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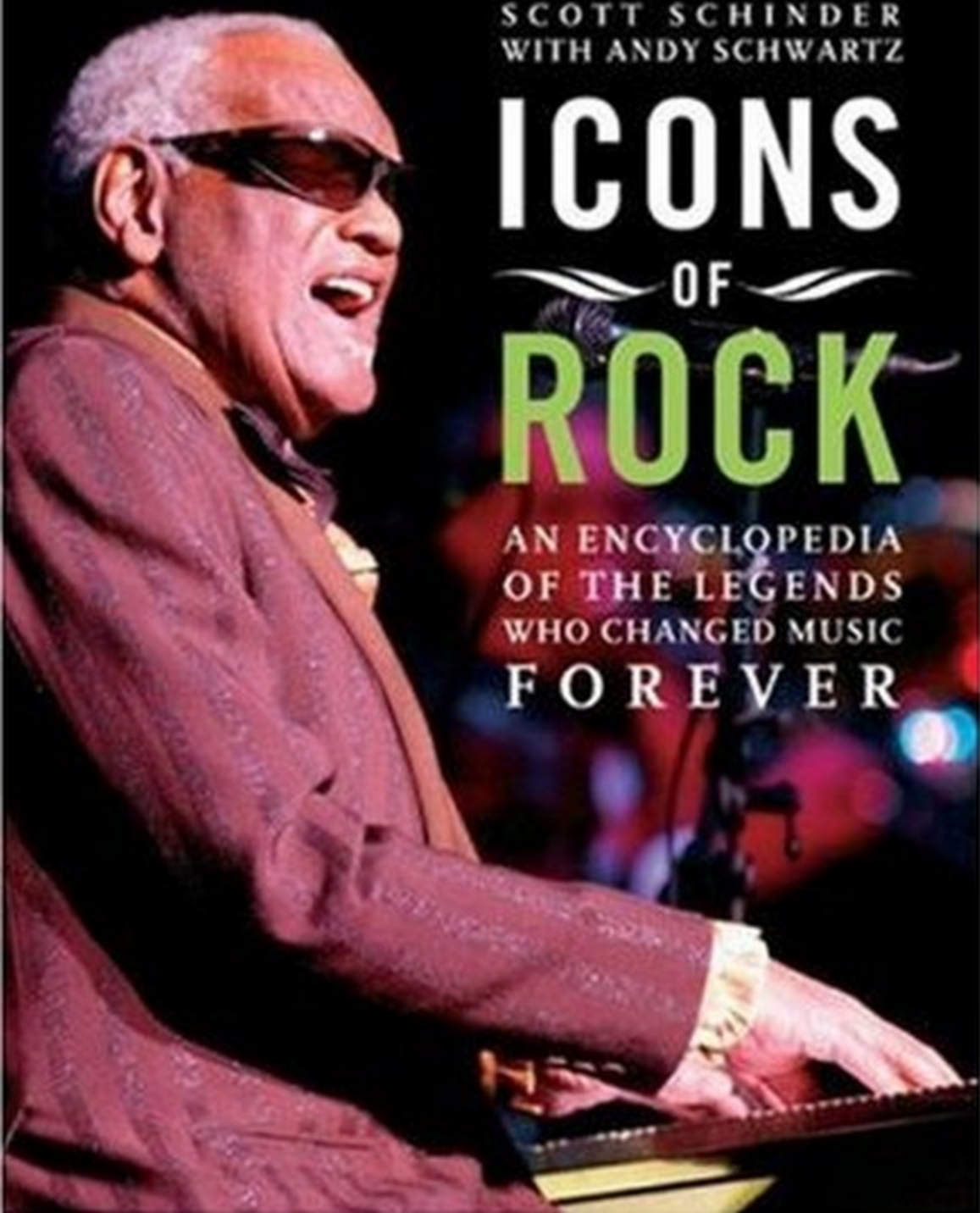
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GREENWOOD ICONS

SCOTT SCHINDER
WITH ANDY SCHWARTZ

ICONS OF ROCK

AN ENCYCLOPEDIA
OF THE LEGENDS
WHO CHANGED MUSIC
FOREVER



ICONS OF ROCK

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ICONS OF ROCK

An Encyclopedia of the
Legends Who Changed
Music Forever

VOLUME 1

Scott Schinder and
Andy Schwartz

Greenwood Icons



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Preface

It's now been more than half a century since rock and roll's official birth, although the music's roots stretch back much further. In that time, the genre has produced a rogues' gallery of memorable performers who've made essential contributions to rock's development as a major American art form, while emerging as fascinating, bigger-than-life figures in their own right.

It's common for historians to point to July 5, 1954—the evening that Elvis Presley recorded his debut single, “That’s All Right, Mama” at Sun Records’ Memphis studio—as the Night That Rock and Roll Was Born. But rock’s birth cycle was messier and more complicated. The mongrel synthesis of black and white musical forms—blues, jazz, gospel, country—was the product of the convergence of an unruly mass of musical, cultural, and social forces that had been percolating for longer than anyone could remember. Presley’s significance lies largely in the fact that in addition to being a brilliant and riveting performer, he was a charismatic young white man whose music could be marketed to Caucasian audiences at a time when musical tastes were as racially segregated as the rest of American society.

Those musical divisions began to break apart in the years following World War II. Postwar posterity created the first generation of American teenagers with sufficient disposable income to make them a potent economic force. Not coincidentally, that generation became the first to forge its own musical tastes; prior to the rock and roll era, kids more or less listened to the same music as their parents.

Beginning in the early 1950s, substantial numbers of white kids, who found little to relate to in the white-bread pop hits of the day, had begun to embrace the energy and immediacy of black rhythm and blues. While legal, social, and economic boundaries could prevent the races from mixing in public, they couldn’t keep white teens from listening to the black R&B discs that could be heard on the radio in most cities, spun by hipster disc jockeys of both races.

One of the most prominent was Alan Freed, whose combination of patter and platters captivated teens in Cleveland and New York, and who's generally credited as the man who popularized the term "rock and roll."

Almost immediately, rock and roll became the subject of outrage and derision from various moral guardians, authority figures, and bigots, who decried the music as an inducement to sexual abandon and race mixing. The critics, of course, were correct, and the music would play an integral, if gradual, role in breaking down racial barriers. In rock's early days, though, it was standard practice for hits by African American artists to be covered, in watered-down form, by white artists in order to make them palatable to white listeners. Thus, Little Richard's raucous, sexually charged "Tutti Frutti" became a jaunty, nonthreatening nonsense ditty in the hands of clean-cut Pat Boone, while the Penguins' passionate doo-wop anthem "Earth Angel" was whitewashed by the Crew-Cuts' version. But teenagers were too savvy to be fooled for long; most of the neutered cover versions, even the popular ones, were soon forgotten, while the originals were permanently enshrined in listeners' hearts.

But the view of rock and roll as a matter of whites co-opting and diluting black music is simplistic and inaccurate. For example, the multitude of rockabilly artists who followed in Elvis's wake, most of them Southerners of humble means, brought their own personalities and experiences to the mix, as evidenced by the dynamic work of Elvis's Sun Records labelmates Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins, and Johnny Cash, and that of such lesser-known iconoclasts as Charlie Feathers, Sonny Burgess, and Billy Lee Riley.

The first flowering of rock and roll in the 1950s produced a rich and diverse array of black and white performers. Many of the latter—like Bill Haley, the Everly Brothers, Buddy Holly, Eddie Cochran, and Gene Vincent—were steeped in country and rockabilly yet equally enamored of rhythm and blues. New Orleans, the city that had given birth to jazz, spawned jazz-rooted hits by Fats Domino, Huey "Piano" Smith, Lloyd Price, Lee Dorsey, Ernie K-Doe, and Clarence "Frogman" Henry. In Chicago, the seminal blues label Chess entered the rock and roll market by introducing two of rock's preeminent auteurs, refined wordsmith Chuck Berry and primitive genius Bo Diddley. Various urban centers spawned a biracial wave of doo-wop vocal groups. And innovative, forward-thinking African American artists Ray Charles, Sam Cooke, Jackie Wilson, and James Brown worked to lay the foundations of modern soul music.

It's a widely accepted truism that the years between the 1959 plane crash that killed Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens, and the Big Bopper and the arrival of the Beatles in early 1964 were fallow ones for rock and roll. But that notion is refuted by the sheer volume of magnificent music that was made during that period—by such one-of-a-kind voices as Roy Orbison and Del Shannon, by a wave of urban girl groups, by visionary producer Phil Spector, by surf-music overachievers the Beach Boys, and in the early stirrings of Motown, Stax and numerous other R&B labels.

For an America whose idealism had just been shattered by the assassination of its youthful president John F. Kennedy, the Beatles' arrival was welcomed as a desperately needed dose of optimism. The Beatles' influence was so pervasive that their success opened the doors for a massive influx of British acts, who dominated the American charts until the social and cultural upheavals of 1967's Summer of Love. Although the idealism of the Woodstock era didn't last, that period's musical changes did, pushing rock in a heavier, more self-consciously serious direction, and shifting the music industry's emphasis from hit singles to long-playing albums.

The 1970s saw rock diversify and fragment into diverse subgenres, which enriched and deepened the music's stylistic range, even if it limited its potential to spawn mass movements as it had in the 1950s and 1960s. As mainstream rock grew increasingly bloated and impersonal, blowback arrived in the form of the do-it-yourself rebellion of punk rock. Punk was both a mass movement and an influential commercial phenomenon in Britain, but it remained a cult item in America, where it spawned a vibrant independent underground that would eventually inspire the commercial alternative-rock boom of the 1990s.

In America, mainstream rock grew moribund in the 1980s, with the rise of style-obsessed MTV seeming to signal the death of the music's potential for provocation and transcendence. But the stasis of mainstream rock helped to fuel an increasingly vibrant underground circuit of left-of-center bands, scrappy independent labels, and small regional clubs. The built-in limitations of airplay, distribution, and media exposure conspired to keep American indie-rock underground for years, until the long-simmering groundswell exploded in the major-label success of Nirvana in the early 1990s.

As of this writing, the massive influence of the Internet, downloading, and affordable home recording has democratized music making and redrawn the parameters of the music industry. The long-term effects of these changes are still in the process of revealing themselves, but the music itself remains as integral to American life as ever.

In *Icons of Rock*, we examine the lives, music, and long-term influence of two dozen of rock's most prominent and influential bands and solo artists. Although each left an indelible mark on rock's development, we chose this combination of acts in effort to provide a representative cross-section of rock's rich panoply of sounds, styles, and stances. Indeed, rock's history is so broad and varied that we could just as easily have chosen twenty-four other acts and provided an equally representative selection. While history is written by the winners, it's worth noting that the rock's foundation owes as much to obscure visionaries, forgotten geniuses, and one-hit wonders as it does to superstars. But the twenty-four artist profiles featured in *Icons of Rock*—accompanied here by a variety of related features—offers a useful introduction for new listeners while providing additional insight for committed fans.

—Scott Schinder

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Photographer: William V. "Red" Robertson.

Elvis Presley

Scott Schinder

THE BOY WHO INVENTED ROCK AND ROLL

Actually, no one person can claim to have invented rock and roll. The fundamentally mongrel genre arose from a long-simmering cross-pollination of black and white musical styles, an evolution that was fueled by the increasing pervasiveness of music radio broadcasting in America beginning in the 1930s. The cross-pollination of black and white music had already begun long before

the term “rock and roll” (originally African American slang for sexual intercourse) was ever applied to music, with blues and jazz elements turning up frequently in white country music, and vice versa.

But if one were to narrow down the birth of rock and roll to a specific time and place, the most logical choice would be the informal recording session that took place on the evening of July 5, 1954, in the modest studio of Sun Records on 706 Union Avenue in Memphis, Tennessee. It was there that Elvis Presley, a poor teenaged country boy from Tupelo, Mississippi, merged disparate strands of blues, country, and gospel into a fiercely dynamic sound that ignited a musical and cultural explosion whose reverberations are still being felt today. The track that Presley cut that night, “That’s All Right, Mama,” would quickly emerge as the cornerstone of a revolution.

Elvis Presley is the single most significant figure in rock and roll history, and it’s hard to imagine rock and roll without his contributions. In addition to revolutionizing the way popular music sounded and looked, he forever changed the way young people relate to music. Emerging from the racially segregated South in the mid-1950s, Elvis, consciously or not, struck an important blow for racial harmony by making African American music accessible to millions of white teens who wouldn’t have been exposed to it otherwise. And in popularizing rock and roll for a worldwide audience, Elvis almost single-handedly altered the parameters of the entertainment industry. By many estimates, he remains history’s biggest-selling recording artist.

Elvis certainly wasn’t the first white man to perform black music. But he was the first to fuse elements of rhythm and blues, country, and gospel into a distinctive, charismatic package that held consistent appeal for white kids, without sanitizing the music or sacrificing its essential grit.

Charismatic and cocky yet humble and polite, generous and charitable yet paranoid and tyrannical, Elvis embodied the contradictions of his country, his time, and his genre. If his life and career would take a darker turn and end in tragedy and dissipation, his best music remains as compelling as ever. His original status as the King of Rock and Roll has never been seriously challenged, and he’s remained a bottomless source of inspiration for the generations of rock and rollers who’ve taken up the cause in the decades since that July night in Memphis.

“When I first heard Elvis’s voice, I just knew that I wasn’t going to work for anybody, and nobody was going to be my boss,” Bob Dylan once said. “Hearing him for the first time was like busting out of jail.”¹

“Before Elvis,” commented Keith Richards, “everything was in black and white. Then came Elvis. Zoom, glorious Technicolor.”²

“Before there was Elvis, there was nothing,” John Lennon declared.³

“It was like he came along and whispered some dream in everybody’s ear, and somehow we all dreamed it,” rhapsodized Bruce Springsteen.⁴

The basic elements of Elvis Presley's history have been so thoroughly documented, retold, and mythologized that it can be a challenge to separate fact from legend. But even the most circumspect reading of his story reveals a quintessential American saga that's both a heroic saga and a cautionary tale.

THE BOY KING

Elvis Aaron Presley was born just before dawn on January 8, 1935, in a two-room house in rural Tupelo, Mississippi, to Vernon and Gladys Presley. Like many of their home region, Vernon and Gladys struggled amidst the lingering effects of the Great Depression, with Vernon taking various odd jobs to make ends meet. Elvis's twin brother, Jesse Garon, was stillborn, leaving Elvis an only child. When Elvis was three years old, Vernon began serving a nine-month sentence at the infamous Parchman Farm prison camp for forging a check; his father's extended absence contributed to the closeness that he would maintain with his mother for the rest of her life.

Although Vernon and Gladys were poor, they were protective and indulgent of their son. At age ten, Elvis made his first known public appearance, singing "Old Shep" (a song he would record after becoming famous) in a youth talent contest at the Mississippi-Alabama Fair and Dairy Show, which was broadcast over local radio station WELO. That event prompted his parents to buy him a guitar for his eleventh birthday.

When Elvis was thirteen, the family relocated to Memphis, in search of a better life. Memphis was a cultural crossroads that, despite institutionalized racial segregation, played host to a vibrant melting pot of black and white musical traditions. The Presleys lived in public housing, and in the poor neighborhoods of the city's north side. Their attendance of a white Pentecostal church instilled Elvis's lifelong affinity for gospel music. He also developed a passion for country, blues, and bluegrass, as well as the work of mainstream white pop vocalists (he often cited Dean Martin as one his favorite singers).

As a teenager attending all-white L.C. Humes High School, Elvis was shy, quiet, and something of a misfit. A highlight of those years was his prize-winning performance at a school talent show. He absorbed black music through regular trips to Memphis's bustling Beale Street, where he purchased slick hipster threads that belied his family's humble economic circumstances. He cultivated a nonconformist personal style, with sideburns and a slicked-back haircut that was scandalous by the standards of the time.

