifties, radio stations that programmed the new music were few and far between; Buddy Holly and his friends drove around Lubbock late at night to find a spot where they could pick up a clear-channel radio station that played rhythm and blues. Television occasionally featured rock-and-roll acts. Carl Perkins appeared

on Perry Como's popular television show, but Como—a smooth-voiced pop singer-turned-television personality—*had* the show; audiences tuned in to him every week. Even among teenagers, enthusiasm for real rock and roll was far from unanimous. Pat Boone, a contemporary of Elvis who sang mostly pre-rock pop (although his disastrous cover of Little Richard's "Tutti Frutti," still reached No. 12 on the pop charts), was more successful than any rock-and-roll act besides Elvis. Most rhythm-and-blues artists were even less known; only Fats Domino charted on a regular basis.

Early on, rock and roll aroused hostile reactions from the majority of Americans: a sizeable percentage of teens, and most of their parents and grandparents. (Many of the older generations had apparently forgotten the hostility that the new music of their youth had aroused.) To appease censors, Elvis was shown only from the waist up on his last appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show* in 1956. By the end of the decade, the federal government had gotten into the roll-over-rock-and-roll act; the moral degradation caused by rock and roll was an unspoken subtext to the payola hearings at the end of the decade.

The Musical Hierarchy in 1950s America

In the first two post–World War II decades, there was a clear cultural hierarchy in American musical life. At the top was classical music. Directly under it was musical theater, best exemplified by the musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein. Modern jazz was for hipsters: it was the sound track for the counterculture of the fifties. It was heard mainly in small nightclubs frequented by Bohemian types. Although admired by esteemed musicians both classical and popular (among them the conductor/composer Leonard Bernstein), modern jazz was not as prestigious as musical theater in part because so many of the important musicians were black. Pop crooning was a rung below musicals in prestige, and well above rock and roll, R&B, country, blues, and other outsider genres.

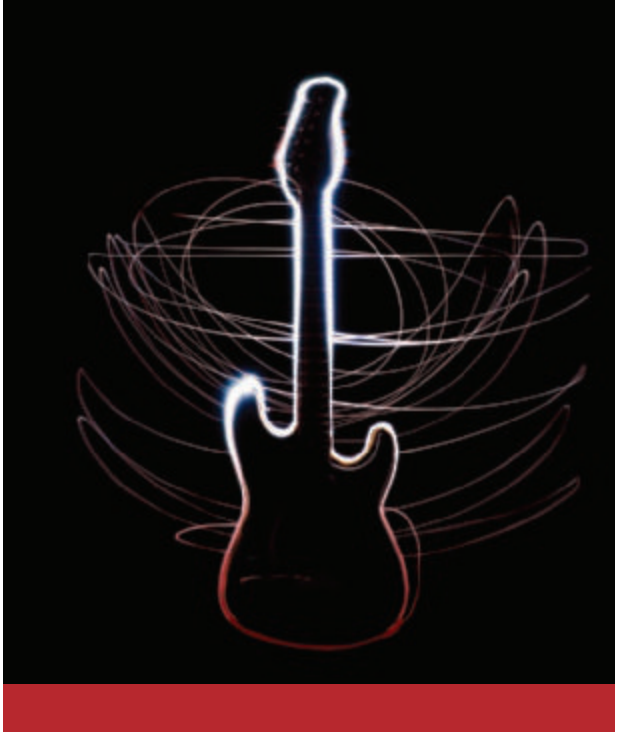
Before the rock revolution, the musical measuring stick of cultural prestige in popular music was the degree of its alignment with classical music, frequently evidenced in such features as prominent strings and little or no percussion, the absence of syncopation and other forms of rhythmic play, flowing melodies and rich harmonic cushions supporting them, supple rhythms and languid tempos, and pleasant—even operatic—vocal styles. "Some Enchanted Evening," the love song from Rodgers and Hammerstein's 1949 musical *South Pacific* (released on film in 1958) is a stellar example of the "classicization" of popular music.

The Broadway musicals and their film counterparts, from Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* (1943) through Walt Disney's *Mary Poppins* (the soundtrack from this film topped the album charts for fourteen weeks in 1965!) represented the most extreme form of a devolutionary trend that began in the thirties. In the late thirties, musical antonym to swing was sweet: melodious fox-trots in a slow tempo, rather than syncopated riffs over a driving swing rhythm. After the end of the war, much mainstream pop retreated even more from the energy of the twenties, not only on Broadway but also in bland white-bread songs like Perry Como's "Hot Diggity," a No.1 pop hit in 1956. That this music remained popular among a large segment of the American public (and among those who controlled the distribution of popular music) through the first half of the sixties made rock's usurping of the market even more revolutionary. This would be the music that rock rebelled against, even as rock-era musicians co-opted elements of it when it served their purposes.

The revolution was over quickly—a matter of a couple of years. The prelude to the revolution took the better part of two decades. We jumpstart our journey from early rhythm and blues to the eve of the revolution with music from Louis Jordan. (See MINDTAP)

CHAPTER 2

RHYTHM AND BLUES, 1945–1955



Learning Objectives:

1) Describe the social climate surrounding the **rhythm and blues** genre following World War II.

2) Give examples of some of the musical developments in the **rhythm and blues** genre.

3) Ascertain the various musical roles of the instruments within a **jump band**.

4) Contrast the differences between early 1950s **rhythm and blues**, **electric blues**, and **doo-wop**.

5) Illustrate the sequence of musical events within the **twelve-bar blues form**.

6) Discuss the various ways Latin music influenced **rhythm and blues**.

race records A term that came into use in the early 1920s to describe recordings by African American artists intended for sale primarily in the African American community.

classic blues The popular blues style of the 1920s, which typically featured a woman singing the blues (e.g., Bessie Smith) accompanied by one or more jazz musicians.

Chapter Introduction

In January 1922, Okeh Records placed an advertisement in the *Chicago Defender*, a black newspaper, that announced "All the greatest race phonograph stars can be heard on Okeh Records . . . Ask your neighborhood dealer for a complete list of Okeh **race records**." Okeh had recorded Mamie Smith's "**Crazy Blues**" at the end of 1920. Its success opened the door for other **classic blues** singers, most notably Bessie Smith. "**Down Hearted Blues**," Smith's first recording for Columbia Records (now Sony), in 1923, reputedly sold over 1 million copies.

During the twenties, recordings by black musicians, mainly for a black audience, occupied a small but important niche within the recording industry. Other major companies, most notably Victor and Columbia (which would ultimately merge into Sony BMG), created branches of their catalog to serve the "race" market. Joining them in catering to the black community were small labels like Paramount and W. C. Handy's Black Swan, which was bought by Paramount in 1924. However, the race record part of the music industry almost went under during the first years of the Depression. Sales of race records, which had been as high as 5 percent of total sales at the end of the twenties, dropped to only 1 percent in the early thirties, and several record companies went out of business or stopped recording black musicians.

Business began to pick up toward the end of the thirties. By 1942, *Billboard*, then and now the bible of the entertainment industry, began charting "race record" hits.

The magazine dubbed the chart the "Harlem Hit Parade" (reportedly chart position was determined by an informal poll of a handful of record stores in Harlem). After World War II, *Billboard* reverted to "race records" as the chart label. In 1949, Jerry Wexler, then a staff writer at the magazine, suggested the more politically correct and musically appropriate term **rhythm and blues**.

rhythm and blues A term used since the mid forties to describe African American popular styles, especially those influenced by blues and/or dance music.

popular music Music that appeals to a mass audience, is intended to have wide appeal, and has a sound and a style distinct from classical or folk music.

2–1 The Emergence of Rhythm and Blues

By the time the renamed chart made its first appearance on June 25, 1949, rhythm and blues (R&B) had become a small but significant part of the record industry. During World War II, what we now call rhythm and blues was just an occasional blip on the radar screen of **popular music**. After the war ended, rhythm and blues took off—maybe not as fast as Jackie Brenston's "**Rocket 88**"—but quickly enough to get the attention of *Billboard*'s staff. However, it was in the fifties that rhythm and blues began to expand its niche in the pop marketplace, even as it carved out its distinctive sound identity. Within a decade, rhythm and blues became part of what would soon be a new kind of popular music.

The commercial growth of rhythm and blues during the first postwar decade was mainly a product of four factors: the economic and social empowerment of blacks, a media revolution that introduced new recording formats and redefined the role of radio, the growing interest of whites in black music, and the crossover appeal of the music itself.

2–1a Black Social and Economic Issues in Postwar America

The central issue for blacks after World War II was equality: racial, economic, and social. Black and white soldiers had fought for the United States during World War II, sometimes side by side, but more often in segregated units. The irony of blacks fighting to defend freedom in a country that did not treat them as free men was not lost on President Truman. In 1948, he signed an executive order demanding an end to discrimination in the armed services. This was one of numerous postwar developments that moved the United States—however painfully—closer to an integrated society.

If World War II brought the equality issues to the fore, the postwar economic boom, the massive emigration of blacks from the rural South, and the Cold War gave the United States the reasons to respond to it. The flourishing postwar economy meant more and better-paying jobs. It put more money in the pockets of blacks, although not at the same rate as whites, and it reduced competition for jobs, which was one reason for trying to maintain the status quo, especially in the South. The migration of blacks to the North and West, which had begun in earnest after the turn of the century, accelerated during and especially after World War II. There they had the right to vote, which enabled them to exert pressure on politicians.