After graduating from high school on June 3, 1953, Elvis took a job working at Parker Machinists Shop, moving to a better-paying position driving a delivery truck for the Crown Electric Company in the fall. During the summer, he had visited the Memphis Recording Service, home of the Sun Records label, and paid about \$4 to record a pair of pop ballads, "My Happiness" and

“That’s When Your Heartaches Begin,” onto a ten-inch acetate disc as a present for his mother.

The Memphis Recording Service had been founded in early 1950 by Sam Phillips, a former disc jockey from Alabama who paid the bills by hiring out his services to make tape recordings of local weddings, bar mitzvahs, and community events. But Phillips’s real passion was music, and he drew from the region’s rich regional talent pool to record blues, R&B, and hillbilly musicians, licensing the results to such independent labels as Chess in Chicago, Duke-Peacock in Houston, and Modern and RPM in Los Angeles. Among the notable African American musicians who recorded for Phillips were Howlin’ Wolf, Rufus Thomas, Rosco Gordon, Little Milton, Bobby Blue Bland, and a young B.B. King. Eventually, Phillips started his own label, Sun, and began releasing his recordings himself.

One of Phillips’s early successes was 1951’s “Rocket 88,” credited to Jackie Brenston and His Delta Cats but actually the work of a young Ike Turner and his band the Kings of Rhythm. That song is considered by many to be the first rock and roll record, thanks to its driving backbeat and raw, distorted electric guitar.

Although Phillips had had considerable success recording and releasing music by black artists, he realized that the racial divisions that governed the entertainment industry at the time limited his sales potential. “If only I could find a white man (with) the Negro feel,” Phillips had been quoted as saying, “I could make a billion dollars.”⁵

Phillips wasn’t present when Elvis came to Sun to record the acetate disc for Gladys. But Marion Keisker, Phillips’s secretary and right-hand woman, was impressed enough to make a tape copy of the tracks to play for her boss. Phillips wasn’t immediately impressed when he heard the tape the next day. In January 1954, Elvis showed up at Sun again to cut another two-sided acetate. This time, Phillips was in attendance, but still wasn’t ready to invite Presley to make records for his label.

In June 1954, Phillips took a liking to a demo of a ballad titled “Without You” and decided to record the tune for Sun. After an unsuccessful attempt to find the vocalist on the original demo, Keisker suggested getting “the kid with the sideburns” to take a crack at it, and called Elvis to Sun for his first chance at making a real record. But the inexperienced singer had trouble connecting with the song, and nothing usable arose from the session. Despite the fruitless recording attempt, Phillips was intrigued by Presley’s voice and presence, and tested the newcomer by asking him to run through every song he knew. Elvis responded to the challenge by regaling Phillips with a broad array of country, blues, gospel, and pop material.

Phillips was sufficiently impressed with the breadth of Presley’s musical knowledge to decide to invest some effort into developing the unseasoned youngster into a recording artist. Toward that end, Phillips teamed the nineteen-year-old with a pair of older local musicians, twenty-one-year-old guitarist

Scotty Moore and twenty-seven-year-old bassist Bill Black. Moore and Black were members of the local country and western outfit the Starlight Wranglers, which had done some recording at Sun, but Phillips felt that Elvis might fare better with spare, stripped-down backing than a full band. For a few weeks, Presley, Moore, and Black met daily to run through songs and work on developing a sound.

In an era when most records were made quickly and within tightly controlled session timeframes, Sam Phillips was an early proponent of keeping the tape rolling and allowing the musicians to experiment. Since Phillips owned the studio, Sun artists had the luxury of recording in informal, open-ended sessions, minus the usual deadline pressures. That method would play a key role in the development of Elvis's musical persona.

On July 5, Presley, Moore, Black, and Phillips gathered at Sun to cut some tracks, including a hopped-up version of the Bill Monroe bluegrass standard "Blue Moon of Kentucky." After they'd spent several hours running through various material with unsatisfying results, Elvis spontaneously broke into "That's All Right, Mama," a 1946 number by Mississippi bluesman Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup. As the legend goes, Moore and Black picked up the accelerated tempo, Phillips got the tape rolling, and the rest is history.

It's fair to say that no one had ever heard anything like "That's All Right, Mama" before. The combination of Elvis's playful, forceful vocal, Moore and Black's spare, fiery support, and Sun's trademark slapback echo combined to create a sound that was completely new.

As spirited as the performances were, the tape-delay echo that Phillips used on "That's All Right, Mama" was equally integral to the track's appeal. Thereafter, echo would become a key component in the sound of early rock and roll.

Phillips loved the track's manic energy, but when Sun released Presley's debut single two weeks later, "That's All Right, Mama" (listed on the label as "That's All Right") was initially relegated to the B-side. The designated A-side was "Blue Moon of Kentucky," but it was the flip that would put Elvis—and rock and roll—on the map.

A couple of nights after "That's All Right, Mama" session, Sam brought a test pressing of the single to his friend Dewey Phillips (no relation), a manic white disc jockey who spun black rhythm and blues platters on his show *Red Hot and Blue* on local station WHBQ. The show was broadcast from the station's headquarters at the Chisca Hotel in downtown Memphis, and maintained a large biracial audience. The motor-mouthed DJ played "That's All Right, Mama" several times in a row, and the station's switchboard was reportedly flooded with requests to hear it again. Dewey phoned the Presley home to get Elvis to the station for his first-ever live interview. By the end of the week, Sun had advance orders of 7,000.

Released on July 19, just two weeks after it was recorded, "That's All Right, Mama" became a local hit in Memphis. Presley promoted the release with

some informal local performances; on some of those, he was backed by Moore and Black's band the Starlight Wranglers, whose other members reportedly resented Scotty and Bill's moonlighting with Elvis.

In an effort to generate interest outside of their hometown, Elvis, Scotty, and Bill (sometimes billed as "the Blue Moon Boys") hit the road as a touring act. The three musicians and their gear crammed into a Chevrolet Bel Air, with Black's doghouse bass strapped to the roof, and worked at a grinding pace, regularly driving hundreds of miles between shows around the South. They often worked as a warmup act for such established country stars as Slim Whitman, Minnie Pearl, and the Louvin Brothers, whose fans had never before experienced anything like Elvis's volcanic vocals and hip-swiveling, leg-shaking stage moves.

"The first time that I appeared on stage, it scared me to death," Presley later asserted in the 1972 documentary *Elvis on Tour*. "I really didn't know what all the yelling was about. I didn't realize that my body was moving. It's a natural thing to me. So to the manager backstage I said, 'What'd I do? What'd I do?' And he said, 'Whatever it is, go back and do it again.'"⁶

It wasn't long before Elvis's stage moves were regularly evoking hysterical responses from female audience members. One such instance was a pair of Webb Pierce concerts on August 10, 1954, at Overton Park in Memphis, at which Presley appeared as an unbilled opening act. For the early show, he played a set of country ballads to a lukewarm response. But for the late performance, he concentrated on up-tempo material, and whipped the crowd into such a frenzy that headliner Pierce—then one of country's biggest stars—refused to perform. Such occurrences generated hostility toward the young upstart in some quarters of the conservative country music community, but they also hastened Elvis's rise to headliner status.

Presley delivered another savage performance on his second Sun single, "Good Rockin' Tonight," a reworking of a 1948 hit by New Orleans rhythm and blues shouter Roy Brown. The disc was released in September 1954, and maintained Sam Phillips's strategy of combining a "black" R&B song with a "white" country ballad (in this case "I Don't Care If the Sun Don't Shine"), in order to broaden airplay potential. "Good Rockin' Tonight" became another regional hit.

The same month, Elvis performed on Nashville's *Grand Ole Opry*, the wildly popular Saturday-night radio show that was a bastion of mainstream country and western music. As the story goes, he was not well received, with Opry manager Jim Denny famously telling the singer that he should go back to driving a truck.

While he may have been too unruly to be embraced by the staid Opry, Presley was more warmly received by the show's less hidebound competitor the *Louisiana Hayride*, which originated on Shreveport's KWKH. He made his first *Hayride* appearance in October 1954 and soon won a one-year contract,

becoming popular enough with listeners that his regular slot was expanded to twenty minutes. His presence on the *Louisiana Hayride* would play a significant role in winning Elvis new fans across the South.

Presley's own live shows continued to draw larger concentrations of young female fans, with the performances growing progressively wilder and more provocative. The more raucous direction was aided by the addition of *Louisiana Hayride* house drummer D.J. Fontana to Presley's touring band.

Elvis's rising popularity, and his musical progress, would continue with four more Sun singles. Most were interpretations of material recorded by other artists, but to call them cover versions hardly does them justice. By the time Presley was done with Kokomo Arnold's "Milkcow Blues Boogie," Arthur Gunter's "Baby, Let's Play House," and Junior Parker's "Mystery Train," they were his, and his versions would forever eclipse the originals. "Mystery Train," with its foreboding lyrics and general aim of enigmatic dread, is one of Presley's finest and most resonant moments.

By mid-1955, it had become obvious that Elvis had superstar potential. But his popularity was still limited to the South, and it was apparent that a boost to national fame would require more money and clout than Sam Phillips—or Bob Neal, the Memphis DJ who'd become Presley's manager—could muster. His association with the *Louisiana Hayride* had put Presley in contact with Colonel Tom Parker, whose résumé included managing country stars Eddy Arnold and Hank Snow. A savvy huckster who'd picked up the rudiments of show business while touring with a traveling carnival, Parker recognized Elvis's untapped earning potential, and officially took over as his manager in August.

Parker—who'd received the honorary title of colonel in 1948 from Louisiana governor and country singer Jimmie Davis—claimed to have been born in Huntington, West Virginia. But in later years, it would emerge that Parker had constructed an elaborate persona to mask his real history. Apparently born Andreas Cornelis Van Kuijk in Breda, Holland, on June 26, 1909, he was actually a native of the Netherlands who'd fled his homeland, under shadowy circumstances, in May 1929 and later served in the U.S. Army before being discharged for "psychosis, psychogenic depression (and) emotional instability."

The colonel's relationship with Elvis, and the many questionable decisions that he would make on his client's behalf, would become the subject of much speculation and criticism in the future. But there can be little doubt that Parker was instrumental in engineering Presley's initial rise from regional phenomenon to international sensation.

Parker's first major move was to secure a new record deal. In November 1955, Elvis signed with RCA Records, in an arrangement that involved a buy-out of his Sun contract and recordings. Sam Phillips received the then-record sum of \$35,000, plus an additional \$5,000 in back royalties owed to Presley.

Sun Records Beyond Elvis

The seismic impact of Elvis Presley's success made him the brightest star in the galaxy of Sun Records. But Sam Phillips's matchless ear for original talent and his deceptively casual style of production brought forth several more major artists in the period 1954–57 including three Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductees: Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Carl Perkins.

Johnny Cash grew up to become one of the most important artists in American music—one whose popularity and influence extended well beyond the country field. The 1956 Sun release "I Walk the Line," was the singer's first number one country song. It established the immediately identifiable sound of Cash's resonant baritone voice; the sparse but propulsive accompaniment of his band, the Tennessee Two (later Three), and songs that blended primal strains of American folk, blues, and gospel music.

Louisiana singer/pianist Jerry Lee Lewis combined a precarious emotional volatility with effortless musical versatility. He shot to international stardom in 1957 with the landmark Sun hits "Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On" and "Great Balls of Fire."

Carl Perkins, the son of poor Tennessee sharecroppers, was a fine electric guitarist with a warm, inviting vocal style and a knack for writing catchy, country-flavored songs set to a rock and roll beat. In early 1956, Perkins's second Sun single, "Blue Suede Shoes" (which he wrote), became the label's first million-seller when it reached number one on the country charts and number two on both the pop and R&B lists.

Andy Schwartz

In hindsight, it's easy to view Phillips's willingness to relinquish Presley as folly. But \$35,000 was an unprecedented payoff by 1955 standards. Phillips also pointed out that he didn't possess the financial wherewithal to promote Elvis nationally, and that Sun was in need of an influx of cash to expand the company and promote new artists like Jerry Lee Lewis and Carl Perkins.

Parker, meanwhile, set up music publishing companies to oversee the songs Elvis would record for RCA. Shrewdly realizing the commercial value of having a composition cut by Presley, the colonel was able to demand that songwriters give up a piece of their publishing royalties in return for the privilege (which explains non-writer Presley's name occasionally turning up in the credits of several of the tunes he recorded). While this practice would generate additional income, it would also limit the range of material that Presley had access to.

To further maximize his client's profitability, Parker licensed Presley's name and likeness for a dizzying array of products, from toy guitars to phonographs to wallets to cologne to stuffed hound dogs and teddy bears, unleashing a torrent of Elvis-related trinkets that continues to this day. Such commercial tie-ins

demonstrated the colonel's knack for sniffing out profits, but they were also symptomatic of his tendency to go for the quick buck, with little consideration of those moves' long-term affect on Elvis's image or credibility.

Parker's schemes would generate considerable income for Presley—and for Parker, whose hefty 25 percent commission would later rise to an unprecedented 50 percent. For better or worse, the colonel would exercise control over most of Elvis's business and creative decisions for the remainder of his career.

ELVISMANIA

Elvis's first RCA session took place on January 10, 1956—two days after his twenty-first birthday—at the company's Nashville studio. Recording was overseen by Steve Sholes, head of RCA's country division, who'd signed Presley to the label. Moore, Black, and Fontana were augmented by legendary guitarist Chet Atkins and noted session pianist Floyd Cramer, plus the gospel vocal quartet the Jordanaires, who would continue to play a prominent role in his recordings.

That date yielded “Heartbreak Hotel,” a stark, seething, sexually charged manifesto that proved to be the perfect calling card to introduce Elvis to a national—and international—audience. Released in late January as his RCA debut, the song justified the company's investment by becoming Presley's first national hit, rising to the number one slot on *Billboard's* pop chart and selling over 300,000 copies in its first three weeks.

Two months later, the label released Presley's first full-length LP, *Elvis Presley*, which combined new RCA recordings with some previously unheard leftovers from his Sun days. Despite containing none of his hits, the collection spent ten weeks at the top of *Billboard's* pop LP chart, earning Elvis his first gold album award.

Elvismania briefly simmered down on April 23, 1956, when Presley made his Las Vegas debut with an extended engagement at the New Frontier Hotel. But Elvis (billed as “the Atomic Powered Singer”) wasn't well received by the gamblers and tourists who comprised most of the New Frontier audience, and the gig was cut short after two weeks.

Although his first Vegas trip had been a failure, one good thing did come out of it. During their visit, Elvis and band heard Freddie Bell and the Bellboys performing a flamboyant version of “Hound Dog,” a song penned by the up-and-coming duo of Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, and originally recorded by Big Mama Thornton in 1953. Elvis worked up his own raucous reading of the song, which would become one of his signature hits three months later.

A key factor in Elvis's rise to household-name status in 1956 was a series of high-profile prime-time TV appearances which Parker cannily booked. Between January and March, he performed on six episodes of Tommy and

Jimmy Dorsey's CBS variety show, followed by a pair of guest spots on Milton Berle's NBC program. His June 5 performance of "Hound Dog" on the Berle show generated a storm of controversy over the singer's gyrations—and simultaneously established Presley as a top ratings draw.

When Elvis performed "Hound Dog" on Steve Allen's Sunday night ABC show three weeks later, Allen had an uncomfortable-looking Elvis trussed up in a tuxedo and singing to a basset hound. That night also marked the first time Allen had beaten Ed Sullivan's wildly popular variety hour in the ratings, and the shrewd Sullivan—who had initially vowed that he'd never allow Presley onto his stage—responded by booking Elvis for three appearances in September, October, and January, for which Colonel Tom was able to extract a hefty \$50,000 performance fee.

The Sullivan shows were instrumental in launching Elvis Presley as a national phenomenon, raising his public profile while amplifying the moralistic furor over his scandalous movements. The controversy was such that, for the last of his Sullivan spots, the camera operators were instructed to only shoot Elvis from the waist up, even when he performed the gospel standard "There'll Be Peace in the Valley for Me." The mild-mannered camera work aside, Sullivan, at the time one of the most powerful men in television, did his part to defuse the controversy by assuring his audience that Presley was a fine, decent boy.

While the TV appearances helped to ratchet up the air of fan hysteria that surrounded Presley, the real evidence of Elvismania was in his riotous live concerts, which attracted teenage ticket buyers in record numbers. Reports of his fans literally tearing the clothes off of their idol's back arose on more than one occasion. When he performed at the Mississippi-Alabama Fair in 1956, 100 National Guardsmen were recruited to keep fans from storming the stage.

In its May 15, 1956, issue, *Time* magazine offered an adult perspective on the live Elvis experience: "Without preamble, the three-piece band cuts loose. In the spotlight, the lanky singer flails furious rhythms on his guitar, every now and then breaking a string. In a pivoting stance, his hips swing sensuously from side to side and his entire body takes on a frantic quiver, as if he had swallowed a jackhammer."⁷

As his popularity rose, Elvis was increasingly the target of various media observers and moral guardians who decried him as a corruptor of the nation's youth. As the most visible figurehead of the new youth culture, he was an inviting target for those eager to blame him and his music for a litany of social ills, from juvenile delinquency to teen promiscuity.

The groundswell of anti-Elvis outrage was such that, when he performed in Jacksonville, Florida, in August 1956, juvenile court judge Marion Gooding threatened to arrest the singer if he shook his body while on stage. Presley remained still for the entire set, wiggling a single finger in protest.

"Rhythm is something you either have or don't have," Elvis commented, "but when you have it, you have it all over."⁸

Although he was still treated with trepidation, condescension, or downright derision by many mainstream commentators, the adult world's skepticism strengthened Elvis's credibility with teenagers. Thanks to post-World War II prosperity, those teens now comprised a powerful economic force that was essential in fueling rock and roll's birth.

Much of the criticism leveled at Elvis carried a thinly veiled—and sometimes not so thinly veiled—air of racism. While some religious and community leaders condemned him for playing the Devil's Music, others castigated his style as “nigger music.”

Much as they tried, the critics couldn't stop Presley, or the legion of rock and roll stars—both black and white—who followed in his wake. Elvis's success created an eager audience for such African American performers as Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Fats Domino, and Bo Diddley, as well as white rockers like Jerry Lee Lewis, the Everly Brothers, and Buddy Holly, who shared his background in country and western music.

Presley's example, particularly the homespun, do-it-yourself vibe of his Sun recordings, also launched an explosion in rockabilly, with countless young white boys, mostly but not exclusively in the South, picking up guitars and delivering high-energy variations on Elvis's sound. Some of them, like Lewis, Carl Perkins, Johnny Cash, and Roy Orbison, would launch their careers at Sun. Some, like Eddie Cochran, Gene Vincent, and Presley's high school classmate Johnny Burnette, would gain major-label deals, while hundreds more would record for small independent regional labels.

The Rockabilly Explosion

Rockabilly hitched the driving beat of early black rhythm and blues artists like Fats Domino and Little Richard to the guitar-based instrumentation of “hill-billy,” as the industry dubbed the country sounds of Hank Williams and Lefty Frizzell. Although it lasted only from about 1954 to 1958, the sound and style of rockabilly touched every region of the United States. Its popularity expanded the overall music market through an outpouring of raw talent, the likes of which would not be repeated until the Beatles-inspired rock explosion of the mid-1960s.

A great rockabilly record didn't require much in the way of musical sophistication or technical ability. The songs were just three or four chords, and the singers privileged excitement over enunciation. If the recording engineer could apply enough echo to the tracks, a cardboard box might even substitute for real drums. Many confirmed country performers attempted to jump on the new trend, often recording big-beat numbers under pseudonyms: George Jones as “Thumper Jones,” Buck Owens as “Corky Jones,” Webb Pierce as “Shady Walls.”

By contrast, both the Everly Brothers and Ricky Nelson were more sincere in their commitment to the new music and more inventive in their approach.

The roots of Don and Phil Everly lay deep in the country and bluegrass styles of their native Kentucky, but beginning in 1957 they incorporated pop, blues, and R&B in a dazzling series of discs including the number ones “Wake Up, Little Susie” and “Cathy’s Clown.” In that same year, Ricky Nelson released his first single—a cover of Fats Domino’s “I’m Walkin’”—and promptly became the second most famous rock and roller in the country (after Elvis), thanks to a featured musical segment on his family’s weekly television series *The Adventures of Ozzie & Harriet*. In his first five years as a recording artist, Nelson scored seventeen Top Ten hits, most featuring the peerless lead guitar work of James Burton.

Gene Vincent placed five songs on the Hot 100 in 1956–57 (including the masterful “Be-Bop-A-Lu-La”) and never had another hit. But his initial impact was sufficient to sustain the troubled singer’s performing career until his death in 1971, especially among the dedicated Vincent cultists of Britain and France. Two brothers from Memphis, Johnny and Dorsey Burnette, formed the Johnny Burnette Trio with guitarist Paul Burlison. Their lone album, *Rock ‘n’ Roll Trio* (1957), is an all-time rockabilly classic that includes “The Train Kept A-Rollin’,” a song later recorded by the Yardbirds and Aerosmith. In 1960, Wanda Jackson’s “Let’s Have a Party” was a spirited late entry in the rockabilly sweepstakes, although she soon returned to a straight country repertoire.

For every hopeful with a record on the national charts, there were a half-dozen whose songs found only local or regional success. “Everybody’s Got a Baby but Me” by Warren Miller and “Rockin’ by Myself” by Sammy Gowans are just two rockabilly classics by artists who were barely acknowledged even in their own time.

A. S.

Records weren’t the only things that Elvis was helping to sell. Sales of transistor radios and record players boomed in the wake of his rise to fame, while the rock and roll explosion that he set off helped to build the fledgling record business into a major industry. Teenagers around the United States emulated his dress sense and adopted his “ducktail” haircut.

One example of Elvis’s ubiquitous fame was the publicity that accompanied the brief, informal jam session on December 4, 1956, by the one-off super group that came to be known as the Million Dollar Quartet. That event transpired when Presley dropped in to visit Sun Records while Carl Perkins was recording, with Jerry Lee Lewis playing piano on the session and Johnny Cash also in attendance. They ran through an improvised array of gospel, country, R&B, and pop material. One highlight was Elvis’s admiring description of Jackie Wilson, then lead singer of Billy Ward’s Dominoes, singing his version of the recent Presley smash “Don’t Be Cruel,” followed by Presley’s imitation of Wilson’s delivery.

Sam Phillips had the presence of mind to keep the tape rolling. The publicity-savvy Phillips also called the local newspaper the *Memphis Press-Scimitar*.

Bob Johnson, the paper's entertainment editor, came by to document the event, bringing a photographer who took the famous shot of Presley at the piano surrounded by Lewis, Perkins, and Cash (Elvis's girlfriend Marilyn Evans was cropped out). Bootleg tapes of the sessions circulated for years before being officially released in 1990.

While some observers quibble that Presley's early RCA releases lacked some of the raw edge and primal power of his Sun sessions, it's hard to argue with the quality of his early RCA releases. The impassioned "I Want You, I Need You, I Love You" (backed by another Arthur Crudup cover, "My Baby Left Me") was a number one follow-up to "Heartbreak Hotel," while the subsequent "Hound Dog"/"Don't Be Cruel" was a double-sided smash that became one of the biggest-selling singles the music industry had ever seen. While less rootsy and more polished than his Sun work, they're still first-rate vehicles for Presley's talent and charisma.

The holiday LP *Elvis' Christmas Album*, was also released in 1957, which combined bucolic seasonal fare, serene gospel material, and bluesy Yuletide tunes like "Santa Claus Is Back in Town," "Santa, Bring My Baby Back (to Me)," and the hit "Blue Christmas."

GOING HOLLYWOOD

Despite his massive record sales, Presley's—and Parker's—ambitions extended beyond music. Offers of movie roles began to pour in during the 1956 media assault, and in April Elvis signed a seven-year movie contract with producer Hal Wallis and Paramount Pictures. His studio screen test was a scene from the upcoming A-list Burt Lancaster/Katharine Hepburn production *The Rainmaker*. But rather than appearing in that prestigious project, Elvis made his big-screen debut with a star turn in *Love Me Tender*, a hokey Civil War-era drama that allowed him to croon four songs. It was dismissed by critics, but became a box office smash.

Love Me Tender was followed in 1957 by Presley's first color feature *Loving You*, a slick but stale showbiz romance which riffed on Elvis's early experiences touring the rural country and western circuit. *Jailhouse Rock*, released later that year, offered a slightly darker take on his rise to fame, with Presley demonstrating genuine acting ability as an ex-con turned arrogant, amoral rock and roll star. In 1958 with *King Creole* Elvis rose to the challenge of a complex role in a serious drama, holding his own alongside such serious thespians as Carolyn Jones, Vic Morrow, and Walter Matthau, under the guidance of *Casablanca* director Michael Curtiz.

Indeed, Presley's early performances demonstrated that he possessed immense natural screen presence, and his early directors and co-stars consistently described him as hard working and serious about developing his acting skills. But the colonel's fondness for the easy payoff—and his client's apparent

inability to stand up to intimidating father figure Parker—would ultimately crush Elvis's dream of establishing a reputation as a dramatic actor.

By 1957, Elvis Presley was arguably the world's most famous musical entertainer. Bill Haley (the first American rocker to tour overseas) had been instrumental in popularizing rock and roll in Europe, but Elvis triggered a massive shift in musical tastes around the world. Other countries began to spawn their own answers to Elvis, like England's Cliff Richard, France's Johnny Hallyday, and Italy's Adriano Celentano, who offered homegrown (if watered-down) variations on the Presley style.

Elvis's popularity even extended behind the Iron Curtain. On February 3, 1957, the *New York Times* ran a story under the headline "Presley Records a Craze in Soviet Union." The paper reported that, although not officially released in the Soviet Union, bootleg recordings of his music were being pressed on discarded X-ray plates and sold on the black market in Leningrad for the equivalent of about \$12.

In March 1957, Elvis purchased his soon-to-be-famous mansion Graceland in Memphis. The following month, he made his first Canadian appearances, playing concerts in Toronto and Ottawa. A performance in Vancouver that August would mark the last time he would perform outside of the United States.

Presley's music and film careers were still on the upswing when Elvis received his draft notice in December 1957. By the time he reported to Fort Chaffee for induction (and his much-publicized GI haircut) three months later, he'd left enough unreleased tracks in the can that RCA was able to continue releasing new material to keep him a steady chart presence during his two-year army stint. The fan furor surrounding his induction would inspire the successful 1960 Broadway musical *Bye Bye Birdie*, which would also be adapted into a film.

After completing six months of basic training in Fort Hood, Texas, Presley was stationed in Friedberg, Germany, for eighteen months. Although he maintained an off-base residence in nearby Bad Nauheim, Elvis was reportedly a model soldier who requested and received no special treatment from his superiors. On August 12, 1958, Gladys Presley suffered a heart attack; Elvis flew back to Memphis to be with her, and she died two days later.

While in Germany, Elvis met fourteen-year-old Priscilla Beaulieu, stepdaughter of Army Captain Joseph Beaulieu. She would become Presley's wife on May 1, 1967. On February 1, 1968, exactly nine months after the wedding, Priscilla would give birth to their only child, Lisa Marie Presley.

Although he'd worried that his fans would forget him during his absence, Elvis Presley returned to civilian life in March 1960 to find his popularity intact. The following month saw the release of *Elvis Is Back!*, a solid collection of rockers, ballads, and blues that seemed to bode well for his musical future. It was followed by *His Hand in Mine*, the first of his several gospel albums; while that disc was mild-mannered rather than impassioned, it offered credible evidence of Elvis's sincere and deep-rooted affinity for gospel.

The next few years would see Elvis release a handful of memorable singles, including the catchy novelty “Return to Sender” (written by Otis Blackwell, author of several Presley hits), the moony ballad “Can’t Help Falling in Love,” and the tough rockers “Little Sister,” “I Feel So Bad,” and “(Marie’s the Name) His Latest Flame.” But by 1963, just as rock was preparing to enter a new era as an agent of social change, Elvis had more or less walked away from his hard-won status as the King of Rock and Roll.

Elvis had initially been enthusiastic about becoming a serious actor, and his work in *Jailhouse Rock* and *King Creole* demonstrated that his natural screen presence could, with proper support and the right material, translate into substantial performances.

But the Colonel had other ideas. Elvis gave sincere performances in the flawed but heartfelt Don Siegel-directed 1960 western *Flaming Star*, playing a pensive half-breed confronting racism, and in the soap-operatic *Wild in the Country*, which incongruously cast him as an aspiring novelist. But instead of following in the footsteps of his heroes Marlon Brando and James Dean, Elvis would spend much of the 1960s starring in a series of mind-numbingly innocuous b-movies that neutered his dangerous edge into soft-centered cuddliness.

Two or three times a year between 1960 and 1968, Elvis dutifully walked through such creatively bankrupt exercises as *G.I. Blues*, *Blue Hawaii*, *Girls! Girls! Girls!*, *It Happened at the World’s Fair*, *Fun in Acapulco*, *Kissin’ Cousins*, *Viva Las Vegas*, *Roustabout*, *Girl Happy*, *Tickle Me*, *Harum Scarum*, *Paradise Hawaiian Style*, *Spinout*, *Easy Come Easy Go*, *Double Trouble*, *Clambake*, *Speedway*, and *Live a Little Love a Little*, which demanded little more of Elvis than that he show up. The formula was so predictable—cast Elvis as a rakish lifeguard/helicopter pilot/race car driver, place him in an exotic location, surround him with pretty girls and cartoonish comic complications, and have him sing enough mediocre songs to fill the accompanying soundtrack album—that the films were virtually interchangeable. But most of them were huge money makers, and the colonel saw no point in messing with a winning formula.

While America was caught up in the political, social, and musical upheavals of the 1960s, Elvis seemed encased in a show business bubble, out of touch with his own talent and oblivious to the changes afoot in the outside world. Although he remained immensely popular with millions of fans, it was hard to believe that this was the same restless revolutionary who had single-handedly altered the face of Western culture just a few years before.

When John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas in 1963, Elvis was busy cavorting in *Fun in Acapulco*. In 1965, while the Beatles and Bob Dylan were leading rock into provocative new areas of personal discovery and sonic experimentation, Elvis was singing “Do the Clam” amidst carefree spring-break hijinks in *Girl Happy*. In 1967, as the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, and the summer of love were forcing Americans to reexamine their most deeply held beliefs, Elvis was starring in *Clambake*.

“The only thing worse than watching a bad movie,” Presley reportedly said, “is being in one.”⁹

Elvis made little effort to disguise his contempt for his 1960s movies, refusing to watch them and deriding them as glorified travelogues. By all accounts, he was deeply resentful that the colonel had steered him toward such light-weight fare and away from more credible projects. For instance, he was the first choice of the producers of *West Side Story* for that film’s male lead, but Parker passed. *West Side Story* became one of the decade’s biggest blockbusters, and Presley apparently held it against Parker for the rest of his life. Elvis certainly had the clout to put his foot down and demand better scripts and bigger budgets, but he never did.

The colonel also reportedly kept Elvis from auditioning for roles in such edgy, culturally important films as *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *The Defiant Ones*, *Thunder Road*, and *Midnight Cowboy*. In the mid-1970s, long after his box office appeal had been decimated by too many lousy movies, Presley was offered an attractive comeback vehicle in *A Star Is Born*, but the colonel apparently wouldn’t hear of his boy sharing star billing with Barbra Streisand.