Another factor was the evident hypocrisy of the United States during this time: presenting itself to other nations as a defender of freedom, and denying it to some of its citizens at home. During the Cold War, schoolchildren recited the Pledge of Allegiance every day, reiterating that the Republic was "one nation under God, indivisible with liberty and justice for all." Observers outside of the South, as well as those in other countries, were increasingly reminded that so long as all Americans were not equal under the law, this pledge—what the nation professed to believe and practice—was in fact a lie.

The two events that catalyzed the civil rights movement occurred within a year of each other. The first was the Supreme Court's 1954 decision, *Brown v. Board of*

Education of Topeka, which rescinded the "separate but equal" policy sanctioned by the Court's 1896 decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. In *Plessy*, the Court had held that blacks could be educated in separate (or segregated) schools as long as they were "equal" in quality to the schools whites attended. Now, the Court said that there could be no equality unless blacks and whites had equal access to all schools.

Following this decision, the civil rights movement gained momentum in the courts and on the streets. In 1955, Montgomery, Alabama, native Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat to a white person. When she was arrested and sent to jail, blacks in Montgomery boycotted the municipal bus service for a year. Two years later, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. organized the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which advocated nonviolent protest modeled after that used by Mahatma Gandhi in India. All of this laid the foundation for the major advances in civil rights during the sixties.

Rhythm-and-blues artists did not lift their voice in support of the civil rights movement during the postwar years. Their contribution was indirect: the appeal of their music helped heighten awareness of black culture. At the same time, rhythm and blues benefited from the increased attention given to race relations in the media; it was a two-way street.

2–1b The Media Revolution

Two major developments—the emergence of commercial television and the development of new record formats—triggered a media revolution during the fifties. The ripple effect from their impact helped open the door for rhythm and blues.

Television and Radio

The television industry mushroomed after the war. In 1946, the industry was in its infancy; only 6,000 television sets were sold that year. Three years later, sales topped 2 million sets. By the mid-fifties, television was a household staple, and the first color sets were on the market. Television quickly took over radio's role as the primary source of all-purpose entertainment. Soap operas, situation comedies, variety shows, mystery shows—all of these and more moved from radio to television.

As a result, radio redefined itself as a medium. To fill the void left by the migration of these shows to television, radio stations began programming recorded music—most prominently, pop. Some stations, however, began to offer programs that provided an alternative to the bland pop fare. Not surprisingly, these programs were broadcast at odd times—late at night, early in the morning. Still, many attracted a small but fervent following.

style The set of those common features found in the music of a time, place, culture, or individual.

ska The dominant Jamaican popular music through the first part of the 1960s. The most distinctive feature of ska is a strong after -beat: a strong, crisp chunk on the latter part of each beat.

Disc jockeys (DJs), a new breed of radio personality created by the more extensive use of prerecorded material, hosted these shows. Listeners tuned in for the DJ as well as the music. During these early years of radio programming, DJs chose their own music. As rhythm and blues and rock and roll caught on, their ability to choose the music that they played gave them enormous clout, which they abused on occasion. (We discuss Alan Freed's rise and fall, the most familiar instance of this abuse, in **Chapter 3**.)

Record Formats

After World War II, the major record companies fought a format war. For decades, shellac 78 rpm (revolutions per minute) recordings had delivered about three minutes of popular music on 10-inch discs and about four minutes of classical music on 12-inch discs. In 1948, Columbia Records began issuing long-playing (LP) records, that revolved at 33 rpm. These were vinyl discs that held over half an hour of music and didn't break when you dropped them. The next year, RCA brought out

the 7-inch 45 rpm single. This disc was also vinyl and, despite its much smaller size, also held about three minutes of music.

It took a while for these new formats to catch on because they required new record players. However, by the mid-fifties, the new 45 rpm format had largely replaced the 78. Record companies used the 45 for singles targeted at teens, who liked the convenience and durability of the new format and had enough money to buy them. Rhythm-and-blues and rock-and-roll 45s found their way into more and more teenage bedrooms; they also turned up on jukeboxes and radio stations more frequently.

Indies

The music market was there, thanks to the postwar economic boom. The way to make money was there, thanks to radio, jukeboxes, and record stores. The way to bring the money in was there, thanks to Broadcast Music Incorporated—a music licensing agency formed in 1939 to collect fees on behalf of those clients (blues and country musicians) not represented by ASCAP, the licensing organization for pop songwriters and performers. All that was needed was someone to record the music.

The growth of indie (independent) music in the last few decades, as opposed to the major recording companies, relives the rise of independent labels in the late forties and early fifties. Today's technology is different: it is more sophisticated and less expensive than the primitive but costly tape recorders of the postwar era. The distribution is different: bands and their companies can stream their music online, instead of selling records from the trunk of a car (as forties indie pioneer Leonard Chess did). And the music is different. Many of today's indie bands, mostly white, explore peripheral retro styles and **style** fusions, like **ska** and punk. More than half a century ago, legendary independent labels recorded blacks whose music was the cutting edge of popular music.

What the indies of yesterday and today have in common is an entrepreneurial spirit and a desire to bring the music, to which they are passionately devoted, to a larger audience—and make some money in the process. For Leonard Chess, a Polish immigrant, it was another potential source of income. Chess and his brother Phil owned several nightclubs on Chicago's South Side, including the Macomba, a club that featured some of the best black performers in the city. In 1947, sensing that the recording industry offered another good business opportunity, the Chess brothers bought into a newly formed independent label, Aristocrat Records. Like most other independents, Aristocrat concentrated on music outside of the pop **mainstream**. The first releases on the new label featured **jazz** and **jump band** performers. Over the next several years, they added such key figures as Muddy Waters and Chuck Berry to their roster.

The story of Chess Records was replicated with some variation in cities around the country. Ahmet Ertegun, a Turkish immigrant living in New York, founded Atlantic Records in 1947; Jerry Wexler bought in six years later. Art Rupe's Specialty Records based in New Orleans, Lew Chudd's Imperial Records based in Los Angeles, and Syd Nathan's King Records based in Cincinnati, all helped preserve and disseminate the sound of rhythm and blues (and country and western). So did Sam Phillips's Sun Records. His recording studio, the only place that blacks could record in Memphis, also recorded top **rockabilly** acts, beginning with Elvis Presley. Starting and running an independent label was a risky business. Some folded. Labels like Imperial, Chess, and King carved a niche in the market on the strength of a few good acts. Only Ertegun's Atlantic grew into a major label. Still, all the independent labels left an impressive legacy.

mainstream
Prevailing styles.

jazz A group of popular related styles primarily for listening. Jazz is usually distinguished from the other popular music of an era by greater rhythmic freedom (more syncopation and/or less insistent beat keeping), extensive improvisation, and more adventurous harmony. There are two families of jazz styles: those based on a four-beat rhythm and those based on a rock or 16-beat rhythm.

jump band In the late 1940s, a small band—rhythm section plus a few horns that played a rhythm-and-blues style influenced by big-band swing and electric blues. Saxophonist/ vocalist Louis Jordan was a key performer in this style.

rockabilly According to Carl Perkins, a country take on rhythm and blues, performed mainly by white Southerners, that combined elements of country music with rock and roll. Rockabilly was most popular in the mid fifties.

2–2 The Range of Rhythm and Blues

Like "race records," "rhythm and blues" came into use as a marketing term: it identified music made by black musicians mainly for a black audience. Jerry Wexler's label implied that this new black music was a family of styles. Indeed, "rhythm and blues" embraced far more than basic blues and music with a big beat. Among the most important developments in rhythm and blues during the decade that followed World War II were:

- Up-tempo good-time blues styles with a strong beat and/or backbeat
- Electric blues, a transformation of **country blues** through the use of amplified guitar and the addition of a **rhythm section**
- The incorporation of Latin rhythms and instruments
- A new black pop style, shaped by a long history of pop and **gospel** vocal groups

These trends were like colors on an artist's palette; they could be mixed together in countless ways. For example, Latin-tinged rhythm and blues included such diverse examples as Professor Longhair's "**Tipitina**," Ruth Brown's "**Mambo Baby**" (a No. 1 R&B hit for her in 1954), and **Bo Diddley**'s "Bo Diddley." We sample music from all of these sources, beginning with music that put a lot of rhythm in rhythm and blues.

country blues A family of African American folk blues styles that flourished in the rural South. Country blues differs from commercial blues mainly in its accompanying instrument-usually acoustic guitar-and its tendency toward less regular forms.

rhythm section The part of a musical group that supplies the rhythmic and harmonic foundation of a performance. Usually includes at least one chord instrument (guitar, piano, or key-board), a bass instrument, and a percussion instrument (typically the drum set).

gospel A family of religious music styles: there is white and black gospel music. Black gospel music has had the more profound influence on popular music by far. Created around 1930 by Thomas Dorsey and others, gospel has influenced popular singing, especially rhythm and blues, since the early 1950s.

2–3 Jump Bands

Jump bands stripped down and souped up the sound of big-band **swing**. They kept the rhythm section but reduced the horn sections drastically, paring down three full sections to a couple of saxophones and a trumpet. Often, they strengthened the beat by converting the four-beat swing rhythm to a shuffle. They built songs on repeated **riffs**, usually over a blues or blues-based form. The songs typically took a medium **tempo** because shuffle rhythm put the more frenetic swing tempos out of reach. Jump bands also emphasized singing more than swing had. The vocalist was the key figure in the group, and the lyrics typically told a funny story or allowed the singer to brag a little, or both. A blend of **hokum**, boogie-woogie, and big-band swing, jump band music was different from all of them.