By the time the Beatles usurped his status as the world’s biggest rock and roll act in 1964, Elvis’s musical career had become little more than a half-baked sideline. His film commitments kept him from performing concerts, and most of his record releases were throwaway soundtrack albums, loaded with trivial film tunes and often padded with old studio outtakes.

Although his recorded output gave little indication that he’d been keeping up with musical trends, Elvis actually played host to the Beatles in his Bel Air home in August 1965, while the Fab Four were on tour. The four-hour visit, according to John Lennon, included an informal jam session, on which Elvis played piano and drums.

One of the few bright spots of his largely forgettable soundtrack album output was a 1966 reading of Bob Dylan’s “Tomorrow Is a Long Time” that proved that Presley was still capable of delivering sensitive, compelling performances when presented with quality material. But such instances were few and far between, and the fact that this meeting of generational icons was buried on the *Spinout* soundtrack LP is indicative of how far out of touch Elvis and his handlers were with the seismic changes that were occurring in music and popular culture at the time.

THE COMEBACK

The generally appalling quality of his movie-era music made Elvis’s subsequent musical rejuvenation seem all the more miraculous. By 1968, the King’s prestige was at an all-time low. Even his most patient fans had stopped turning out for his films, which by now were often consigned to the lower half of double features, and which often didn’t receive play dates in major cities

at all. Whether due to artistic inspiration or career necessity, Presley's long-dormant musical instincts stirred back to life in the late 1960s, spawning a brilliant new body of work that instantly reestablished him as a creative force.

Presley's return to rock and roll was signaled by a pair of tough, rootsy singles, the Jimmy Reed blues classic "Big Boss Man" and the Jerry Reed-penned "Guitar Man." Released in September 1967 and January 1968, respectively, those efforts found him sounding more focused and engaged than he had in nearly a decade, weaving his blues and country influences into an updated sound that was effortlessly contemporary without pandering to trends.

They were followed in October by "If I Can Dream," an idealistic anthem whose acknowledgment of the era's social ills marked something of a milestone for Elvis. In other hands, the song might have felt naive or simplistic, but Presley tore into it with such passionate belief that one couldn't help but be uplifted by its hopeful message. "If I Can Dream" reached number twelve in *Billboard*, his best chart showing in years.

Those releases could only hint at the full-on resurrection that would occur with Presley's upcoming NBC-TV special. Commonly referred to as "the 1968 comeback special" but officially titled *Elvis*, the show—shot in late June but not broadcast until December 3—decisively re-embraced Elvis's rocking roots, and in the course of one hour managed to reestablish the tarnished icon as a contemporary artist.

Although the colonel had originally envisioned the show as a bucolic Christmas-themed trifle, the show's producer/director Steve Binder had something more substantial in mind. He saw the special as an opportunity for Presley to reassert his performing prowess and reclaim his credibility. Elvis, frustrated after the years of forgettable films and mediocre music, stood up to his manager for a change. Actually, he and Binder conspired to keep the colonel placated and distracted while they went ahead with their plans to do the show their way.

Presley and Binder's instincts proved correct. The NBC special reestablished Elvis as a vital musical force virtually overnight, showing his talent and magnetism intact after nearly a decade of aesthetic neglect. The show opened with a trim, leather-clad Elvis delivering the *King Creole* chestnut "Trouble" with a swagger that immediately announced that he was back with a vengeance. An informal jam session segment in which Elvis traded songs and stories with a circle of musical pals including Scotty Moore and D.J. Fontana, showed him to be loose, confident, and firmly in control.

Another highlight was an extended, athletic production number built around "Guitar Man." The piece follows its protagonist through his journey from struggling musician to successful star, through his eventual realization that his dream has been achieved at the expense of his original passion. In the end, he abandons the trappings of stardom to return to his humble musical roots. It would be hard to miss the reference to Elvis's own travails.

Although the colonel had originally insisted that the program end with a rendition of “Silent Night,” the actual finale of “If I Can Dream” ended the show on an inspirational note. Standing alone on stage, Elvis delivered the song’s idealistic lyrical message with an intensity that made it one of the most galvanizing moments of his career.

Suddenly, the thirty-three-year-old Elvis, long considered an anachronism, was relevant again. As critic Greil Marcus observed in his 1975 book *Mystery Train*, one of the first serious tomes to attempt to unravel Presley’s mythical appeal, “It was the finest music of his life. If ever there was music that bleeds, this was it.”¹⁰

The NBC special set the stage for a remarkably productive period during which a reenergized Elvis returned to music-making in earnest. In January and February 1969, he entered American Studios in Memphis for his first hometown sessions since 1955. Working with noted producer Chips Moman and a crack assortment of Southern session players, Presley took a proactive role in marathon all-night sessions, and the result was *From Elvis in Memphis*, considered by many to be the best album of his career.

The American Studios recordings found Presley shaking off the boredom and complacency that had set in during his movie years, and taking a hands-on role in leading the band, putting together the arrangements and running the sessions, just as he had in the old days.

As veteran producer/engineer Bones Howe, who’d served as music producer on the NBC special, told author Jerry Hopkins in his 1971 book *Elvis, A Biography*, “Elvis produced his own records. He came to the session, picked the songs, and if something in the arrangement was changed, he was the one to change it. Everything was worked out spontaneously. Nothing was really rehearsed. Many of the important decisions normally made previous to a recording session were made during the session.”¹¹

From Elvis in Memphis introduced a punchy new sound that imbued Elvis’s country and blues roots with funky country-soul grooves that were well suited to the songs’ more mature attitude. There was no mistaking the level of emotional commitment that he brought to the material, which spanned the breadth of his interests and influences. The songs ranged from contemporary soul hits like Jerry Butler’s “Only the Strong Survive” and Chuck Jackson’s “Any Day Now” to such venerable country tunes as Hank Snow’s classic “I’m Movin’ On” and Eddy Arnold’s “I’ll Hold You in My Arms,” as well as the recent Glen Campbell hit “Gentle on My Mind.”

From Elvis in Memphis spawned a major hit in the Mac Davis composition “In the Ghetto.” It was the closest Presley would ever come to singing a protest song, and its socially conscious message carried a particular resonance in an America torn by racial and economic injustice. If the song was somewhat simplistic and melodramatic, the fact that it was delivered by a figure of Elvis’s stature carried much weight in the divisive atmosphere of 1969.

Meanwhile, with box office receipts dwindling, Elvis closed out his acting career with some relatively offbeat projects that made some token attempts to break away from the established formula. *Charro!* was a poorly executed faux-spaghetti western in which Presley played it straight as a scruffy, non-singing gunfighter. *Change of Habit* was a well-intentioned but ill-conceived stab at social relevancy, with Elvis as a guitar-slinging inner-city doctor who may or may not be in love with nun Mary Tyler Moore.

With Elvis having finally freed himself of his Hollywood commitments, the next logical step in his resurrection was a return to live performance. Rather than bother with the rock audience that had expanded and diversified during the 1960s, Colonel Parker booked a much-ballyhooed four-week, fifty-seven-show engagement at the newly constructed International Hotel in Las Vegas beginning on July 31, 1969 (eleven days after Neil Armstrong became the first man to walk on the moon). Those performances introduced Presley's powerful new live band, an expanded ensemble that included the peerless rockabilly guitarist James Burton.

At the center of the lavish presentation was the lean and hungry Elvis, performing with the fire of a man given a second lease on life. The International Hotel run was an unmistakable triumph, winning rave reviews and breaking Las Vegas attendance records. It would be followed by a series of massively successful national tours and Vegas engagements. Presley would give over 1,000 sold-out Vegas performances between 1969 and 1977, and would be the first act to sell out New York's Madison Square Garden for four shows in a row.

The Vegas comeback coincided with Elvis's biggest hit since 1962, the number one smash "Suspicious Minds," recorded during the *From Elvis in Memphis* sessions but not included on the album. "Suspicious Minds" was a perfect distillation of his soulful new sound, and would remain one of his most popular numbers (and its subject matter resonated strongly with rumors of troubles in the Presley marriage). Two more songs cut during the American Studios sessions, "Don't Cry Daddy" and "Kentucky Rain," also became hits in late 1969 and early 1970, respectively.

Three months after "Suspicious Minds" was released, the song turned up in a live version on the double album *From Memphis to Vegas/From Vegas to Memphis*, which combined an LP of performances from the closing week at the International with a disc of leftovers from the American Studios sessions. The live half (the first installment in a steady stream of live Elvis material that RCA would continue to grind out through the 1970s) offered a persuasive document of Presley's return to the stage. The studio half underlined what a bountiful creative purging the Memphis sessions had been.

When Elvis returned to the silver screen, it was as the focus of a pair of successful feature documentaries that documented his return to the live stage, 1970's *Elvis: That's the Way It Is* and 1972's *Elvis On Tour*. In January 1973, he'd score a massive small-screen success with *Aloha from Hawaii*, the

first-ever worldwide live satellite broadcast of a musical event, seen by over a billion viewers worldwide.

As it happened, Hawaii would be the furthest Elvis would ever travel to perform. Many have speculated that the colonel turned down lucrative offers of overseas tours because he was an illegal alien whose status would have been discovered had he attempted to travel abroad. It has also been theorized that Parker kept Elvis performing in Vegas in order to cover Parker's massive gambling debts.

ELVIS: WHAT HAPPENED?

The reestablished superstar of *Aloha from Hawaii* was a very different animal from the comeback kid of the NBC special and the 1969 Vegas gigs. By this point, Elvis concerts had ballooned into overblown extravaganzas that often felt less like musical performances than opportunities for the faithful to worship at the Elvis altar. While there was no denying the undiminished energy of his performances or the ongoing magnificence of his voice, many considered the spectacle—along with the King's bejeweled, jumpsuit-clad stage persona—to be gauche and overly grandiose.

By then, Priscilla had left Elvis (their divorce would become final on October 9, 1973) and troubling rumors of drug use and unpredictable behavior had begun to swirl around the singer.

On December 21, 1970, a reportedly drug-impaired Presley paid a visit to President Richard M. Nixon at the White House, after writing Nixon a six-page letter suggesting that he be made a "Federal Agent-at-Large" in the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs. The meeting yielded a famous photo of an uncomfortable-looking Nixon shaking hands with Presley, clad in a dark cape, open-collared shirt, and garish belt buckle. Elvis brought the soon-to-be-disgraced president the gift of a World War II commemorative Colt .45 pistol (which the Secret Service seized), and Elvis was eventually sent a "specially prepared" badge from the Bureau of Narcotic and Dangerous Drugs.

During a 1975 show at the Las Vegas Hilton, Elvis spontaneously addressed recent rumors in a bizarre onstage outburst in which he denied using drugs and threatened severe physical harm to those who'd suggest that he did. Despite such unpredictable behavior, Presley would continue touring successfully for the remainder of his life, playing for large, adoring crowds in Vegas and in arenas around the United States.

In 1972 "Burning Love" became Presley's final Top 10 hit, and, for all intents and purposes, his last stand as a rock and roller. Thereafter, he settled into a comfortably middle-of-the-road country-pop style that yielded some catchy, well-crafted music, but nothing approaching the intensity of his best work.

But Elvis had bigger issues than musical direction. He had grown increasingly isolated, rising at sunset and rarely venturing outside of Graceland when

he wasn't on tour. He'd become increasingly dependent on a number of prescription drugs, and his prodigious consumption took a heavy toll on his health. His weight fluctuated wildly and his performances could be distracted and incoherent, further raising concerns among fans and the press.

His fans' worst suspicions were confirmed with the 1977 publication of *Elvis: What Happened?*, a book that drew upon interviews with Red West, Sonny West, and Dave Hebler, former members of the cadre of Elvis cronies and gofers commonly known as the Memphis Mafia. The tawdry tome painted a disturbing portrait of the artist as a volatile drug addict obsessed with sex, death, religion, and firearms, with his most irrational whims (like plotting to have his estranged wife's lover killed) indulged by his posse of yes-men. In those days before twenty-four-hour news channels and Internet gossip, the book shocked fans who still thought of Elvis as the humble, polite country boy who gave generously to friends and charities, and purchased Cadillacs for needy strangers.

On the evening of August 16, 1977, mere weeks after the publication of *Elvis: What Happened?*, Elvis Presley died at Graceland at the age of forty-two. He was found lying on the floor of the bathroom adjoining his bedroom by girlfriend Ginger Alden, who had been asleep in his bed. He was taken to Memphis's Baptist Memorial Hospital, where doctors pronounced him dead at 3:30 P.M. While the official cause of death was heart failure, lab reports detected fourteen different drugs in his system and strongly suggested that his drug use played a role in his demise. His remains were initially buried at Forest Hill Cemetery in Memphis, next to his mother. After an attempted theft of the body, Elvis's and Gladys's graves were moved to Graceland.

Elvis Presley's death precipitated a massive outpouring of mourning from fans around the world. It also spawned an industry of posthumous Elvis-related commerce, from all manner of memorabilia to a variety of musical, literary, and cinematic tributes.

One measure of the public's ongoing Elvis obsession is the persistence of theories that he didn't actually die in 1977, but faked his demise to escape the pressures of the spotlight. Another curious manifestation of Presley's iconic status—and of the public's desire to hang on to some vestige of the departed star—is the proliferation of Elvis impersonators. Acts appropriating the King's likeness and performing style began to spring up almost immediately after his death and have continued to prosper, with several annual Elvis impersonator festivals hosting multiple tribute artists.

In the decade following his death, Elvis's recorded legacy was treated by RCA Records and Colonel Tom Parker with the same capriciousness with which they handled his catalog while he was alive. The company churned out a stream of carelessly assembled, blatantly exploitive releases, with little regard for historical perspective and musical quality. Elvis's body of work finally began to receive respectful repackaging in the CD era.

Graceland was opened to the public in 1982 as a monument to Presley's memory and continues to be a major tourist destination, attracting over

600,000 visitors per year. It was designated a National Historic Landmark on March 27, 2006.

In 1986, Elvis was one of the first group of inductees into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. He was added to the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1998 and the Gospel Music Hall of Fame in 2001. In 1993, the image of the young Elvis was featured on a U.S. postage stamp. As of this writing, the Sirius Satellite Radio service features an all-Elvis channel.

In October 2005, when the entertainment trade journal *Variety* named the top 100 entertainment icons of the twentieth century, Elvis was in the top ten, along with Louis Armstrong, Lucille Ball, the Beatles, Marlon Brando, Humphrey Bogart, Charlie Chaplin, James Dean, Marilyn Monroe, and Mickey Mouse. A week later, *Forbes* magazine named Elvis, for the fifth straight year, the top-earning dead celebrity.

More than a quarter century after his death, Elvis remains the best-selling solo artist in popular music history, according to the RIAA, with worldwide sales estimated at one billion as of 2006. His classic recordings continue to attract new listeners, as evidenced by the 2002 chart success of Junkie XL's remix of the obscure "A Little Less Conversation" (originally from the 1968 film flop *Live a Little Love a Little*) and the following year's Paul Oakenfold remix of "Rubberneckin'" (from *Change of Habit*).

Like the country and culture that spawned him, Elvis Presley was a tangled mass of contradictions. If he was ultimately brought down by his inability to fully understand his own talent or grasp the larger implications of the changes that he wrought, his accomplishments speak for themselves.

TIMELINE

January 8, 1935

Elvis Aaron Presley is born to Gladys and Vernon Presley in a two-room cabin in East Tupelo, Mississippi.

July 18, 1953

Elvis Presley goes to the Memphis Recording Service, home of Sun Records, and pays \$3.25 to record two songs, "My Happiness" and "That's When Your Heartaches Begin," as a present for his mother. Office manager Marion Keisker makes a note to alert her boss Sam Phillips to the eighteen-year-old's talents as a ballad singer.

June 27, 1954

In an effort to help Presley find his style, Sam Phillips teams him with two local musicians, guitarist Scotty Moore and bassist Bill Black, and has the trio begin rehearsing and learning songs together.

July 5, 1954

During a recording session at Sun, Elvis spontaneously breaks into "That's All Right, Mama," a blues number by Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup. The next day, Elvis, Scotty, and Bill cut a similarly energetic reworking the Bill Monroe bluegrass tune "Blue Moon of Kentucky."

July 19, 1954

Sun Records releases “That’s All Right, Mama” and “Blue Moon of Kentucky” as Elvis Presley’s first single, bearing the catalog number Sun 209.

July 20, 1954

Elvis makes his first public appearance, performing on a flatbed truck in Memphis.

October 2, 1954

Elvis appears on Nashville’s Grand Ole Opry for the first and only time. His performance of “Blue Moon of Kentucky” receives a polite audience response.

October 16, 1954

Elvis makes the first of many appearances on the *Louisiana Hayride* radio show, broadcast from Shreveport, Louisiana.

August 15, 1955

Elvis Presley signs a management contract with Colonel Tom Parker.

November 20, 1955

After Parker fields an offer from RCA Records, Sam Phillips sells Elvis’s recording contract to RCA for \$35,000.

January 27, 1956

Elvis Presley’s RCA debut, “Heartbreak Hotel,” is released. It will be the first of Presley’s seventeen number one hits, spending eight weeks at the top of the charts and establishing Elvis as a national sensation.

January 28, 1956

Elvis Presley makes his first network TV appearance on bandleaders Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey’s *Stage Show*.

September 9, 1956

Elvis makes the first of three appearances on TV’s *Ed Sullivan Show*, drawing an estimated 82.5 percent of the viewing audience.

November 15, 1956

Elvis’s first film, *Love Me Tender*, premieres at the New York Paramount.

December 4, 1956

Elvis and his former Sun label-mates Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins, and Johnny Cash gather at Sun for an informal jam session, performing gospel standards and R&B hits around the piano. Sam Phillips dubs the one-time aggregation the Million Dollar Quartet.

December 20, 1957

Elvis Presley is served with his draft notice while home at Graceland for Christmas.

March 24, 1958

Elvis is sworn in as a private in the U.S. Army. The Memphis draft board had granted him a deferment to allow him to complete filming on *King Creole*.

October 1, 1958

Elvis begins his army service.

March 2, 1960

Elvis returns to the United States after completing his army service. He is honorably discharged at the rank of sergeant.

May 12, 1960

Elvis is featured in *Welcome Home Elvis*, a Frank Sinatra–hosted TV special.

August 27, 1965

Elvis hosts the Beatles for an evening of music and conversation at his house in Bel Air, California.

May 1, 1967

Elvis Presley marries Priscilla Beaulieu at the Aladdin Hotel in Las Vegas.

February 1, 1968

Elvis and Priscilla's only child, Lisa Marie Presley, is born, exactly nine months after her parents' wedding.

December 3, 1968

NBC airs *Elvis*, a prime-time TV special that serves notice of Presley's resurrection as a rock and roll performer.

January 13, 1969

Elvis enters American Sound in Memphis for his first hometown recording sessions since leaving Sun in 1956. The American sessions mark Elvis's revitalization as a recording artist, and spawn such hits as "Suspicious Minds" and "In the Ghetto."

July 31, 1969

Elvis ends an eight-year hiatus from live performance, beginning a four-week engagement at the International Hotel in Las Vegas. He will continue to perform regularly in Vegas, and on tour, for the rest of his life.

October 9, 1973

Elvis and Priscilla Presley divorce.

June 26, 1977

Elvis Presley performs his last concert, at Market Square Arena in Indianapolis.

July 16, 1977

"Way Down" enters *Billboard's* pop chart, becoming the last of 105 singles by Elvis Presley to reach the Top Forty during his lifetime.

August 16, 1977

An unconscious Elvis Presley is rushed to Memphis's Baptist Memorial Hospital and subsequently pronounced dead.

July 1982

Graceland is opened to the public. It will become a popular tourist destination.

January 8, 1993

The U.S. Post Office's Elvis Presley postage stamp goes on sale.

June 2002

A remix of the 1968 Presley non-hit "A Little Less Conversation," by Junkie XL, becomes a number one hit in twenty countries.

March 27, 2006

Graceland is officially designated a National Historic Landmark.

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Courtesy of Photofest.

Ray Charles

Andy Schwartz

SATURDAY NIGHT AND SUNDAY MORNING

The weather in Atlanta, Georgia, is damp and breezy on the night of May 29, 1959. Despite intermittent rainfall, a crowd of 9,000 people has filled the stands of a minor league ballpark called Herndon Stadium for a long evening of live rhythm and blues. The Drifters, Ruth Brown, Jimmy Reed, Roy Hamilton, and B.B. King all have performed to an enthusiastic response; now the crowd

is enraptured by the show's headline attraction, whose set has reached a peak of controlled frenzy.

Wearing dark sunglasses and rocking from side to side in his seat at an electric piano, the singer stomps his right foot to count off a mid-tempo blues called "(Night Time Is) The Right Time." He hits the first chord and one of his accompanists, saxophonist David "Fathead" Newman, swoops in with eight bars of searing tenor. The singer bears down hard on the lyrics—exhorting, pleading, commanding—as he rides the relentless rocking-chair rhythm of bass and drums: "*You know the night time . . . is the right time . . . to beeee . . . with the one you love.*"

On the opposite side of the stage, a harmonizing trio of female backup singers echoes his secular sermon with wordless syllables ("*bah-doo-day*") until he calls forth one of them with a gruff shout: "Sing the song, Margie!" The piercing voice of Margie Hendricks emerges from the group for a fiery solo turn until the leader reenters, soaring into top of his vocal range with a hair-raising wail. At the end of his last chorus, the band thunders to a close and the entire audience leaps to its feet for a standing ovation that lasts nearly ten minutes.

The organizer and MC of the show, a local disc jockey named Zenas Sears, races onto the stage and grabs the microphone. "The great Ray Charles!" he shouts deliriously over the roar of the crowd. "The High Priest! The High Priest! *Ray Charles—What a show!*"

EARLY YEARS

Ray Charles Robinson was born in Albany, Georgia, in 1930. Because he never possessed a birth certificate, the exact date of birth can't be verified. Most but not all sources state September 23, the date observed by Ray. His mother Aretha (known as Retha) was a teenage orphan who'd been adopted by Bailey Robinson and his wife Mary Jane and lived with them in the small north Florida town of Greenville. When Retha became pregnant, word spread that Bailey was the father; the girl was sent to stay with relatives in Albany to have the baby. Shortly after the birth, Ray and Retha returned to Greenville where they lived in a shack in the impoverished black neighborhood known as Jellyroll. Bailey Robinson remarried, moved to a nearby small town, and had little involvement in Ray's upbringing.

Ray's brother George was born less than a year later; as toddlers, the two boys were inseparable. Retha was a strict mother who assigned regular chores to her sons when they were just five and six years old. Every Sunday, she brought them with her to the New Shiloh Baptist Church where the reverend preached fiery sermons, gospel singers wailed and shook tambourines, and parishioners "fell out" in spasms of devotional ecstasy.

Outside the church, young Ray's important musical influence came from Wiley Pitman, the owner of a local general store and café called the Red Wing. Pitman was a talented stride and boogie-woogie pianist who sat Ray on his knee for his first lessons at the piano. The boy also listened avidly to the Red Wing jukebox with its selection of guitar blues, piano boogies, and swing tunes.

One afternoon in 1935, the Robinson boys were splashing around in a large washtub outside the café. When George suddenly began to panic in the water, Ray wasn't big or strong enough to rescue him. George's accidental drowning, before his brother's own eyes, was the first of two tragedies that scarred Ray's early childhood. The second followed later that same year when mucus began to ooze from his eyelids and his sight began to fail. (Years later, doctors speculated that the cause was congenital juvenile glaucoma.)

Retha was determined that her nearly sightless son be able to make his own way in the world. She refused to lighten Ray's load of chores or allow him to just hang around the house. Again and again, his mother reminded Ray that she wasn't going to live forever: He had to do everything he could to prepare himself for independent life as an adult.

"The woman never let me get away with anything just 'cause I was blind," Charles told co-author David Ritz in his autobiography *Brother Ray*. "I was treated like I was normal. I acted like I was normal. And I ended up doing exactly the same things normal people do."¹

By the fall of 1937, Ray had lost his sight. Over his tearful protestations, Retha put her son on the train to St. Augustine, Florida, where she had enrolled him in the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind. For the next eight years, Ray remained a boarding student at this racially segregated state institution, where he became known as RC to his friends and fellow students.

Despite facilities and materials inferior to those bestowed upon the school's white pupils, the mostly poor black students and underpaid black faculty of D&B forged a powerful bond. The children learned to read Braille, play sports, and make handicrafts in addition to their academic subjects. At the Christmas break and the end of the school year, Ray would return to Retha's dilapidated home in Greenville.

RC was an avid radio listener from adolescence. He tuned into the sounds of country and western music and the big bands of Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw, and Tommy Dorsey; he was astounded by blind jazz pianist Art Tatum's flawless technique and unending flow of musical ideas. The hardcore down-home blues of the Mississippi Delta and Chicago was almost never heard on radio in the years before World War II but Ray heard Tampa Red and Lonnie Johnson on jukeboxes as well as local blues players in cafés or on the street.

By the age of thirteen, Ray had picked up a second instrument, the clarinet. When not attending D&B, he played piano for a Tallahassee jazz band led by guitarist Lawyer Smith that worked weddings, proms, dances, juke joints, and fraternal organization affairs. Ray was still in school in the spring of 1945

when his mother, still in her early thirties, died suddenly of an undiagnosed illness. Retha's death was a crushing blow to her only surviving son. But he was comforted by Rebecca Bea aka Ma Beck, a healer and midwife widely admired in the Greenville black community who herself had given birth to at least nineteen children.

In October 1945, Ray was expelled from D&B—a place he felt he'd outgrown already—and moved in with some family friends in Jacksonville, Florida. He scuffled for gigs on the local music scene while honing his piano chops and learning the pop standards required for all-occasions entertainment. The singer and alto saxophonist Louis Jordan was approaching the peak of his national stardom with bouncy hits like "Caldonia" and "Choo Choo Ch'Boogie." Ray enjoyed Jordan's witty R&B style but was more deeply enamored of Nat King Cole, a virtuoso jazz pianist and vocalist, and of Johnny Moore's Three Blazers, whose massive 1946 hit "Drifting Blues" featured the mellow vocal and piano of Charles Brown.

"By the time I hit the streets of Jacksonville," Ray later recalled, "I'd been schooled on all these different sounds way 'fore I ever heard the word school; it was part of my natural upbringing. And at school, of course, I'd been exposed to Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Sibelius, Chopin, and all the other big names."²

Ray traveled to Orlando with a band led by saxophonist Tiny York; when work ran out and the group broke up, he stayed on. Blind, broke, and alone in a city where he knew almost no one, RC literally went hungry on many occasions while trying to hustle gigs on the competitive local music scene. Yet he never gave up and seems never to have asked for charity—only for the chance to play and be paid for his music.

Gradually, RC found work on the bandstands of the black community in west Orlando. In early 1947 he was hired to play piano with Joe Anderson's fifteen-piece big band and later to write original arrangements for the group. Ray's confidence rose as he began teaching himself to play alto saxophone. Soon he'd earned enough to buy his first record player and a treasured handful of 78 rpm jazz discs by Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, and other jazz innovators.

Later that year, Ray relocated to Tampa and was quickly recruited by two different groups. The Honeydrippers, led by Charlie Brantley, were an all-black "jump blues" band in the mode of Louis Jordan's Tympani Five; the Florida Playboys were an all-white country band playing the songs of Hank Williams, Eddie Arnold, and other Grand Ole Opry favorites. In a segregated city like Tampa, it was surprising that the Playboys would enlist a blind black pianist. But RC could play country music with as much ability and feeling as any white musician—he even sang lead on a couple of tunes. Heeding the suggestions of friends, he also began to wear the heavy-rimmed dark sunglasses that became his trademark.

Life in Tampa was improving for RC. It got better still when he became the featured vocalist and pianist with a new group called the Manzy Harris Quartet

that specialized in the sophisticated blues and ballad style of Nat King Cole. Ray also purchased a wire recorder and made some informal home recordings on this primitive device. These lo-fidelity tracks (such as “Walking and Talking” and “I Found My Baby There”) would surface years later on various cheaply packaged compilation albums. Despite the poor sound quality and uncertain backing of his accompanists, RC’s piano playing cuts through the fog with sophisticated chords and explosive single-note runs.

RC’s musician friend Gossie McKee had done some touring around the United States and returned to Tampa with exciting tales from the road—and of cities in the North and West that were free of Florida’s segregationist codes. In the spring of 1948, Ray rode a Trailways bus from Tampa to Seattle, Washington, where Gossie already had settled into the black entertainment district centered on Jackson Street. There was plenty of work for a musician as talented as Ray Charles on a circuit of gigs that extended north to Vancouver and south to Portland, Oregon. RC formed the McSon Trio with Gossie on guitar and Milt Garred on bass. For professional purposes, he dropped his last name in deference to the established fame of welterweight boxing champion Sugar Ray Robinson.

West Coast Rhythm and Blues

When Ray Charles moved from Florida to Seattle in 1948, he joined a long-term mass migration that brought large numbers of African American musicians to the West Coast from the Deep South and Southwest. This movement gained momentum with the outbreak of World War II and the need for workers in factories and shipyards revitalized by the war effort. In Los Angeles, Central Avenue was the city’s African American business district and home to such flourishing nightspots as Club Alabam, Little Harlem, and the Downbeat.

Many early pioneers of West Coast rhythm and blues had personal roots in the South and professional ones in the swing era of the 1930s including Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductees Aaron “T-Bone” Walker, Nat King Cole, and Charles Brown.

Born 1910 in rural Texas, T-Bone Walker was the first to popularize the electric guitar in blues and swing music with the big bands of Les Hite and Freddie Slack. Walker’s 1948 recording of “Call It Stormy Monday” “drove me crazy,” B.B. King recalled years later. “I never believed a sound could be that pretty on an instrument.”

Nat King Cole and Charles Brown (born in Alabama and Texas in 1917 and 1922, respectively) rose to prominence in the 1940s, singing and playing piano in a smooth small-group format sometimes known as “club blues.” Nat Cole overcame barriers of institutional racism to become a beloved mainstream entertainer. He briefly hosted his own television show, headlined in Las Vegas, and placed twenty-seven songs in the Top Forty from 1954 until his death from cancer in 1965. Charles Brown recorded such West Coast

standards as “Trouble Blues” (1949), “Black Night” (1951), and the holiday perennial “Please Come Home for Christmas” (1960). After many years in obscurity, this openly gay bluesman made a late 1980s comeback with the help of Bonnie Raitt (who took him on tour as her opening act) and several Grammy-nominated albums recorded in his classic style.

Johnny Otis was a key player on the Los Angeles R&B scene for decades, less important as a vocalist than as a bandleader, multi-instrumentalist, and talent scout. He was born John Veliotes in 1921—a white man of Greek heritage who lived his life entirely within the African American community. (Indeed, many of his fellow musicians believed that Otis *was* black.) His discoveries included future soul stars Esther Phillips and Etta James, and the great vocal group Hank Ballard and the Midnighters. Otis was the bandleader and *de facto* producer for two landmark number one R&B hits of the 1950s: “Pledging My Love” by Johnny Ace and Willie Mae “Big Mama” Thornton’s original version of “Hound Dog,” later a number one hit for Elvis Presley. Fifty years later, Johnny Otis was still active as a record producer, author, lecturer, painter, and radio personality.