"**Choo Choo Ch'Boogie**" was a big hit in 1946 for Louis Jordan and His Tympany Five. Louis Jordan (1908–1975) first made his mark as a saxophonist in Chick Webb's fine swing band. He played for Webb from 1936 through 1938, then formed his own smaller group a year later. Unlike many later rhythm-and-blues artists, Jordan got a record deal with a major label, Decca, with whom he signed a contract in 1939. This undoubtedly helped build his audience.

The song begins with the pianist laying down a boogie-woogie bass while the horns play a simple riff. The first part of Jordan's vocal is a series of six short phrases, all of which rhyme and all of which develop from a simple repeated riff. Although the words happen over a blues harmonic progression, they do not follow the standard **form** of the blues lyric. Instead, they serve as a storytelling verse to the catchy **chorus** that follows. The theme, of course, is life on the railroad—certainly a common topic for songs of that era. (Note the reference to "ballin' the jack," that is, getting the train moving.) As with "Maybellene" (**Chapter 1**), "Choo Choo Ch'Boogie" adapts the conventional blues form to a **verse/chorus** pattern; the hook of the chorus provides an easy point of entry into the song.

swing Rhythmic play over a four-beat rhythm

In a jump band like Louis Jordan and His Tympany Five, the roles of the musicians are clearly defined: the bass walks; the drummer plays a shuffle beat; the guitar and/or the piano also helps keep the beat—the pianist may also play fills and solo; the saxophone honks riffs, either behind the vocalist, in response to him, or in a solo; and the other horns join the sax in creating harmonized response riffs. There is a clear hierarchy.

The tone of the lyric is humorous and self-deprecating; we sense that the "I" in the song is a happy-go-lucky kind of fellow. (The wanderer has pretty much disappeared from our twenty-first-century lives, but even in the decade after World War II, hoboes—men who "rode the rails" from place to place [stowed away on trains], working odd jobs in exchange for food, a roof, and maybe a little cash, or simply begging—were more common. Their mystique, a holdover from the Great Depression, was still powerful.) The music—with its bouncy shuffle beat, catchy riffs (not only in the vocal parts but also in both the piano and the sax solos), and pleasant vocal style—helps capture the mood of the lyric.

This became the formula for Jordan and many of the jump bands that followed him. One reason for the increasing appeal of these songs, to black Americans and gradually to whites as well, was the easy points of entry: upbeat lyrics; repeated riffs, either sung or played on a honking saxophone; a clear beat, usually in a shuffle rhythm; and a chorus-based form.

hokum An upbeat blues style that emerged between the first and second world wars.

form The organization of a musical work in time.

chorus (1) A large singing group. (2) In verse/chorus and rock songs, that part of a song in which both melody and lyrics are repeated. (3) In blues and Tin Pan Alley songs, one statement of the melody.

2–4 Big-Beat Rhythm and Blues

During the early fifties, rhythm and blues became more rhythmic. Three widespread changes often coordinated to make the rhythm more prominent and impactful:

- Use of an amplified guitar
- More rhythmic activity moving faster than the beat
- A stronger backbeat

Each expressed in a different way the drive to shift the balance toward rhythm. The use of amplified guitar was key, even though other instruments weren't amplified. Guitarists typically conveyed both rhythm and **harmony** by playing repeated patterns that outline **chords** and reinforce the distinctive rhythm of the underlying template, which was usually a shuffle rhythm. In addition, the increased volume level of the guitar effectively compelled the other rhythm instruments—especially drums and piano—to play more loudly.

Pianists often responded by playing rapid repeated chords in a **triplet** rhythm. As used in R&B, triplets divide each **beat** into three equal parts. Triplets align with the shuffle rhythm: the first two notes of the triplet in each beat sound with the "long" part of the long/short shuffle pattern, while the third triplet sounds with the "short" part of the shuffle rhythm. We hear examples of all three rhythmic features in two enduring songs from the early fifties, Jackie Brenston's "Rocket 88" and Joe Turner's "**Shake, Rattle and Roll**."

Jackie Brenston's "Rocket 88" (1951) was a big rhythm-and-blues hit with a big beat. Although Brenston (1930–1979) was the singer on this date, it was the band of pianist Ike Turner (1931–2007) that Brenston fronted, and the most distinctive sound on this recording is Willie Kizart's distorted guitar, not Brenston's singing. The story of how it found its way onto a record is the stuff of rock-and-roll legend.

According to most accounts of the making of this record, the band was driving from Mississippi to Memphis, with their instruments strapped on top of the car.

verse/chorus The most popular song form of the late nineteenth century. The verse tells a story in several stages (this section is strophic, i.e., different words are set to the same melody), whereas the chorus, which comes at the end of each verse, repeats both words and melody to reinforce the main message of the song. In early verse/chorus songs, the chorus was often sung by a small group, usually a quartet.

harmony Chords and the study of chord progressions.

triplet Rhythmic pattern that divides each beat into three equal parts

At some point, the guitar amp fell off, or was dropped, and the speaker cone was torn. As a result, the guitar produced a heavily distorted sound, even after Kizart had stuffed it with paper. When recording engineer Sam Phillips heard it, he decided to make an asset out of a perceived liability, so he made the guitar line, which simply adapts a shuffle-style boogie-woogie left hand on the guitar, stand out.

Both the distortion and the relative prominence of the guitar were novel features of this recording—these are the elements that have earned "Rocket 88" so many nominations as "the first" rock-and-roll record. From our perspective, "Rocket 88" wasn't the first rock-and-roll record, because the beat is a shuffle rhythm, not the distinctive rock rhythm heard first in the songs of Chuck Berry and Little Richard. Still, the distortion and the central place of the guitar in the overall sound certainly anticipate key features of rock style.

So does the prominence of the rhythm: Kizart's relentless pattern outlines the shuffle rhythm at a medium fast tempo, and Turner's occasional triplets inject a jolt of energy. The sax riffs also reinforce the driving rhythm.

Joe Turner (1911–1985), commonly identified as "Big" Joe Turner because of his girth, grew up in Kansas City, Missouri, which was a wide-open city and a major center for jazz and blues during the thirties. During the forties, Turner's career gathered momentum; he became a popular R&B recording artist, hopping from one independent label to the next. His career peaked in the mid-fifties: "Shake, Rattle and Roll" topped the R&B charts in 1954. Perhaps because of its lyrics, Turner's version never crossed over to the pop charts; a **cover version** by Bill Haley with some less suggestive lyrics reached No. 7 that same year.

cover version
Recording of a song by an act other than the first to record it

Among the most distinctive musical features of "Shake, Rattle and Roll" is the heavy backbeat. The drummer's sharp rap on the snare drum, reinforced periodically by Turner's clapping, make it the most prominent rhythmic feature of the recording: Upbeat rhythm-and-blues songs like "Shake, Rattle and Roll" were the direct source of the heavy backbeat that is such an important component of rock rhythm. The two songs also exemplify two common musical features of swing-derived rhythm and blues: blues form and honking saxophone solos.

2–4a Blues Progression

Blues can be a *feeling*: music to convey sadness, or music to chase the blues away, like the two examples here. Blues can be a *style* of singing and playing, as we heard in these two songs, the next two, and several earlier examples.

Blues can also be a *form*, a consistent way of organizing music in time. The key musical element in blues form is a blues progression, a series of chords in a well-established sequence. The three chords are generally referred to as the I, IV, and V chords. (The Roman numerals indicate chords built on the first, fourth and fifth notes of a major scale.)

12-bar blues form (so called because one statement of the form lasts twelve **measures**) consists of three four-measure phrases, in this sequence:

- The first phrase begins on the I chord and typically stays on it through the phrase
- The second phrase begins on the IV chord and returns to the I chord halfway through
- The third phrase begins on the V chord; it also arrives back on the I chord halfway through

Thus, each phrase *begins* on a different chord and *returns* to the I chord halfway through. Within this harmonic framework, there is ample opportunity for variation,

as we will discover. But the six chords, each falling on odd-numbered bars, serve as milestones through each statement of the form.

Both "Rocket 88" and "Shake, Rattle, and Roll" use blues form. In "Rocket 88," Kizart's guitar pattern clearly outlines the three chords in the conventional sequence. This is the blues progression in its most basic form, clearly stated. "Shake, Rattle, and Roll" uses the same basic version, but the chords are not as prominent.

2–4b Honking Saxophones

Rhythmic rhythm-and-blues bands were as consistent in their approach to **instrumentation** as they were in their approach to rhythm and harmony. "Rocket 88" is typical: the band behind Jackie Brenston consists of a full early-fifties-style rhythm section—electric guitar, piano, bass, and drums—plus two saxophones, one of which takes an extended solo. Turner's backup band is similar: a complete rhythm section, but without a guitar, plus a pair of saxophones. In a fifties rhythm-and-blues song we expect to hear bands with a rhythm section and at least one saxophone; the saxophone will usually be a solo instrument as well as an accompanying instrument; and both accompaniments and solo passages will feature repeated riffs. This instrumental arrangement would morph into the **soul** bands of the sixties and the **funk** bands of the seventies and early eighties.

instrumentation Literally, the instruments chosen to perform a particular score; broadly, the instrumental and vocal accompaniment for a recording.

soul A term used widely in the 1960s by both white and black Americans to describe popular music by African Americans, particularly music, like that of James Brown, marginally influenced by pop or white rock styles.

funk An R&B-derived style that developed in the 1970s, primarily under the guidance of George Clinton. It is character-ized mainly by dense textures (bands may include eight or more musicians) and complex, often sixteen-beat rhythms.