Andy Schwartz

As a musician, RC had both growing technical command and deep Southern feeling; as a man, he was already supporting himself and his girlfriend, Louise Mitchell. Ray seemed older than his eighteen years and younger Seattle musicians like saxophonist Buddy Catlett and trumpeter Quincy Jones held him in high esteem for his abilities as an arranger. “He showed me how to voice the first brass section writing I ever did,” Quincy told writer Nat Hentoff. “He really showed me the function of an arranger, what he was capable of doing.”³

But in this same eventful year of 1948, Ray Charles discovered drugs. He became a heroin addict and remained one for the next seventeen years despite the personal and financial toll extracted by his habit.

“It was more curiosity than anything,” Ray explained to David Ritz in his characteristically blunt manner. “The way I was around mechanical devices, the way I was around musical instruments, electronic playthings—well, that’s how I was around drugs. Once I started, I saw no reason to stop. In those days, [heroin] didn’t even cost that much.”⁴

One night during an extended engagement at the Rocking Chair in Seattle, the members of the McSon Trio were introduced to Jack Lauderdale, the proprietor of a small independent label called Down Beat Records. The next day, Lauderdale brought the group into a local studio to cut two sides, “I Love You, I Love You” and “Confession Blues.” In early 1949, Down Beat released the songs on the debut single by the Maxin Trio; authorship of both tunes was credited to Ray Charles.

To the surprise of all concerned, this disc made it into the Top Ten of *Billboard’s* Best Selling Retail Race Records chart (the industry term “race

records” had not yet been supplanted to “rhythm and blues”) and in June Jack Lauderdale returned to Seattle to record more songs with the trio. He brought along a recording contract that Gossie McKee quickly signed on behalf of the group even though its extravagant guarantees were pure fiction—for example, the promise that Down Beat would record at least 200 songs by the group during the six-year term of the agreement.

More sessions followed but internal tensions soon broke up the McSon Trio. RC’s relationship with Louise Mitchell was also crumbling; when at last she returned to her family in Florida, neither of them even knew that Louise was pregnant with Ray’s first child, a daughter who they named Evelyn. Jack Lauderdale was undeterred by these developments. Ray was clearly the star of the group, was still under contract to Lauderdale’s label (now renamed Swingtime Records), and was now free to relocate to Los Angeles, where he arrived alone by train in the spring of 1950.

SOLO ARTIST

Black L.A. was jumping. Its central business district, along a six-mile-long stretch of Central Avenue, was filled with restaurants, bars, hotels, nightclubs, and movie theaters. Ray’s new Swingtime release, “Late in the Evening” backed with “Th’ Ego Song,” gave him the brassy backing of an eight-piece band and extra pay as the session leader. But just weeks after his arrival in town, RC was on the road with blues singer and guitarist Lowell Fulson, then riding high on his career-making Swingtime hit “Every Day I Have the Blues.” While playing piano for Fulson, Ray also received a featured spot of his own which earned him his first notices in the black press.

Jack Lauderdale reverted to the drum-less trio format for the next Swingtime session and came up with a winner in “Baby Let Me Hold Your Hand.” Ray’s closely miked vocal and delicate keyboard intro—played on a celeste rather than piano—imbued the track with a distinctive sound that was part Nat King Cole, part Charles Brown, and part pure RC. The song hit the stores and airwaves in January 1951 when the Lowell Fulson tour was still out on the road. Saxophonist Stanley Turrentine was not quite seventeen when he signed on with the Fulson show. It was the future jazz superstar’s first national tour: “I got on that raggedy bus . . . we turned south and we *stayed* south.”⁵

During an extended engagement in Cleveland in July, Ray met Eileen Williams, a beautician from Columbus, Ohio. The two had known each other for about three weeks when they were wed in Atlanta on July 31; Ray went back on the road while Eileen returned to Columbus. Within a year, the marriage was effectively over and the couple later divorced.

Peaking at number five on the *Billboard* R&B Jukebox chart, “Baby Let Me Hold Your Hand” was Ray’s first hit under his own name. It became a

national best-seller and led to his signing by the powerful Shaw Artists booking agency (he remained with the firm for the next fifteen years). But the sound was still too derivative to establish RC as a viable artist in his own right.

Out on the road, Ray's superior musicianship made him invaluable to Lowell Fulson and earned him multiple salary increases. Between those performance earnings and occasional record royalties, RC could afford to buy his first car and pay someone to drive it while making regular deposits to the savings account he maintained back in Greenville. But he chafed under the limitations of a supporting role, and the Shaw Agency began to book Ray under his own name on selected dates.

"Kissa Me Baby," the next Swingtime release by Ray Charles, fell short of the R&B Top Five and quickly faded from the chart. Jack Lauderdale found his cash flow squeezed by tight-fisted distributors who postponed payment as long as they possibly could. In January 1952, Lauderdale sold RC's recording contract for \$2,500 to Ahmet Ertegun and Herb Abramson, the founding partners of New York-based Atlantic Records.

"I heard 'Baby, Let Me Hold Your Hand' once and I said this is the most fabulous singer alive today," Ertegun recalled in a 2005 interview. "A booking agent named Billy Shaw said to me, 'We have Ray Charles but we can't book him as a headliner. Do you think you can make hit records with him?' and I said, 'I *know* I can make hit records with him.' . . . I was the only one who thought so."⁶

THE ATLANTIC YEARS

In September 1952, Ray Charles arrived in New York City for his first Atlantic recording session. Jesse Stone, the company's main man in the studio, had booked some of his regular musicians for the date, which produced four finished masters in three hours. "Roll with My Baby" evoked Nat King Cole, just as "Midnight Hour" did Charles Brown. But "The Sun's Gonna Shine Again" pointed toward a more distinctively original sound with its somber mood, plaintive vocal, and Ray's repeated exclamations of "Lord."

The first single, "Roll with My Baby" backed with "Midnight Hour," received good notices in the trade publications though not much in the way of sales or airplay. It was the same story with "Jumping in the Morning" backed with "The Sun's Gonna Shine Again," released in early 1953. But Atlantic had scored several of the biggest Top Ten R&B hits of 1952 with other artists such as Ruth Brown ("Mama, He Treats Your Daughter Mean"), and these sales allowed the company to continue recording Ray until he came up with a hit.

When the army suddenly recalled Herb Abramson to active duty in Germany, Ahmet found a new partner in Jerry Wexler. A former song promoter, *Billboard* staff writer, and fellow black music buff, Wexler had coined the phrase "rhythm and blues" in an essay for *The Saturday Review of Literature*.

In his 1995 autobiography, Jerry recounted his first meeting with RC at the old Atlantic offices on West 56th Street in Manhattan.

“I was struck by his physical presence,” he wrote, “strong, broad-shouldered, barrel-chested, his rhythms simultaneously quick and cautious. . . . His speaking voice, like his singing voice, was deep but ever-changing, sometimes sounding old beyond his years, sometimes filled with youthful ebullience, sometimes sullen and withdrawn. His dark glasses were a symbol of his mystery, an emblem of some secret pain.”⁷

Years later, Ray reflected upon his solitary mode of existence: “Loud parties, large crowds, being out with the gang—none of these things interested me. . . . Of all the people I’ve met in my life, I’d have to struggle hard to find five I’d call my friends, people I can really count on. And that’s my doing. I’m just not the type to have scores of long-lasting, intimate friendships.”⁸

Wexler was present for Ray’s second Atlantic session, in May 1953. This time, everyone played it by ear, without a pre-set repertoire. Ahmet called out song titles and stray lyrics from the history of jazz and blues; at the piano, Ray blithely ran off boogie-woogie motifs and swing era quotations. Ertegun sang a twelve-bar blues stomp he’d written called “Mess Around” and Ray cut it fast, loose, and hard-driving. “Losing Hand” was a ghostly minor-key blues with atmospheric guitar work by Mickey Baker. “It Should’ve Been Me” was a sly mid-tempo tale of ghetto street life as told by an envious also-ran watching “a real sharp cat, with a \$300 suit and a \$100 hat” and his “real fine chick, driving that Dynaflo!”

Released as a single, “It Should’ve Been Me” climbed to number five R&B and hung on the chart for nine weeks—a respectable showing if not a career breakthrough. But more important, on at least half the tracks from this session, Ray had moved away from his skillful emulations of Nat King Cole and Charles Brown toward his own style of phrasing and delivery. Ahmet Ertegun sensed the beginning of this transformation and knew it was only a matter of time and circumstance until he had the Ray Charles hit he craved.

In his travels with Lowell Fulson, RC had been particularly well received in New Orleans; he settled there temporarily in the summer of 1953. In August, Ahmet and Jerry flew down for sessions at J&M Recording, working with J&M owner/producer/engineer Cosimo (Cosmo) Matassa. With time left over from a date with local singer Tommy Ridgley, they let Ray cut a pair of slow blues numbers. Atlantic rush-released “Feelin’ Sad” in late September but it too failed to catch on.

New Orleans Rhythm and Blues

It’s not surprising that New Orleans should have been the place where Ray Charles found his true voice as a recording artist. From the end of World War II into the early 1960s, the Crescent City was a leading producer of rhythm and blues just as it had been the cradle of jazz in earlier decades. The history

of New Orleans is marked by deep poverty, political corruption, and racial segregation. But its citizens take great pride in the city's centuries-old cultural traditions, showing a special affection for local musicians whether or not they ever find success beyond the city limits. A New Orleans artist who barely brushed the national charts with a single song could still be "a star in the ghetto" decades later in one or another of the city's close-knit neighborhoods.

Singer/pianist Antoine "Fats" Domino remains the most famous name in the history of New Orleans rhythm and blues, more than fifty years after making his *Billboard* R&B chart debut in 1950 with the rocking, self-mocking blues "The Fat Man." Between 1950 and 1963, Fats placed thirty-seven songs in the Pop Top Forty including "I'm Walkin'," "Whole Lotta Loving," and "I'm in Love Again." The tunes were infectiously simple but arranged for maximum danceability by Domino's co-writer and bandleader, Dave Bartholomew, and played by a stellar studio group that included saxophonist Lee Allen and drummer Earl Palmer. When recording activity in New Orleans declined in the mid-1960s, these and other musicians moved to Los Angeles. But until the floods of Hurricane Katrina destroyed his home in 2005, Fats Domino continued to live in the Lower Ninth Ward—the same New Orleans neighborhood where he was born in 1928. In 1986, Domino was among the first group of artists inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

Roy Brown (1925–81) sang the blues with gospel fervor and put New Orleans on the post-war musical map with his 1947 hit "Good Rockin' Tonight." Larry Williams (1935–80) was a favorite of the Beatles, who covered his late 1950s hits "Slow Down" and "Bad Boy." Eddie Jones aka Guitar Slim (1926–59) created an all-time blues standard with his only R&B chart hit, "The Things That I Used to Do." With his hundred-foot guitar cord and brightly colored suits, Slim was a flamboyant performer so much in demand that other Crescent City singer/guitarists like Earl King were sometimes booked to perform in his stead, using his name.

Rock and Roll Hall of Fame honoree Allen Toussaint began his career in 1958 and rose to become the city's best-known songwriter and producer. Artists ranging from Lee Dorsey ("Workin' in a Coal Mine") to the Pointer Sisters ("Yes We Can-Can") have reaped major hits from Toussaint's catalog of compositions. In August 2005, Allen Toussaint lost his home in the flooding after Hurricane Katrina. But in collaboration with English singer-songwriter Elvis Costello, he released a new album, *The River in Reverse*, that brought the New Orleans rock and roll tradition into the twenty-first century.

A. S.

On October 16, 1953, Ray participated in another session at J&M, this one starring Guitar Slim (Eddie Jones Jr.). The flamboyant blues singer/guitarist had passion and energy to burn but none of Ray's technical skill or organizational ability. RC quickly took command of the session: playing piano, humming

improvised horn riffs to the band, and reining in the excitable Slim, who tended to rush the tempo and wander off the microphone. It was nearly dawn when they cut the master take of the last song of the date, “The Things That I Used to Do.”

Released on Specialty Records in December, “The Things That I Used To Do” became the biggest-selling R&B disc of 1954 and topped the Billboard R&B chart for six straight weeks. The Guitar Slim date showed Ray that he had what it took to create a smash hit, albeit for another artist.

Jerry and Ahmet returned to New Orleans in December for an all-night session at a local radio studio. This time RC brought along several original blues-based tunes including the infectious “Don’t You Know.” “Now you can hear the real Ray emerging,” Wexler noted. “It’s Ray’s tune, Ray’s chart, Ray’s irresistible spirit that sets the sexy agenda. From his opening falsetto scream . . . to the horn voicings to the super-hip medium-mellow groove, the production is brilliant.” In its very brief R&B chart appearance, “Don’t You Know” struggled to number ten.

Ray would not return to the studio for nearly a year. But in the interim, he took a major step forward in his career when he formed his own seven-piece band. Any horn player auditioning for RC had to be able to read music, to improvise jazz solos, and to play the blues. One of RC’s key early recruits was saxophonist David “Fathead” Newman, a Dallas native who would remain with Ray for the next ten years. As band director or “straw boss,” New Orleans trumpeter Renald Richard was responsible for overseeing rehearsals and making sure the musicians took the stage on time, properly attired, and more or less sober. In addition to playing piano and singing his featured numbers, Ray also soloed on alto sax during a portion of the show.

The group was assembled initially to back Ruth Brown for two weeks of shows, the first of which necessitated a breakneck 750-mile drive from Houston to El Paso. The second date, the next night in Alexandria, Louisiana, required driving all the way *back* to Houston and then 200 miles further east. Such grueling trips were fairly typical of RC’s early life on the “chitlin’ circuit” along with shortchanged or non-existent performance fees, segregated accommodations, and frequent police harassment.

By November 1954, when he was due to appear at the Royal Peacock in Atlanta, RC had worked up several new originals in anticipation of his next studio session. One of them was “I Got a Woman,” a fast-paced tune co-written with Renald Richard and based on the melody of a gospel song Ray had heard one night on the car radio. The response from live audiences had RC so excited that he called Ahmet Ertegun and Jerry Wexler to ask if they could fly to Atlanta for a recording date. A few days later, they sat in the empty club and listened intently as singer and band ran through “I Got a Woman,” Renald’s humorous “Greenbacks,” the aching soul-blues ballad “Come Back Baby,” and more.

The two Atlantic executives were overwhelmed by the range, power, and precision of the music; they hastened to book recording time at a local radio

station. “I Got a Woman” was the obvious choice of a first single from the session, and test pressings were sent out to key disc jockeys and distributors in mid-December. A few days into the New Year of 1955, it was clear that Ray Charles and Atlantic Records had a smash hit on their hands.

By March, “I Got a Woman” was *Billboard*’s number one R&B song—and it hung on the chart for twenty weeks. More than a hit record, “I Got a Woman” was a defining musical statement that bridged the long-standing divide within the African American community between blues and gospel.

“The record blended elements like a hybrid flower,” wrote Michael Lydon. “It had a dancing beat like a jump blues, but it was built on gospel’s ‘rise to glory’ chords, and the cheerful lyric, infectiously delivered by Ray, gave that mix a pop music gloss.”¹⁰ Although he would never refer to or think of himself as a rock and roller, in the public’s eyes Ray Charles now counted as one of the black rock and roll artists—including Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, Little Richard, and Fats Domino—who were revolutionizing Western popular music.

RC was now based in Dallas, where on April 5, 1955, he married Della Bea Howard. A former gospel singer, modest and soft-spoken, Della seemed content to make a comfortable home for her husband to enjoy during his irregular interludes in residence even as Ray’s inveterate womanizing and continued heroin use became open secrets between them.

The next recording session, convened in April in Miami, produced more gems written, arranged, conducted, and sung by Ray Charles. “This Little Girl of Mine” was Ray’s rewrite of the gospel standard “This Little Light of Mine” with the addition of a jazzy horn chart and Latin-tinged syncopation. As for the confessional slow blues “A Fool for You,” Ahmet Ertegun and Jerry Wexler thought it was simply the best record Atlantic had made to date—even if they’d done little more than book the studio time and make sure the engineer didn’t erase the completed takes. By July, “A Fool for You” was RC’s second *Billboard* number one record; his next two songs, “Greenbacks” and “Blackjack,” also made the R&B Top Ten.