2–4c Blues Themes: Cars and Sex

Postwar rhythm and blues positioned itself against mainstream pop in words as well as music. Even as many fifties pop songs gravitated toward the sanitized lyrics reminiscent of contemporary sit-coms (who would say in everyday speech, "Hot-diggity, Dog-diggity, what you do to me?"), R&B lyrics spoke about everyday topics in everyday language—albeit metaphorically if necessary. "Rocket 88" focuses on a favorite subject during the postwar years: cars. "Rocket 88" was inspired by Joe Liggins's 1947 recording, "**Cadillac Boogie**," and it is one link in a chain that passes through Chuck Berry's "**Maybellene**" to the Beach Boys' "**Little Deuce Coupe**." By contrast, Joe Turner's song explores a subject with a long history in the blues: what "rock and roll" referred to before it was a musical **genre**.

The blues has always been a personal music, and there is no more personal subject in secular culture than man–woman relationships. In "Shake, Rattle and Roll," Turner talks about a woman in his life, and it's not pretty: she's lazy, trashy, loose with money and her favors, and diabolical.

The most physically intimate aspect of a relationship is sexual intercourse. In our time, lyrics can and do discuss this explicitly. By contrast, blues lyrics have usually talked about sexual relations indirectly, typically through metaphor. We heard this in Bessie Smith's song: her partner is a "coffee grinder" who's got a brand new grind. In Blind Lemon Jefferson's "**Black Snake Moan**," one of the very early country blues recordings, it's easy to imagine what the black snake is, especially when he sings "black snake crawling in my room/and some pretty mama better come and get this black snake soon." Hokum was a blues genre dedicated to the double entendre; songs like "**It's Tight Like That**" are laced with "wink-wink" lyrics. It was the exceptional bluesman who did not deal with sexual relations in at least one of his songs. In Robert Johnson's "**Terraplane Blues**," the woman is a car; he continues the metaphor when describing intercourse: "when I mash down on your little starter/then your spark plug would give me fire."

The lyrics of many postwar rhythm-and-blues songs continued to explore all aspects of man–woman relationships. On some blues recordings the lyrics were so raunchy that they were not issued commercially (a few circulated as bootleg

genre Stylistic category.

recordings). Others approached the matter implicitly, as in Roy Brown's 1947 classic "**Good Rockin' Tonight**," when he says "I'm gonna hold my baby as tight as I can/ Tonight she'll know I'm a mighty mighty man." Here, the "rockin'" in the title refers to sex, not music. In "Shake, Rattle and Roll," Turner describes foreplay in this line: "I'm like a one-eyed cat peeping in a seafood store." It was a metaphor that eluded not only the censors but apparently the musicians who redid the song: in his cover version, Bill Haley changed some of the lyrics in an effort to clean them up but left that line in.

rap A musical style of the 1980s and beyond characterized by a rhymed text spoken in a heightened voice over a repetitive, mostly rhythmic accompaniment.

What the blues started, **rap** has finished. Rap lyrics can talk about sex in the most explicit terms; some leave nothing to the imagination. It is now possible to discuss sexual matters openly, although recordings must wear the record industry's scarlet letter. But perhaps this freedom has come at a price: the music has lost some of the fun that goes along with describing sexual matters elliptically or metaphorically. The good humor that seems to accompany indirect references to sex is a thread that runs from the earliest blues recordings through rhythm and blues and into rock. It seems to have disappeared in recent years.

2–4d Rhythm and Blues, Rock and Roll, and the Beat

Much of this big-beat music was considered rock and roll, especially when it crossed over to the pop charts and/or was covered by white bands. And many critics and commentators have claimed that "Rocket 88" was the first rock-and-roll record, largely because of the prominent distorted guitar sound. In 1956, these songs and others like them, such as Fats Domino's "**Ain't That a Shame**," would have been labeled "rock and roll." As Domino told an interviewer, "What you call rock and roll is what we've been playing in New Orleans for 15 years." However, if we understand rock and roll as the music that led directly to rock, and agree that the most fundamental and pervasive feature of rock music is its beat, then this strain of rhythm and blues is not rock and roll: these songs and others like them have the wrong beat.

The fascinating aspect regarding the emergence of rock rhythm is that white bands adopted it before black bands. What makes this fascinating is that the impetus for denser and more active rhythms in popular music has come from Afro-centric musical cultures, especially those in the United States, Cuba, and Brazil, and that the beat that would soon distinguish rock and roll from rhythm and blues would come from Little Richard and Chuck Berry. Despite this, the vast majority of black acts retained the four-beat rhythms—either the standard swing beat or the more active shuffle rhythm—of earlier rhythm and blues through the end of the decade, even as white rock-and-roll bands jumped on the rock-beat bandwagon.

2–5 Electric Blues

Attend any of the many blues festivals throughout North America and you will hear band after band take the stage. Most will feature a full rhythm section with one or more electric guitars; horns are optional. For most contemporary listeners, this is the sound of the blues: the classic blues style that has remained largely unchanged for over half a century. The sounds of these bands are unlike the blues of the twenties and thirties, and it is different from the rhythm and blues that we have just heard. It came together in the early fifties, when **deep blues** moved north from Mississippi to Chicago and went electric.

deep blues Early acoustic blues originating from the Missis-sippi and surrounding areas.

2–5a Electrifying the Blues

country music A music genre which emerged out of the commercialization, broadcasting, and recording of southern folk music.

The electric guitar, already a staple in **country music** and jazz by the early forties, soon began to find its way into the blues. Muddy Waters began playing electric guitar in 1944, so that he could be heard over the crowd noise in the bars where he performed; others followed suit. At the same time, bluesmen like Waters surrounded themselves with other instrumentalists—another guitarist, a drummer, a bass player, and in Waters's case, Little Walter, the soulful master of the harmonica. This new sound has been called electric blues; now it is just the blues.

Electric blues came of age in the fifties. It completed its transformation from a rural to an urban music and its migration from the juke joints and street corners of Mississippi to the bars of Chicago's South Side. Blues kept its soul through the journey, in the music of bluesmen like Muddy Waters and Elmore James.

Muddy Waters

Muddy Waters (born McKinley Morganfield, 1915–1983), grew up in Clarksdale, Mississippi, the northwest part of the state in the heart of what is called the Delta region. The population was mostly black, and for the vast majority, life was brutal. Both males and females worked as sharecroppers, often from childhood; Waters was a farm laborer as a boy. Some men made a little more money working as stevedores loading riverboats along the Mississippi, but there too, the days were long, the work hard, and the pay meager. Most lived at subsistence level, trapped in an unending cycle of economic dependence. From this harsh and isolated environment came what Robert Palmer called deep blues, a powerful music that gave expression to, and release from, the brutal conditions of the Delta.

Waters heard this music while he was growing up and began to play it in his teens. He started on the harmonica, then took up the guitar, because, "You see, I was digging Son House and Robert Johnson." By his late 20s, Waters had become a popular performer in the region.

Like many other southern blacks, Waters moved north during World War II, settling on Chicago's South Side. He continued to play, first at house parties, then in small bars, and recorded for Columbia in 1946. (The recordings were not released until many years later.) Still, it was not enough to pay the rent, and Waters was working as a truck driver when he approached Aristocrat Records about recording for them.

Muddy Waters's singing and playing retained its earthiness and passion after he moved north; however, he added the power of amplification and a full rhythm section during his first years in Chicago. Both voice and guitar gained a presence not possible with the "man and his guitar" setup of country blues.

"**(I'm Your) Hoochie Coochie Man**," the 1954 recording that was Muddy Waters's biggest hit, epitomizes the fully transformed electric blues style. It retains the essence of country blues in Waters's singing and playing yet creates a far richer and more powerful sound than we heard in Robert Johnson's blues. Blues singer Big Bill Broonzy described Waters's appeal in this way:

> It's real. Muddy's real. See the way he plays guitar? Mississippi style, not the city way. He don't play chords, he don't follow what's written down in the book. He plays notes, all blue notes. Making what he's thinking.

And certainly it is all of a piece: Waters's singing brings Willie Dixon's lyrics to life. It makes the references to love potions and voodoo charms, sexual prowess and special status seem believable. It is easy to conjure up such a world and him

as the hoochie coochie man. That much remained virtually unchanged from the rawest country blues of the twenties and thirties.

The great achievement of electric blues, however, is that everything else that goes on amplifies Waters's message. Instrumental support includes what amounted to Chess Records' house blues band—bassist (and blues songwriter) Willie Dixon, pianist Otis Spann, and drummer Fred Below—plus guitarist Jimmy Rogers and harmonica player Little Walter, Waters's musical alter ego. Together they weave a dense musical fabric out of riffs and repeated rhythms.

textures The relationship of the parts in a musical performance.

The song alternates between two **textures**: the stoptime of the opening (an enormous expansion of the first four bars of the standard 12-bar blues form), where an instrumental riff periodically punctuates Waters's vocal line, and the free-for-all of the refrain-like finish of each chorus. The stop-time opening contains two competing riffs—one played by the harmonica, the other by the electric guitar. In the refrain, everybody plays—harmonica trills; guitar riffs; piano chords, either lazy Fats Domino–style triplets or on speed; thumping bass; shuffle pattern on the drums—all are woven together with Muddy's singing.

These different melodic and rhythmic strands are an important part of the mix, but none is capable of standing alone. This kind of dense texture, with independent but interdependent lines, was almost unprecedented in small-group music before rock. The closest parallel would be early **New Orleans jazz** band recordings, such as those by King Oliver. And it works. No one gets in anyone else's way. There is no stylistic inconsistency, as is so often the case when country blues singing is mixed with horns or strings.

New Orleans jazz Style of jazz performance based on the early bands that performed in and around New Orleans; revived in the late 1940s, it is based on collective improvisa-tion and quick tempos. The front-line instruments usually include cornet or trumpet, clarinet, and trombone, with a rhythm section usually including banjo, tuba, and sometimes piano. Also called Dixieland jazz.

The electric blues of the fifties also brought nastier guitar sounds into popular music. The distorted guitar in "Rocket 88" may have been an accident, but the overdriven guitar sounds that jumped off numerous blues records were intentional. Almost as soon as they went electric, blues guitarists began to experiment with distortion in order to get a guitar sound that paralleled the rawness of singers like Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf. Among the leaders in this direction were Buddy Guy and Elmore James, both based in Chicago through much of the fifties.

Like Waters, Elmore James (1918–1963) came from the Mississippi Delta, but at the southern fringe—closer to Jackson than Clarksdale. Also like Waters, he connected with established Delta bluesmen like Robert Johnson; while in his teens, he began touring with Sonny Boy Williamson. After a three-year tour of duty with the Navy in World War II, he returned to Mississippi and worked during the day as a radio repairman and in the evenings as a musician. He would leave for Chicago in 1951, shortly after recording his top-ten R&B hit song, "**Dust My Broom**."

"Dust My Broom" is a remake of Robert Johnson's 1936 recording "**I Believe I'll Dust My Broom**." A comparison of the two versions shows how amplification of the guitar and its reverberation through the rest of the band transformed the deep blues of the thirties into the classic electric blues sound of the fifties. James preserves the two key elements of Johnson's guitar playing, the familiar shuffle-style accompanying pattern and the triplet chords that he uses to respond to the vocal phrases. Still, he is just a man with one (acoustic) guitar: skilled but constrained by having to handle both accompaniment and responses.

amplifier A piece of equipment that can increase the strength of an electric signal.

That's not a problem for James, who is backed by a band with a full rhythm section, including another guitarist playing the shuffle pattern and a drummer rapping out the backbeat along with the rhythm. James opens the song with his signature slide guitar triplets. James apparently used his electronics skills to tweak the sound of his **amplifier** to give his guitar a nastier, more distorted sound. His solo playing is the seminal slide guitar style on an amplified instrument. Electric guitarists playing slide style trace the roots of their approach back to this recording.

Early electric blues is a crucially important stage in the transformation of Delta blues into rock guitar playing. Both Johnson and James sing and play in a gritty, deeply felt style, but by amplifying the guitar and supporting it with strong, more active rhythms, the sound is far more forceful.

In the music of Waters and other like-minded Chicago bluesmen, electric blues found its groove during the fifties. By the end of the decade, it had evolved into its classic sound, which it has retained to this day. Its most consistent features include:

- Regular blues form (or an easily recognized variant of it)
- Rough-edged vocals
- Vocal-like responses and solos from the lead guitar or harmonica
- A dense texture, with several instruments playing melody-like lines behind the singer
- A rhythm section laying down a strong beat, usually some form of the shuffle rhythm popularized in forties rhythm and blues

During this time, its stars attracted a loyal following, mostly in the black community. Records by Muddy Waters, B. B. King, Howlin' Wolf, Lowell Fulson, Elmore James, and Bobby Bland consistently found their way onto the R&B charts. They were not as well-known as the pop-oriented groups, but far better known—within and outside the black community—than their country kin from previous generations.

2–5b From Electric Blues to Rock

What electric blues gave to rock came in two installments. The first arrived in the mid-fifties, when Chuck Berry adapted the basic blues band instrumentation—prominent lead guitar, second chord instrument, piano, bass, and drums—to his influential brand of rock and roll.

The second arrived a decade later, when rock musicians dipped deeply into the blues. The Rolling Stones took their name from a 1950 Muddy Waters recording. Rock musicians adapted the blues attitude, as expressed in words and music. The Stones covered Muddy Waters's "**I Can't Be Satisfied**," then reworked it into "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction" (even though the story behind the title came out differently). Bluesmen like Howlin' Wolf inspired the onstage persona and singing of Jagger and countless others.

Rock also took its dense texture most directly from electric blues and found inspiration in the sounds of blues guitarists. The sounds of the Rolling Stones, the Who, Jimi Hendrix, Eric Clapton, and other major sixties acts have deep blues roots.

Although it was innovative and influential in many other ways, electric blues was certainly in the R&B rhythmic mainstream. The tempos were slower, but the shuffle rhythm heard in so many jump band recordings was also the mainstay of electric blues.

2–6 The Latin Tinge

During the first half of the twentieth century, what was called Latin music infiltrated popular music in America in three waves. The first was the tango, an Argentine dance that was enormously popular during the 1910s. In 1930, Don Azpiazú, a white Cuban bandleader leading black musicians, had a surprise hit with a song entitled "El Manisero" ("**The Peanut Vendor**"). The song introduced Afro-Cuban rhythm and instruments to American audiences and sparked a new dance craze, the rumba, prompting many **Tin Pan Alley** songwriters to write Latin songs.

Tin Pan Alley A nickname for a section of East 28th Street in New York City, where many music publishers had their offices. Also, the styles of the songs created in the first half of the century for these publishers: a Tin Pan Alley song refers to songs by Irving Berlin, George Gershwin, and their contemporaries.

mambo First twentieth-century Latin dance fads to develop on American soil; it merged authentic Afro-Cuban *son* with big-band horns and riffs

The final pre-rock Afro-Cuban dance fad was the **mambo**. Unlike earlier Latin dance fads, the mambo was homegrown, not imported; it was developed during the early forties in uptown New York. Latin musicians, some of whom had worked in the swing bands, cross-bred big-band swing with Latin rhythms and percussion instruments and came up with a hot new dance music. By the late forties, non-Latins were filling up ballrooms. The mambo craze peaked in the fifties. By the end of the decade, the much simpler cha-cha-chá had become the Latin dance of choice.

2–6a Clave Rhythm

The most characteristic feature of Afro-Cuban rhythm is the clave pattern. Clave is to Afro-Cuban rhythm what the backbeat is to American dance rhythms: its most elemental feature and main point of reference. Playing in clave is to Afro-Cuban music what rocking is to rock or swinging is to swing. In stylistically authentic Cuban music, other rhythms conform to clave or react against it in a specific way.

clave rhythm The characteristic rhythm of Afro-Cuban music. It can be represented as: //X x x X x x X x // x x X x X x x x //. The x's indicate an eight-beat rhythm; X's are accented notes. To create a reverse clave rhythm, switch the two measures.

The asymmetrical nature of **clave rhythm** highlights the fundamental difference between Afro-Cuban rhythm and the black rhythms heard in jazz, blues, and popular song. In American black rhythms the beat is typically marked with an instrument such as a walking bass or a strummed guitar. In Afro-Cuban music, the attention is on the faster rhythms and the clave pattern; the beat is felt but not kept by any particular instrument.

However, American musicians, black and white, most often reinterpreted Afro-Cuban rhythm in terms of their own experience. Almost always, they preserved the even division of the beat into two equal parts and typically added elements of the clave pattern and extra percussion instruments to give their music a Latin flavor.

Some of the Latin-influenced music of the early rock era came from New Orleans, where it was blended with the blues. However, much of the more familiar Latin-tinged R&B derived from the Americanized Latin music popular during the fifties: Ruth Brown's "Mambo Baby" was a No. 1 R&B hit in 1954 and other rhythm-and-blues acts, most notably Ray Charles, featured at least one Latin number in their sets. However, the most overt and distinctive merging of Afro-Cuban rhythm and rhythm and blues during the fifties seems to come out of nowhere.

2–6b The Bo Diddley Beat

The nature of the connection between clave rhythm and Bo Diddley's famous beat is just one of several unanswered questions about one of the most fascinating musicians of the rock era. The questions begin with his name. He was born in McComb, Mississippi, in 1928. His father's name was Bates, but he was adopted by a relative, Gussie McDaniel; by most accounts, his real name is Elias McDaniel. In the mid-thirties, the McDaniels family moved to Chicago and settled on the South Side. Like many other black performers (such as the bluesmen Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf) he acquired a stage persona, but he claims it came from his schoolmates. As he tells it, students started calling him "Bo Diddley" during his teens and it stuck. (Given McDaniel's Mississippi roots, the name would seem to connect to the diddley bow, a homemade instrument popular in the deep South. However, there is no evidence of such a connection.)

There are musical questions as well. How do we reconcile the extent of his influence with his lack of commercial success? In his fifty-year career, he has had only a few R&B hits and only one Top 40 hit—"Say Man," which reached 20 in 1959. Yet he is, without question, a rock icon; among his many distinctions, he was a second-year inductee into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame (1987). And he is a celebrity: he returned to the spotlight in the nineties in a famous commercial with Bo Jackson.

There is one aspect of his music about which there is no question: his interest in rhythm. Bo Diddley was fascinated by rhythms and percussion. (The story goes that he added maracas to his street-corner band because he wanted a percussive sound but didn't want to lug a drum set around town. Still, he kept the maracas when he added drums.) Not surprisingly, then, his most important and memorable contribution to popular music is not a song but a beat—the Bo Diddley beat—which appears in the aptly titled 1955 song "Bo Diddley," the first of his R&B hits.