Ray’s band now included fellow heroin addicts Fathead Newman, baritone saxophonist Jay Dennis, and bassist Roosevelt “Whiskey” Sheffield. On November 17, backstage at a gig in Philadelphia, all four musicians were arrested and charged with possession of drugs and drug paraphernalia. Road manager Jeff Brown bailed out RC but the others remained in jail for a week. Finally Jeff retained a New York attorney who succeeded in having all charges dropped, reportedly in exchange for payoffs totaling around \$6,000.

The arrest didn’t curb Ray’s drug use simply because, as Jerry Wexler observed, “there wasn’t an instance where his addiction interfered with his work As a bandleader and producer, he was more than conscientious; he was meticulous and demanding, ready to reject the least instance of faulty intonation or rhythm. His own singing and playing were beyond reproach, his writing a paragon of art and commerce combined. When it came to Ray’s professionalism, there could be no grounds for complaint. He worked his ass off.”¹¹

Two weeks later, Ray was in Atlantic's New York studio for another session. This date produced "Mary Ann," a lightly lascivious tune dedicated to singer Mary Ann Fisher, a recent addition to the Ray Charles show. Two other highlights were the strutting, jubilant "Hallelujah I Love Her So," with its Count Basie-style horn chart, and "Drown in My Own Tears," a stately slow blues in the mode of "A Fool for You" that became Ray's third R&B number one in early 1956.

The latter song featured the first appearance on any of RC's records by a young female trio called the Cookies, who were Atlantic recording artists in their own right. Ray loved the blend of his rougher voice with their dulcet harmonies, and he found lead singer Margie Hendricks's churchy, growling solos irresistible. But it wasn't until 1958 that RC felt financially able to add the women (Hendricks, Ethel McRae, and Pat Lyles) to his touring organization. When he did, he gave them a new name: the Raeletts. Although the personnel would change frequently with the passing years, from this time on the group would always be a key element of the Ray Charles road show. The star carried on countless short- and long-term affairs with various female members of his troupe, in which it was often said that in order to become a Raelett, you had to "let Ray."

RISING STAR

In 1956, Elvis Presley's RCA debut album included a cover of "I Got a Woman" that earned Ray his first substantial royalty check as songwriter. The level of RC's income from live performances was such that he was able to loan money to the Shaw Agency when the company fell on hard times after founder Billy Shaw died suddenly from a heart attack. Ahmet Ertegun's older brother Nesuhi Ertegun had recently joined Atlantic to oversee its production of jazz and long-playing albums. In April, Nesuhi cut a few piano trio tracks with Ray; subsequently, he brought in the full road band to complete a pure jazz album titled *The Great Ray Charles*, released the following year. With arrangements by RC or Quincy Jones, the tunes included Tin Pan Alley standards ("I Surrender Dear," "My Melancholy Baby") and Horace Silver's hard-bop classic "Doodlin'."

In terms of record sales, 1957 was a comedown after the stunning success of the previous two years. Atlantic released several new Ray Charles singles that were moderate sellers at best. The rigors of the road inevitably precipitated further personnel changes in Ray's band. Edgar Willis replaced Whiskey Sheffield and remained RC's bassist for the next two decades. Baritone saxophonist Leroy "Hog" Cooper initially signed on for just a few months' roadwork but wound up staying with Ray into the 1970s. Hank Crawford possessed a singing, soulful tone on alto saxophone that eventually made him a jazz star in his own right while Don Wilkerson and Fathead Newman played tenor sax in contrasting but equally compelling styles.

In June 1957, Atlantic compiled various singles and B-sides to create the eponymous debut album, *Ray Charles*. That it failed to chart was not surprising: The seven-inch single still dominated R&B and Ray's album (later retitled *Hallelujah I Love Her So*) was one of Atlantic's early entries in the burgeoning LP field. Had Ertegun and Wexler waited a few more months, they would have had a brand-new Ray Charles hit to include on the album.

In November 1957, RC made an unexpected breakthrough with his recording of "Swanee River Rock"—a gospelized, up-tempo transformation of Stephen Foster's sentimental nineteenth-century ballad "Old Folks at Home," with Mongo Santamaria on conga drum and a hot tenor solo by Fathead Newman. For Michael Lydon, this track revealed "Ray's emerging grand ambition: to absorb all American music For pop singers, Stephen Foster belonged to the square and distant past; jazzmen looking for songs to jam on seldom reached further back than Irving Berlin and Jerome Kern. In recording rock 'n' roll Foster, Ray declared American music of any era fair game for his devices."¹² The Atlantic single not only made it to number fourteen R&B but to number thirty-four on the *Billboard* Hot 100—Ray Charles's first entry on the pop chart.

R&B, pop, jazz—Ray was determined to do it all and do it as well or better than anybody. For another 1957 session, Nesuhi Ertegun put him together with vibraphonist Milt Jackson of the Modern Jazz Quartet, Atlantic's best-selling jazz act, for a languid session of extended jazz instrumentals (some reaching the nine-minute mark) that featured RC on both piano and alto sax. The resulting tracks were issued on the albums *Soul Brothers* and *Soul Meeting*—titles that incorporated the word "soul" several years before the term was applied to the music of Sam Cooke, Otis Redding, and Aretha Franklin.

When Ray bought his first home in Los Angeles in March 1958, it was a clear sign of his increasing wealth. His rising stature within the music industry was certified on July 5 by his first appearance at the prestigious Newport Jazz Festival. On a festival bill that included Duke Ellington, Miles Davis, and John Coltrane, RC and his fiery band held their own with a set that ranged from jazz instrumentals to R&B hits, closing with a long, ecstatic version of "I Got a Woman." Nesuhi Ertegun edited the tapes to make a live LP, *Ray Charles at Newport*, that Atlantic issued in the fall of the year. For many jazz listeners and others of the American intelligentsia, this album was their first introduction to RC—one that set him apart from the black rock and rollers and urban blues singers.

WHAT'D I SAY

One night in December 1958, headlining at a dancehall outside of Pittsburgh, Ray and the band found they'd played through their entire "book" of sheet

music arrangements but still had fifteen minutes left to fill. Ray told the musicians to follow his lead and the Raeletts to simply repeat whatever he sang. As he bore down on an up-tempo Latin-tinged piano riff, “I could feel the whole room bouncing and shaking and carrying on something fierce. . . . When I got through, folk came up and asked where they could buy the record. ‘Ain’t no record,’ I said, ‘just something I made up to kill a little time.’”¹³

The February 1959 session that brought forth the recording of this new song—now titled “What’d I Say”—was dispatched in Ray’s usual all-for-business manner. It didn’t feel especially momentous at the time yet the master take was over six minutes long, the stop-time verses divided by RC’s fluid solos on electric piano (an instrument rarely heard in late 1950s R&B). The whole performance built through wave upon wave of barely disguised sexual tension and release as Ray’s voice rose to a wail and the Raeletts moaned in unison behind him.

Ahmet Ertegun and Jerry Wexler held back the release of “What’d I Say” until April, when Atlantic issued the track as a two-part single. This first, frankly adult version met stiff resistance from radio programmers—which translated into scant orders from the label’s distributors—so Atlantic’s chief engineer Tom Dowd re-edited the track to give it a slightly more playful teenage atmosphere. In July, “What’d I Say” entered the *Billboard* Hot 100 at number eighty-two and then jumped to number forty-three the next week. By August, Ray Charles had his first Top Ten pop hit (peaking at number six) and his fourth R&B number one; the disc became the best-selling single in Atlantic’s history and gave the company its first monthly sales gross of more than \$1 million.

“What’d I Say” was the song that “brought Ray Charles to everybody. In faraway Liverpool, Paul McCartney heard ‘What’d I Say’ and chills went up and down his spine: ‘I knew right then and there I wanted to be involved in that kind of music.’”¹⁴

Not content with having one of the biggest rock and roll/R&B hits of the year, in 1959 Ray went into the studio to record an album of standards from the Great American Songbook. On half the tracks, he was backed by a brassy big band, arranged by Quincy Jones; on the rest, by a full orchestra with arrangements by Ralph Burns. The rough edge of RC’s voice and the “blue” quality of his phrasing turned oft-recorded songs like “Just for a Thrill” and “When Your Lover Has Gone” into modern masterpieces. After the tracks were issued on a 1960 LP titled *The Genius of Ray Charles*, the appellation “genius” stuck to the singer for the rest of his life.

The other side of Ray Charles—the raw rhythm and blues shouter who could drive his audiences into a frenzy—was captured on a tape made by disc jockey Zenas Sears during a May 1959 performance at Herndon Stadium in Atlanta. The sound of this single-microphone recording is startlingly clear and RC’s performance raises the roof, especially his call-and-response with Margie Hendrix on “(Night Time Is) The Right Time” and an epic six-minute

version of “Drown in My Own Tears.” A joyful Jerry Wexler worked with Tom Dowd to edit the tape into Ray’s second live album, *Ray Charles in Person*.

Both *The Genius of Ray Charles* and *Ray Charles in Person* made the *Billboard* Top Twenty—a rare feat for a black artist in 1959. Along with Bobby Darin, Ray Charles was one of the two best-selling artists on Atlantic Records. But his contract was about to expire and Ray would soon be moving on.

THE ABC YEARS

When Ray Charles left Atlantic for ABC-Paramount at the end of 1959, Ahmet and Jerry were hurt and angry but not really surprised. The backing of two major entertainment corporations, the American Broadcasting Company and Paramount Theaters, allowed the label—founded in 1955 and headed by Sam Clark—to make RC an offer that Atlantic simply couldn’t match.

The new three-year contract gave Ray an advance of \$50,000 per year and 75 percent of net sales after the label recouped its manufacturing and promotion costs. Most important, Ray was granted both creative control and 100 percent *ownership* of his master recordings, which ABC-Paramount would license for a period of just five years after delivery. This was an unprecedented achievement for a black artist—one never to be repeated even by future superstars like James Brown, Stevie Wonder, or Michael Jackson.

Ray’s first ABC-Paramount album, *Genius Hits the Road*, released in the fall of 1960, became his first Top Ten LP. It was also the first in a series of RC concept albums—this one based on songs about places (“Moonlight in Vermont,” “California, Here I Come,” etc.)—and the singer’s first full-length collaboration with Sid Feller, his new producer/A&R man. The album’s indisputable high point was “Georgia on My Mind.” Ray’s beautifully orchestrated rendition made this song (written in 1930) into something much more than just a nostalgic paean to the state of his birth. Coming from one who’d traveled so far for so long, “Georgia” captured a profound sense of yearning for home; it also invoked the collective spirit of all the black women who’d nurtured and cared for the singer. “Georgia on My Mind” became Ray Charles’s first number one pop single as well as a number three R&B hit and won two Grammy Awards. He would sing the song almost nightly for the rest of his life.

By the end of the year, Ray’s performance fee was up to \$1,500 per night thanks to the effort of promoter Hal Zeiger, who was determined to present RC as a “class act” who could play Carnegie Hall and the Hollywood Palladium as successfully as any ghetto dancehall. Previously, Ray’s original songs were published by Atlantic’s Progressive Music. But the creation of his own Tangerine Music allowed RC to keep every dime earned from airplay royalties, cover versions, and licensing fees. His touring band nearly doubled in size, with every man on a regular weekly salary. RC was earning as much as

\$300,000 per year at a time when the annual per capita income for an African American male was just \$2,260.

Dedicated to You, comprising songs named for women (“Nancy,” “Margie,” “Ruby,” and the like), reached number eleven on the *Billboard* chart. *Genius + Soul = Jazz* (1961) was a snappy instrumental set with Ray on organ backed by the Count Basie band; it was followed that same year by *Ray Charles & Betty Carter*, a set of intimate duets. In July 1961, Ray and his road band cut Percy Mayfield’s “Hit the Road Jack,” a minor-key song set to an up-tempo groove. Mayfield’s clever, down-home lyrics cast Ray as a no-account lover begging not to be cast out by his girl, a role sung with convincing fervor by Margie Hendrix. Tough and bluesy as any Atlantic track, “Hit the Road Jack” epitomized the vocal interplay between RC and the Raeletts. It shot to number one on the Hot 100 and topped the R&B Singles chart for five weeks.

In the spring of 1962, Ray released *Modern Sounds in Country & Western Music*. This unprecedented collection comprised songs originally made famous by (among others) Hank Williams, Eddie Arnold, and the Everly Brothers, arranged either as lush ballads with orchestra and chorus or as bluesy big-band numbers. Despite the initial misgivings of ABC executives, *Modern Sounds* became the label’s first million-selling album—a massive across-the-board hit that held the number one position for fourteen weeks and stayed on the chart for two years. RC’s version of Don Gibson’s “I Can’t Stop Loving You” topped the Hot 100 for five weeks; it became a number one R&B hit and won the Grammy Award for Best Rhythm & Blues Recording. Country radio programmers, however, simply ignored Ray’s landmark achievement.

A true pop music event, “I Can’t Stop Loving You” inaugurated a year in which Ray Charles scored four Top Ten pop singles and four Top Five albums including the inevitable *Modern Sounds in Country & Western Music (Volume II)* and the number two album *Ingredients in a Recipe for Soul*. Although a consistent presence on both the Pop and R&B charts into the early 1970s, Ray reached the pinnacle of his commercial success as a recording artist in the period 1960–64. He founded the ABC-distributed Tangerine label to release the recordings he produced for the Raeletts, the blues singer/songwriter Percy Mayfield, and the brilliant jazz balladeer Jimmy Scott. To ensure a steady supply of new material and publishing royalties, he signed talented writers such as Jimmy Lewis to his own Tangerine Music.

Ray was still a heroin addict—albeit one protected by wealth, prestige, and a personal retinue headed by his hawk-eyed new manager Joe Adams. He endured police harassment and several minor busts but always managed to avoid a jail term. On October 31, 1964, in Boston, Ray Charles was arrested at Logan Airport. This time, there would be no easy way out.

RC’s private jet had landed before dawn and he’d been driven to his hotel, where he realized that he’d left his drugs behind. The singer, who never

entrusted anyone else with his stash, had his chauffeur return him to the airfield to retrieve some of the marijuana and heroin he'd left on board. When suspicious U.S. Customs agents stopped the two men on the tarmac, they found pot and a small amount of white powder in Ray's overcoat. A subsequent search of the aircraft uncovered three ounces of heroin.

RC was released on his own recognizance, but the impact of the bust was severe and immediate. The story made the front page of the Boston papers and quickly spread throughout the international media. When Customs impounded his plane, Ray's agent was forced to cancel a string of cross-country dates and the band members were laid off.

Between November 1964 and March 1966, Ray Charles took his longest-ever hiatus from live performance. In the interim, Ray returned to Los Angeles where he focused on moving Della Bea and their three sons (Robert, David, and Ray Jr.) into a new home and his businesses into a new headquarters. One of his only public appearances during this period came in December 1964, when soul singer Sam Cooke was shot and killed by a motel manager in Los Angeles. When Ray arrived at the funeral and heard the huge crowd call out to him, he sat down at the piano and sang a heartbreaking impromptu version of the gospel hymn "The Angels Keep Watching Over Me."

Facing four narcotics charges handed down by a federal grand jury, RC made the decision to quit heroin. On July 26, 1965, he entered St. Francis Hospital in L.A. and endured four days of "cold turkey" withdrawal with its attendant waves of nausea, chills, and diarrhea. As part of his therapy Ray met three times per week with a psychiatrist, Dr. Friedrich Hacker, who taught his patient the basics of chess—a game that RC loved and quickly mastered. When the singer returned to the recording studio in October, the result was *Crying Time*—"one of Ray's true masterpieces, the self-portrait of an artist in a season of despair. . . . Every track, every note, bears the scars of experience."¹⁵ The title song, previously a country hit for Buck Owens, reached number six Pop and won the Grammy Awards for Best Rhythm & Blues Solo Vocal Performance and for Best Rhythm & Blues Recording. Another track, the wry, witty soul-blues "Let's Go Get Stoned," became RC's tenth R&B number one.