The source of the Bo Diddley beat is the biggest question of all. Although the Bo Diddley beat is virtually identical to the clave pattern, there is no clear connection between the two. We can infer that his famous beat may well have come from a long-standing African American tradition. The practice of beating out rhythms on one's body dates back to slavery; slaves could not make or play percussion instruments, so they used their body. The practice was called patting juba; one such rhythm was apparently the hambone rhythm. Whether there is a link between the rhythm as it was heard in the American South and Cuban rhythm is an open question: keep in mind that New Orleans is close to the Delta and also the original gateway for Cuban music into the United States.

Provenance of the Bo Diddley beat aside, the song "Bo Diddley" focuses on rhythm. It consists mainly of riff-like vocal fragments alternating with the Bo Diddley rhythm, played on guitar and drums. All of this happens over one chord. The lyric is true stream of consciousness: diamond rings, private eyes, animals slaughtered for Sunday clothes, now-you-see-them-now-you-don't people; there is no story. In this respect, it is a grown-up version of a child's song, and it is Bo Diddley's rhythmic take on the one-chord Delta blues style. Rhythms and chords provide a continuing undercurrent to a repetitious, sing-song melody. Even in an era of genuine novelty, Bo Diddley's music stands apart.

2–6c Latin Music and R&B

Recall that Afro-Cuban rhythms and rock rhythm both divide the beat into two equal parts. However, the rhythmic foundation of Afro-Cuban rhythm is more complex than the rhythmic foundation of rock. Its basic texture is richer, yet more open, and the beat is marked less explicitly than in rock and roll. When black music eventually assimilated rock rhythm around 1960, it often gravitated to more Latin rhythmic textures, instead of simply aping the prevailing rock style. Afro-Cuban influence is apparent in both the more "open" sound of the **Motown** songs and the new rhythmic approach that James Brown announced in "**Papa's Got a Brand New Bag**" (1965). Indeed, both occasionally used the clave pattern (for instance, the Miracles' "**Mickey's Monkey**" and Brown's "**Get It Together**").

Motown A set of stylistic features heard in sixties Motown recordings: melodic saturation, a good mellow beat, a broad spectrum of sound and a predictable format.

The frequent use of Latin percussion instruments (conga, bongos, and others), especially in Motown recordings, provides additional evidence of Afro-Cuban influence. The rhythms of black music from the mid-sixties on are generally more intricate, complex, and active than those heard in the music of white rock bands. Afro-Cuban music was not the sole source of these new rhythms, but its influence—however indirect—was certainly significant, even though it is generally not acknowledged.

doo-wop A pop-oriented R&B genre that typically featured remakes of popular standards or pop-style originals sung by black vocal groups. Doo-wop died out in the early 1960s with the rise of the girl groups and Motown.

2–7 Doo-Wop: R&B Pop

"Life could be a dream, life could be a dream"; "doo, doo, doo, doo, sh-boom." The first part of the lyric is typical of the romantic pop of the era, the second is the signature of **doo-wop**, the most popular kind of fifties rhythm and blues. As the song unfolds, the lyric alternates between explaining why life could be a dream and

nonsense syllables like "hey, nonny ding dong, shalang alang alang." "Sh-boom" returns regularly between phrases of the lyric; it is like a gentle prod that keeps the rhythmic momentum going. Periodically, an entire phrase of nonverbal sounds interrupts the romantic scene unfolding in the rest of the lyric, and the nonverbal sounds from the introduction also serve as the vocal part behind the saxophone solo. Significantly, the title of the song comes from one of these nonsense syllables, not from the first phrase of the lyric.

The function of the nonsense syllables is to inject rhythmic energy into the song. The syllables are typically rich in consonant sounds that explode ("*b*") or sustain ("*sh*" or "*m*"). In the "sh-boom" type parts of the song, the voices become instruments. They are not percussive instruments per se, because they have **pitch**, but the vocal sounds have a percussive quality, like the plucking of a string bass or the slapping of an electric bass.

pitch The relative highness or lowness of a musical sound, determined by the frequency with which it vibrates.

The practice of using the voice to imitate instruments, especially percussive-sounding instruments, is a distinctively black practice. In jazz, the practice is called scat singing. The first familiar examples come from Louis Armstrong's late-twenties recordings; there is no difference in conception between Armstrong the trumpeter and Armstrong the vocalist. Armstrong's vocalizations influenced black performers like Cab Calloway, famous as the "hi-de-ho" man. ("Hi-de-ho" were nonsense syllables woven into his account of "**Minnie the Moocher**," a big hit for him in 1931; the parallel with "Sh-boom" should be clear!) Scat singing gave be-bop (later shortened to **bop**), the new jazz sound of the forties, its name ("be-bop" are the syllables that end a scatted stream of notes). Male gospel quartets were a more direct influence. Most sang *a cappella* (that is, without instrumental accompaniment), so backup vocal parts often assumed a rhythmic as well as a harmonic role.

bop A jazz style that developed in the 1940s, characterized by fast tempos, irregular streams of notes, and considerable rhythmic conflict.

The practice became part of the sound of rhythm and blues in the forties, in such hit songs as Lionel Hampton's "**Hey! Ba-Ba-Re-Bop**" and "Stick" McGhee's "**Drinking Wine Spo-Dee-O-Dee**." With doo-wop the practice became so integral to the music that it gave the style its name. The term doo-wop—borrowed from songs that used the phrase—was applied retrospectively to this music to acknowledge its most salient feature.

2–7a Doo-Wop and Black Singing Groups

Group singing by blacks has a history in sound that extends back to the nineteenth century: there are recordings by vocal groups such the Unique Quartet, the Oriole Quartette, and the Standard Quartette from as early as 1893. These are among the earliest recordings by black performers. Such groups sang a little of everything, from **minstrel-show** routines to sacred songs.

minstrel-show A form of stage entertainment distinguished by cruel parodies of African Americans. Minstrelsy was popular from the early 1840s to the end of the nineteenth century.

The first black vocal group to enjoy widespread popular success was the Mills Brothers, who charted regularly from the mid-thirties. Other black vocal groups followed in their wake, most notably the Ink Spots. These groups sang in a smooth pop style quite different from the gospel male quartets active around the same time.

2–7b Early Doo-Wop

After World War II, pop, gospel, and rhythm and blues came together in a new family of styles that featured male or mostly male singing groups. The styles ranged from gospel-tinged pop ideally suited for slow dancing, to up-tempo numbers and novelty songs. The common threads seem to be the gospel and pop influences (the male gospel quartets and pop vocal groups like the Mills Brothers) and the names, which identify the groups as a unit: the Platters, the Penguins, the Cadillacs, the

Drifters, and countless others. The first recordings of these new sounds appeared in the late forties, many by "bird" groups such as the Ravens and the Orioles.

The Orioles' 1953 hit, "**Crying in the Chapel**," blazed the trail. Its history highlights the blurred genre boundaries in the early rock era: "Crying in the Chapel" was a country song that crossed over to the pop charts, which was then covered by an R&B group whose version also made the pop charts!

2–7c "Sh-Boom," the First Crossover Hit

The breakthrough hit "**Sh-Boom**" came the following year. The original R&B version by the Chords hit both pop and rhythm-and-blues charts the same week: July 3, 1954. The Chords' eye toward the pop charts is clearly evident in "Sh-Boom": it's a blend of "jump band lite" and pre-rock pop. From the jump band it took the shuffle rhythm and instrumentation: rhythm section plus saxophone. But the beat is discreet—very much in the background—and the good saxophone solo straddles the boundary between jazz and honking R&B. Moreover, the song is not a blues, but a pop song in form, if not style.

The song focuses on the voices; the instrumental accompaniment is very much in the background. The Chords' sound is typical: a lead singer (Carl Feaster) with a pleasant but untrained voice, plus four backup singers, including the requisite bass voice (William "Ricky" Edwards), who steps into the spotlight briefly. When singing behind Feaster, the backup singers alternate between sustained chords and the occasional rhythmic interjection—"Sh-boom." And during the saxophone solo, the singers' nonverbal sounds from the introduction mimic the backup riffs behind a soloist in a swing-era **big band**.

big band Swing-era or swing-style music performed by a big band.

The Chords' song exemplified another phenomenon of the early rock era: the one-hit wonder. The Chords recorded on Cat Records, an obscure subsidiary of Atlantic Records; the company released only eighteen discs. This is undoubtedly one reason the group never reached either the pop or R&B charts again. Another factor was their frequent name-changing. After "Sh-Boom" hit, they discovered that another group already owned the name, so they became the Chordcats, then the Sh-Booms. Neither name worked for them, although they remained active as the Sh-Booms through the mid-sixties.

2–7d "Heart and Soul" Songs

Most of the songs sung and recorded by doo-wop groups were either pre-rock pop "standards" (a **standard** is a pop song that has retained its popularity) or newly composed songs that used modern-era popular songs—and one song in particular—as a model. The song most associated with doo-wop is "**Heart and Soul**," a 1938 song written by Frank Loesser and Hoagy Carmichael. The song was important to doo-wop not because it was recorded frequently—the first doo-wop style recording of the song, by the Cleftones, wasn't released until 1961—but because so many songs copied its harmony. It's heard not only in "Sh-Boom" but also "Earth Angel," another big crossover hit in 1954, and numerous other songs, including "You Send Me," discussed in **Chapter 4**.

standard A song that remains popular well after its initial appearance; songs that live on in recordings, films, and live performances.

A sizable majority of the pop songs written between 1925 and 1945 used what was called AABA form. A is an eight-measure section that ends with a musical punctuation of some kind. The other two A phrases are always at least quite similar and occasionally identical. The B section is contrasting, and open-ended, because it leads back to the final statement. This form, and the harmony that helps define it, served as a template for numerous doo-wop songs during the fifties.

Underpinning each A section in "Sh-Boom" is a four-chord progression that repeats four times. Three of the four chords are the same as those used in the blues

progression, but the rate of chord change is faster and more regular. This sequence of chords dates back centuries: for Mozart and his contemporaries, it was the grammar of the musical language that they used. However, as used in doo-wop songs, these same progressions represent a transition to a different understanding of the role of harmony. By cycling through a series of chords several with an unvarying rhythm, the progressions anticipate harmonic practice later rock-era rock and pop, and especially twenty-first century pop. It has been common practice in much recent popular music to support the **melody** with cycling chords that remain virtually unchanged for an entire section, or even the complete track. And the "Heart and Soul" progression lives on, in songs like Justin Bieber's 2010 hit "**Baby**."

melody The most musically interesting part of a musical texture. The melody is typically distinguished from other parts by the interest and individuality of its contour and rhythm.

"Earth Angel" and the Doo-wop Pop Ballad

"**Earth Angel**," another enduring crossover hit from 1954, blended old (Tin Pan Alley–style melody, harmony, and form plus a slow four-beat rhythm in bass and drums) and new (triplet rhythm overlay and the refreshingly untutored singing of Cleveland Duncan and the rest of the Penguins). This distinctive mix transformed "Earth Angel" into one of the most recognizable sounds of the fifties.

Although the song as written is a pre-rock pop song in the style of "Heart and Soul," it clearly belongs to the early rock era, for several reasons. Most obvious is the singing style, which is far removed from the pop crooners who dominated the charts during the fifties. Another is the prominent triplet chords in the piano part, which keep the rhythm afloat at the unusually slow tempo. A third is the more melodic role of the backup singers. Unlike the backup singers in "Sh-Boom," whose main responsibilities were to sing the occasion "Sh-Boom" response and harmonize the melody, the backup singers in the Penguins are singing a melody-like line.

This second layer of melody is an early instance of what would become a common feature in much rock-era music: melodic diffusion. Many rock-era genres spread interesting and appealing melodic material over several vocal and instrumental parts, rather than concentrating melodic interest in the lead vocal part. The Marcels' version of "Blue Moon," recorded in 1961 as doo-wop was in decline, is arguably the ultimate example of this practice in doo-wop: the backup vocal line all but overpowers the melody.

2-7e Cover Versions and Commercial Success

Like "Sh-Boom," "**Earth Angel**" was covered by the Crew-Cuts, whose version charted higher than the original. (A cover is a recording of a song by an act other than the first act to record the song.) The notion of a cover version is a rock-era concept; it depends on a recording being understood as the definitive version of a song, and not simply one of many versions of the song.

Many doo-wop songs were, in effect, cover versions—that is, remakes of existing songs—before the idea of covers surfaced. Many of the songs reconceived by the early doo-wop groups were standards that had been around for a while. However, "**Cross Over the Bridge**," like "Crying in the Chapel," was a current hit. In doo-wop at least, song covering was a two-way street. The repertoire that doo-wop groups recorded clearly suggests that they were trying to locate the pop middle ground.

White covers of black songs occurred frequently in the early years of rock and roll. These early cover versions have acquired racial baggage because commentators have viewed them as white acts riding on the coattails of black acts, and enjoying the success that should have gone to the black act. The injustice of covers is not so much a musical issue: the black acts who sang doo-wop were borrowing liberally

from white pop. Instead, it's mainly a financial and racial issue: that blacks did not have easy access to the pop market, that many were naive about the music business and never saw the money that their records made, that the labels that signed and recorded them could not compete with the **majors**, and that white versions sold better than the black originals.

majors Major record labels.

The greatest *musical* injustice evident in white covers of black recordings is bad taste: the pop music establishment superimposing their conception of a sound with mass appeal without any real understanding of what was innovative and meaningful about R&B. Pat Boone's covers of Little Richard's "**Tutti Frutti**" and Fats Domino's "Ain't That a Shame," both of which outsold the originals, are particularly egregious examples of this practice. The musical result was more satisfactory when the white musicians studied and understood the music that they were covering. The recording of "Shake, Rattle and Roll" by Bill Haley is more satisfactory musically because of his stylistic affinity with R&B. And covers were occasionally a springboard to creativity: Buddy Holly's cover of "Bo Diddley" was a precursor to "Not Fade Away."

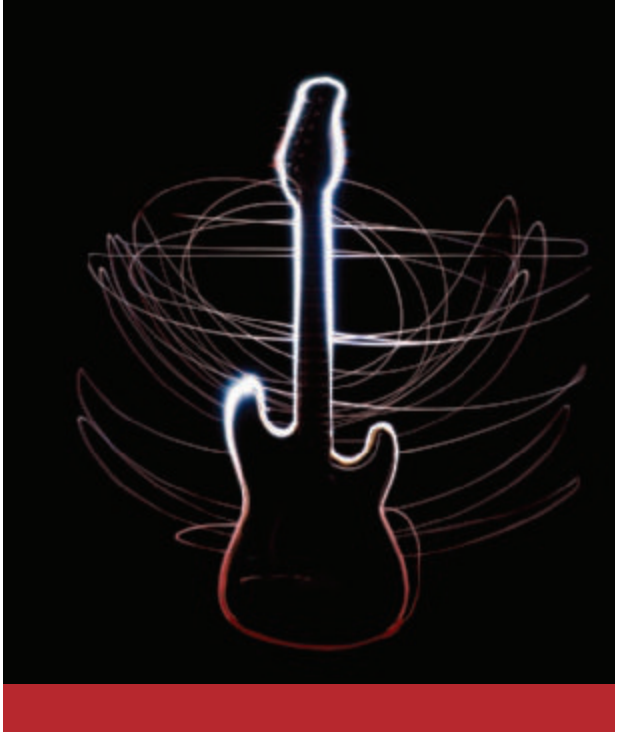
2–8 Rhythm and Blues, 1945–1955

The rhythm and blues that took shape after the end of the war was a group of vigorous and vital new sounds in popular music. The rhythms were more active and aggressive, the sounds louder and often grittier, the riffs more frequent, and the lyrics in blues songs often more direct and down to earth. The contrast with the dominant popular music was striking and substantial. So it was not surprising that doo-wop was the music that helped R&B cross over to the pop market. For whites, doo-wop put a fresh coat of paint on familiar-sounding material. For the majority of white teens who had heard their parents' pop growing up, the familiar elements must have made the music more accessible.

The first decade of rhythm and blues is a body of music whose influence far exceeds its commercial success during the decade it was released. Market presence came only at the end, and then more so in cover versions by white acts than the original versions. Although some of the songs occasionally resurface in cover versions—Death Cab for Cutie released their reconception of "Earth Angel" in 2005!—the legacy has more to do with the styles and their role in shaping the next half-century of popular music. This music did not use rock rhythm, but the strong, active rhythms in so much of it—shuffle rhythm, triplets, prominent backbeat—were an important precursor to rock's most defining feature. Electric blues quickly evolved into its classic style, which numerous blues and boogie bands emulated. Doo-wop was the bridge between pre-rock pop and the new black pop of the sixties. By the time rhythm and blues began to cross over to the pop charts, it had a new name: rock and roll.

CHAPTER 3

ROCK AND ROLL



Learning Objectives:

1) Discuss the difficulty of pinpointing the origin of rock and roll.

2) Compare the musical differences between **rockabilly** and **rhythm and blues**.

3) Audibly identify a **walking** bass line in a musical example.

4) Comment on some of the key musical contributions of Chuck Berry.

5) Contrast the styles of Little Richard and Jerry Lee Lewis.

6) Summarize the developments of early rock and roll through key performers.

Chapter Introduction

In 1986, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Museum in Cleveland, Ohio, admitted its first class of inductees: Chuck Berry, James Brown, Ray Charles, Sam Cooke, Fats Domino, the Everly Brothers, Buddy Holly, Jerry Lee Lewis, Elvis Presley, and Little Richard. Performers become eligible for induction 25 years after the release of their first record. Selection criteria include "the influence and significance of the artist's contributions to the development and perpetuation of rock and roll."

If the complete list of inductees can be used as a reliable guide, rock and roll is, for the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, more or less equivalent to our rock era as an umbrella term for the rock-related music of the last several decades. In this chapter, we describe another more specific understanding of "rock and roll." Our central point of reference will be those artists who will not have been discussed in **chapters 2** and **4**, or—in the case of James Brown—whose most important work would come in the sixties. We look to the music of Chuck Berry, the Everly Brothers, Buddy Holly, Jerry Lee Lewis, Elvis Presley, and Little Richard to lead us to a musical understanding of rock and roll.

The music of these six musicians is the heart and soul of this more time-limited understanding of rock and roll. Although their music represents only a small fraction of the new music of the late fifties, it defines the core and the boundaries of rock and roll, as a style distinct from both pop and rhythm and blues in the fifties, and the rock of the sixties. Rock and roll grew out of rhythm and blues; in the latter part of the fifties, it acquired an increasingly distinct identity. Our primary objective in this chapter is to trace the evolution of rock and roll from its first use as a "cover" label for rhythm and blues to its premature "death" in 1959, by which time it had laid the foundation for sixties rock. We begin in 1951.

3–1 The Beginnings of Rock and Roll

When did rock and roll begin? The answer depends a great deal on the context in which the question is asked. Does it have to do with the term itself? Did rock and roll begin when people labeled rhythm and blues "rock and roll"? Or did it begin when young white singers began covering rhythm-and-blues songs? Or when the media acknowledged a new kind of music and its new stars? Or when what was called "rock and roll" brought new sounds to the pop charts? The answers to all of these questions shed light on the emergence of rock and roll.

3–1a Alan Freed

"Rockin' and rollin'" was originally a euphemism for the sexual act, as we have noted. The expression had been in use on recordings for almost 30 years by the time disc jockey Alan Freed attached "rock and roll" to a musical style. Freed was an early and influential advocate of rhythm and blues. Unlike most of the disc jockeys of the era, he refused to play white cover versions of R&B hits, a practice that gained him respect among black musicians but made him enemies in the business. While broadcasting over WJW in Cleveland in 1951, he began using "rock and roll" as a euphemism of a different kind: through him, the term became a code word among whites for "rhythm and blues."

Freed's "Moondog's Rock and Roll Party" developed a large audience among both whites and blacks, so he took his advocacy of rhythm and blues one step further, into promotion. He put together touring stage shows of rhythm-and-blues artists, which played to integrated audiences. His first big event, the Moondog Coronation Ball, took place in 1952; 25,000 people, the majority of them white, showed up at a facility that could accommodate only a small fraction of that number. The ensuing pandemonium was the first of many "incidents" in Freed's career as a promoter.

Freed linked the term *rock and roll* to rhythm and blues, so it's no wonder that Fats Domino and producer Dave Bartholomew, the mastermind of so many New Orleans R&B hits, commented that rock and roll *was* rhythm and blues. Bartholomew said, undoubtedly with some bitterness, "We had rhythm and blues for many, many a year, and here come in a couple of white people and they call it rock and roll, and it was rhythm and blues all the time!"

In 1954, Freed moved to New York in order to offer his rock-and-roll radio show on WINS. By that year, rock and roll took its first steps toward an identity distinct from rhythm and blues, with white takes on rhythm and blues. In 1954, the best-known example of this was the Crew Cuts' cover of "**Sh-Boom**." However, in Memphis and in small towns in Pennsylvania and neighboring states, rockabilly, a more significant white reinterpretation of R&B, was taking shape.

3–2 Rockabilly

Carl Perkins, perhaps the truest of the rockabilly stars, once explained his music this way: "To begin with . . . rockabilly music, or rock and roll . . . was a country man's song with a black man's rhythm. I just put a little speed into some of the slow blues licks." As Perkins described it, rockabilly was the latest take in a long line of country takes on black music. It continues a trend that began with Jimmie Rodgers's blue yodels, and ran through Bob Wills's **western swing**, and Hank Williams's "moanin' the blues."

western swing A swing style of country music which emerged in the Southwest in the 1930s.

Rockabilly was a state of mind—and body. It was the music of liberation for southern white males: what they danced to on Saturday nights when they wanted to "get real, real gone." As Glenn Gass observed, "Rockabilly was distinctly and proudly southern." Its capital was Memphis, and its capitol building a small storefront located at 706 Union Avenue, where Sam Phillips operated Sun Records. A legion of Johnny B. Goodes, many of whom sang and played with the abandon of black rhythm-and-blues musicians, beat a path to Phillips's door. However, even as southern rockabilly was taking shape in Memphis, other musicians outside the South were following a similar path.

The first big rockabilly hit came from an unlikely source, by way of an unlikely place, and took an unlikely path. Bill Haley (1925–1981), who recorded it, grew up in Pennsylvania listening to the Grand Ole Opry and dreaming of country music stardom. By the late forties he had begun fronting small bands—one was called the Four Aces of Western Swing—and enjoyed some local success. Over the next few years, he began to give his music a bluesier sound and chose—or wrote—songs with teen appeal. "**Crazy, Man, Crazy**" (1953) was his first hit. In 1954, he had some success with a song called "**Rock Around the Clock**"; it reached No. 23 on the pop charts.

A year later, "Rock Around the Clock" resurfaced in the film *The Blackboard Jungle*. The connections among film, song, and performer were tenuous. The film portrays juvenile delinquents in a slum high school, but "Rock Around the Clock" is exuberant rather than angry, and Haley, at almost 30, looks nothing like a rebel. But it was music for and about teens (parents weren't likely to rock around the clock); that was enough for the producers. With the release of the film, the song returned to the charts and skyrocketed to No. 1. It was Haley's big moment. He had a few other minor hits but never repeated his chart-topping success.

"Rock Around the Clock" might be characterized as a lite version of rhythmic R&B: it has the shuffle beat that we associate with so much fifties rhythm and blues, but the tempo is faster, and the beat-keeping is more subtle. The sound is also less aggressive: the vocal style is not as rough, and the instruments play in a higher register; the saxophonist doesn't honk a solo—the electric guitar is the featured instrument. Overall, it's a brighter sound.

"Rock Around the Clock" also takes its form and harmony from rhythm and blues. Like so many songs of the era, it is a 12-bar blues. As in songs like "**It's Tight Like That**," the first four bars function as the verse, and the last eight as the refrain.

While Haley nibbled at the charts, a grittier form of rockabilly was taking shape in Memphis. We encounter it in the music of the performer who would eventually become rock and roll's biggest star.

3–2a Elvis, Sam Phillips, and Rockabilly

In the summer of 1953, a young truck driver named Elvis Presley (1935–1977) walked into the Sam Phillips Recording Service to make a demo record. Phillips wasn't in, so his assistant, Marion Keisker, handled the session. Perhaps to make him feel at ease, she asked him about himself. The conversation went something like this:

Marion: What kind of singer are you?

Elvis: I sing all kinds.

Marion: Who do you sound like?

Elvis: I don't sound like nobody.

Marion: Hillbilly?

Elvis: Yeah, I sing hillbilly.

Marion: Who do you sound like in hillbilly?

Elvis: I don't sound like nobody.

This now-legendary encounter gives us some insight into Elvis's success. Imagine yourself—barely out of high school and with no professional experience—having such a clear sense of who you are and what you can do. Elvis truly didn't sound like anyone else; he was the "white man with the negro feel" that Sam Phillips had been seeking for several years.

Presley recorded his first local hit for Phillips's Sun Records in 1954. The record, a cover of bluesman Arthur Crudup's "**That's All Right**," sparked interest on country-western radio (although some stations wouldn't play it because Elvis sounded too black). Within a year he had reached No. 1 nationally on the country-and-western charts with "**Mystery Train**"—one of Elvis's most enduring early hits. Elvis's Sun sessions are quintessential rockabilly. In Junior Parker's 1953 version—the one Presley covered—"**Mystery Train**" is a boogie-based rhythm-and-blues song; it chugs along at a slow pace underneath Parker's bluesy vocal and the occasional saxophone train whistle. Elvis's version is brighter and more upbeat (recall Perkins's remark), and it uses a more country-style beat. The rhythm section sets a honky-tonk, **two-beat** bass alternating with a heavy backbeat on the electric guitar. But the backbeat is modified with a quick rebound that begins alternately on, then off, the beat. In form, the song is a modified blues; it has the poetic and melodic form of a blues song, but its harmony and phrase length are slightly irregular.

two-beat The division of the measure into two primary beats or accents; the rhythmic basis of the fox trot and other early syncopated instrumental styles.

Elvis's singing is the magical element. In both its basic **timbre** and its variety, his sound is utterly unique—the purest Elvis. It ranges from a plaintive wail on the opening high notes to the often-imitated guttural singing at the end of each chorus. Elvis positions himself not only between country and rhythm and blues, but beyond them. We don't hear the nasal twang so common in country music, nor do we hear the rough-edged sound of a blues singer. Elvis draws on both but sounds like neither ("I don't sound like nobody").

timbre The distinctive tone quality of a voice or an instrument.

The distinctive sound of Elvis's voice is only part of the magic. Just as remarkable is his ability to adapt his sound to suit the material. He can emulate the "high lonesome" sound of **bluegrass** singers like Bill Monroe, or croon when he sings pop songs like "**Harbor Lights**" and "**Blue Moon**." Elvis could evoke almost any style and still sound like himself. Although he didn't play much guitar, he played the radio really well. He was an equal opportunity listener with an insatiable appetite for music, and what he heard he used.

bluegrass An updated version of country's old-time string band music. Bluegrass developed in the late 1940s under the guidance of mandolinist Bill Monroe.

Sam Phillips, Sun Records, and Rockabilly

Elvis was not the only rockabilly artist to get his start at Sam Phillips's Sun Studio. In 1950, while still working as a DJ, Phillips (1923–2003) started his Memphis Recording Service. Initially, he recorded rhythm-and-blues artists like Jackie Brenston and Ike Turner, as well as important Memphis-based bluesmen like B. B. King and Howlin' Wolf. Phillips's studio was by far the best place in the region for black musicians to record. Phillips treated the musicians with respect and approached his work with them imaginatively, as we heard in "**Rocket 88**." Phillips saw the growing market for rhythm and blues from the inside and formed Sun Records after problems with other record companies. He stayed on the lookout for the "white man with the negro feel" until Elvis walked in his door in 1953. In the wake of Elvis's regional success, other top rockabilly acts soon showed up at his studio: Carl Perkins, Jerry Lee Lewis, and somewhat later, Roy Orbison. He also recorded some of the top hard-country acts of the era, including Johnny Cash.