On November 22 in federal court in Boston, Ray Charles pleaded guilty to all charges. Prosecutors called for two years in prison and a hefty fine, but Judge George Sweeney listened carefully to Dr. Hacker's account of RC's determination to get off drugs and his thus-far-successful program of treatment and rehabilitation. The judge offered to postpone the verdict for a year if the defendant would agree to undergo regular examinations by government-appointed physicians. For Ray, the offer was a no-brainer. He knew he was done with heroin for good. When the singer returned to court in November 1967, he received a five-year suspended sentence, four years' probation, and a fine of \$10,000. Ray never spent a day in prison and never touched heroin again, although he continued to smoke marijuana on occasion. Later he

favored a mixture of heavily sugared black coffee and Bols gin, which he would sip throughout the day from a ceramic mug.

Throughout the latter half of the 1960s, Ray Charles maintained a rigorous international touring schedule booked by the prestigious William Morris Agency. He appeared on national television and recorded the title theme song for the Academy Award–winning film *In the Heat of the Night*. He amassed a large personal fortune.

But the big hits tapered off after 1967. The interracial and cross-generational audience Ray had brought together from the time of “I Got a Woman” and “Swanee River Rock” through “I Can’t Stop Loving You” and “Crying Time” had begun to fragment. Young black listeners had turned steadily toward the sounds of Motown, James Brown, and Sly Stone; young whites, toward the Beatles, Bob Dylan, and a host of new pop and rock performers from both sides of the Atlantic. At the end of 1969, ABC declined to renew Ray Charles’s recording contract although the company continued to distribute his albums on the Tangerine label. (*Volcanic Action of My Soul* and *A Message from the People*, from 1971 and 1972 respectively, were two of RC’s most successful post-ABC efforts both artistically and commercially.)

Unlike Sam Cooke, James Brown, or Nina Simone, Ray was not perceived as an ardent supporter or a musical voice of the 1960s civil rights movement. Although he bitterly condemned American racism in interviews, Ray’s involvement in the freedom struggle didn’t go much beyond writing the occasional check. As a self-made man, RC believed in the power of his music to gradually break down society’s walls and to overcome fear and hatred among people.

LATER YEARS

Over the course of the next decade, this singularly gifted artist came to be taken largely for granted by American audiences. Ray Charles was like a president’s face carved on Mount Rushmore: a revered but remote figure whose legacy lay in the past. Ray himself was partly to blame. Too often, his live show was a rote run-through of an over-familiar repertoire. His albums were of uneven quality; he refused either to accept outside musical direction or to curry favor with the press and the music industry.

Occasionally a special event or guest appearance would create a small stir in the media and reintroduce RC to a new subset of listeners. One such moment was his high-spirited stage jam with Aretha Franklin on “Spirit in the Dark,” from her 1971 album *Live at Fillmore West*; another was his brief but lively screen performance in the 1980 box office hit *The Blues Brothers*.

Off stage, Ray’s marriage was crumbling under the strain of his mood swings, career pressures, and numerous affairs; he and Della Bea finally divorced in 1978. In total, the singer fathered nine children outside his marriage.

They included Charles Wayne Robinson, Ray's son by Margie Hendricks (she died in 1973); and his youngest son, Corey Robinson den Bok, born in 1988.

A new deal with Ahmet Ertegun resulted in four albums on Atlantic Records. But only the first, *True to Life*, made the chart, peaking at number seventy-eight in 1977. The following year, Dial Press published *Brother Ray: Ray Charles' Own Story*, a frank if sketchy autobiography co-written with David Ritz, and in 1979 Ray's version of "Georgia on My Mind" was declared the state's official song. Another positive note was struck in the spring of 1980 when PBS broadcast Ray Charles in concert with the Boston Pops Orchestra conducted by John Williams. This well-received program led to many more orchestral bookings, in which RC's soul-stirring interpretation of "America the Beautiful" was always an emotional high point.

Ray Charles was about to enjoy his last sustained run of radio hits—this time, on the country airwaves. In 1982, he was signed to the Nashville division of Columbia Records and released *Wish You Were Here Tonight*, self-produced mostly at the singer's own RPM Studio in L.A. Although musically bland and formulaic, the set received decent sales and engendered a Top 20 Country single in "Born to Love Me." In 1984, Ray handed the reins to top Nashville producer Billy Sherrill for *Friendship*, a collection of duets with country stars like George Jones, Merle Haggard, and Ricky Skaggs. The result was the most fully realized Ray Charles album in years and the number one Country single "Seven Spanish Angels," a mythic cowboy ballad sung with Willie Nelson.

Ray's country crossover reaffirmed the transcendent appeal of his voice—an instrument now readily available for hire in exchange for a substantial payday or some valuable exposure. His fervent delivery stood out among the all-star cast (including Michael Jackson, Bob Dylan, and Bruce Springsteen) that recorded the chart-topping charity anthem "We Are the World" in 1985. Ray performed "America the Beautiful" at Ronald Reagan's second inauguration and sang with Billy Joel on "Baby Grand," an homage to RC included on Joel's 1986 Top Ten album *The Bridge*.

The awards and honors came in a steady stream. In 1986, Ray Charles was named a Kennedy Center honoree and one of the inaugural inductees into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. In 1987, he was given a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award by the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (NARAS). In 1989, an RC duet with jazz singer Dee Dee Bridgewater titled "'Til The Next Somewhere" became a number one hit all across Europe.

These events seemed to set the stage for Ray to take one more shot at American pop radio, and in late 1989 he got his chance with "I'll Be Good to You." A high-tech, hip-hop flavored duet with Chaka Khan, it was the first single released from Quincy Jones's glossy all-star album *Back on the Block*. The song topped the *Billboard* R&B/Hip-Hop Singles chart and reached number eighteen on the Hot 100. "I'll Be Good to You" propelled *Back on the*

Block to platinum status and later won the Grammy Award for Best R&B Performance by a Duo or Group with Vocal.

Vast numbers of television viewers came to recognize Ray Charles from his appearances in an ad campaign for Diet Pepsi that kicked off with the Super Bowl XXIV telecast on January 28, 1990. The ad proved so popular that Pepsi extended the campaign for almost two years, with RC starring in every installment. Ray's key line was "*You got the right one, baby—uh-huh!*" and in this case he most certainly did: Pepsi paid the singer in seven figures and the catch phrase briefly entered the pop culture lexicon. Small children now recognized Ray in airports, and he had to explain to reporters that a Diet Pepsi commercial was not, in fact, the biggest or most significant event of his long career.

Ray's renewed visibility attracted the interest of Mo Ostin, the chairman of Warner Bros. Records, who signed him to the label in 1990. Ostin was soon disappointed by the two discs that resulted, *Would You Believe?* and *My World*. Despite a costly and concerted media push by Warners and a Grammy Award for "A Song for You" from *My World*, the albums received little exposure on radio and only a half-hearted response from record buyers. Old friend Quincy Jones released Ray's *Strong Love Affair* on his own Warner-distributed Qwest label in 1995, but the album was virtually ignored by audiences and critics alike.

In 1997, a lavish five-CD box set on Rhino Records titled *Ray Charles: Genius and Soul* brought together the best and most popular recordings from every phase of his career. Ray demanded and received an advance in excess of \$1 million for granting Rhino the right to reissue his post-1959 master recordings. Two tracks culled from a Japan-only live album, "Till There Was You" and "Am I Blue," served to remind listeners that on any given night, RC was still capable of a masterful and profoundly moving performance. *Genius and Soul* earned overwhelmingly favorable media coverage and sold well considering its high retail price.

In November 2004, *Jet* magazine published excerpts from an interview with Reverend Robert Robinson—Ray's second eldest son, now an ordained minister. Robinson told the reporter that in December 2002, his father had organized a luncheon in Los Angeles attended by all twelve of his children (some had never met each other before) and that, at the conclusion of the meal, Ray had presented each of his offspring with a check for \$1 million.

In the summer of 2003, Ray Charles was diagnosed with hepatocellular carcinoma, a form of liver cancer, and abruptly canceled all further live performances. The singer underwent chemotherapy while he continued to work on *Genius Loves Company*, a new album jointly backed by Concord Records and HEAR Music, an offshoot of the Starbucks coffee chain. Veteran producers John Burk and Phil Ramone were at the controls for this duets collection that paired Ray with longtime admirers like Van Morrison, James Taylor, Johnny Mathis, Natalie Cole, Elton John, and Bonnie Raitt. The songs were all standards of one sort or another, including the Lowell Fulson blues classic

“Sinner’s Prayer” (with B.B. King) and the Frank Sinatra anthem “It Was a Very Good Year” (with Willie Nelson). RC revisited his own catalog of 1960s hits to cut new versions of “Here We Go Again” with Norah Jones and “You Don’t Know Me” with Diana Krall.

Ray’s indefatigable energy and iron constitution had borne him through countless trials and triumphs, and he’d kept his illness hidden from all but his inner circle. Thus, many friends and fans were shocked to see him in a wheelchair when the singer made his final public appearance on April 30, 2004, for the dedication of his RPM Studios building at 2107 West Washington Boulevard as a Los Angeles historic landmark.

In one of his last conversations with David Ritz, Ray spoke admiringly of some of the great musicians he’d worked with over the years—not only Fathead Newman and Hank Crawford but lesser-known and equally gifted players like the saxophonists James Clay and Don Wilkerson and the trumpeters Marcus Belgrave and Johnny Coles.

With the locomotive rush of his career and the intensity of his demands, RC admitted that “I feel like I hurt people. I *know* I hurt people. Well, tell them I’m not an asshole. Tell them I have feelings too. I can feel their feelings, man. Tell them I appreciate them. Tell them . . . just tell them Brother Ray loves them.”¹⁶ Then he began to cry.

Ray Charles died at his home in Beverly Hills, California, on June 10, 2004, at the age of seventy-three. The Reverend Robert Robinson presided over the funeral on June 18 at the First African Methodist Episcopal Church. The more than 1,200 mourners in attendance included actor/director Clint Eastwood, singer Glen Campbell, and the Reverend Jesse Jackson; there were musical tributes from Stevie Wonder, Willie Nelson, and B.B. King. Later, Ray’s body lay in state at the Los Angeles Convention Center, where thousands of fans slowly filed past to pay their last respects.

Genius Loves Company was released on August 31 and entered the *Billboard* chart at number two—the first Ray Charles album to reach the Top Ten since *Sweet and Sour Tears* in 1964. On February 13, 2005, *Genius Loves Company* swept the Forty-Seventh Annual Grammy Awards, winning eight categories including Album of the Year and Best Gospel Performance (for “Heaven Help Us All,” featuring Gladys Knight) as well as Record of the Year and Best Pop Collaboration with Vocals (both for “Here We Go Again”). The album sold over three million copies in the United States alone.

On October 29, the biographical motion picture *Ray* was released in U.S. theaters. Director Taylor Hackford and screenwriter James L. White didn’t shy away from depicting RC’s womanizing and drug addiction, but the film emphasized Ray’s monumental artistic achievements and the struggle to overcome his physical and social handicaps. Jamie Foxx won the Academy Award for Best Actor for his uncanny performance in the title role; a talented singer and pianist, Foxx mostly lip-synched to RC’s original recordings on the soundtrack.

As Ray was filling the theaters, rap star Kanye West's "Gold Digger" (from his album *Late Registration*) was en route to becoming the nation's best-selling single. The song was built upon a vocal sample from "I Got a Woman," RC's breakthrough hit of 1955, along with an *a cappella* introduction by Jamie Foxx. "Gold Digger" was the second-longest-running number one of 2005, spending ten weeks at the top, and won the Grammy Award for Best Rap Solo Performance.

LEGACY

Ray Charles changed the sound of popular music by combining the melodies and emotional fervor of African American gospel music with the secular lyrics and earthy sensibility of the blues. He added elements of traditional pop, jazz, and country music in the course of becoming the single most important figure in the transition from the rhythm and blues of the 1950s to the soul music of the 1960s. Charles was a gifted singer, pianist, arranger, and band-leader who truly deserved his oft-bestowed appellation of "The Genius." He became an international star who put his unmistakable vocal imprint on everything he sang, from low-down blues to Broadway show tunes to country ballads.

Beyond his skills as a live performer and recording artist, Ray Charles was a canny entrepreneur. He presided over a large touring organization; produced and engineered recordings for himself and others in a custom-built studio; and founded his own recording, publishing, and management companies. Between 1957 and 1989, Ray placed more than thirty songs in the Top Forty of the *Billboard* Hot 100 and more than seventy on the R&B singles chart. He earned a career total of seventeen Grammy Awards.

Elton John, Billy Joel, Van Morrison, Michael McDonald (Doobie Brothers), Richard Manuel (The Band), and Stevie Wonder all have acknowledged Ray's influence, either through their public statements or their recording of songs long associated with him. (Wonder's second album, issued in 1962, was titled *A Tribute to Uncle Ray*.) Joe Cocker, Michael Bolton, and Gregg Allman are among the many post-Beatles rock and pop vocalists who owe a clear stylistic debt to RC's sound and style. Singer Taylor Hicks's victory in the 2006 season of "American Idol" was due in part to his convincing take on Ray's eternal "Georgia on My Mind."

"The variety and vitality" of Ray Charles's lifetime output "have been staggering and [have] permanently affected the course of popular music," wrote author and musicologist Lee Hildebrand. "While he charted little new musical territory after the mid-1960s, he had clearly demonstrated that the diverse strains of American music, though divided by ethnic, regional, and class distinctions, were all parts of a common cultural heritage."¹⁷

TIMELINE

September 23, 1930

Ray Charles Robinson is born in Albany, Georgia.

October 23, 1937

He enrolls at the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind in St. Augustine, Florida. Schoolmates give him the nickname RC.

October 1945

Ray Charles Robinson moves Jacksonville, Florida, to find work as a professional musician.

March 1948

RC moves to Seattle, Washington, to join guitarist Gossie McKee in the McSon Trio.

April 9, 1949

Released on Down Beat Records of Los Angeles, “Confession Blues” by the Maxin Trio enters the *Billboard* R&B Singles chart, featuring Ray Charles Robinson on lead vocal and piano. The song peaks at number two and remains on the chart for eleven weeks.

May 1950

RC relocates to Los Angeles. For professional purposes, he drops his last name and is known hereafter as Ray Charles.

February 10, 1951

“Baby Let Me Hold Your Hand” on Swingtime Records is the first song credited to Ray Charles to enter the *Billboard* R&B Singles chart. It reaches number five and remains on the chart for six weeks.

June 1952

Ahmet Ertegun of Atlantic Records buys out RC’s contract from Swingtime for \$2,500.

September 8, 1952

Ray Charles’s first Atlantic recording session in New York.

April 3, 1954

“It Should’ve Been Me” is the first Ray Charles single on Atlantic to enter the R&B chart. It reaches number five and remains on the chart for nine weeks.

January 22, 1955

“I’ve Got a Woman” enters the chart and soon becomes RC’s first number one R&B single. The song combines gospel with rhythm and blues and is a prototype of a new style called “soul music.”

April 5, 1955

Ray Charles marries Della Bea Howard in Dallas, Texas. She is the mother of his sons Robert, David, and Ray Jr.

November 11, 1957

“Swanee River Rock (Talkin’ ’Bout That River)” enters the R&B chart and later becomes the first Ray Charles single to enter the *Billboard* Hot 100 (Pop chart), reaching number thirty-four.

July 5, 1958

RC makes his first appearance at the Newport Jazz Festival in Newport, Rhode Island. The show is recorded and later issued as the Atlantic LP *Ray Charles at Newport*.

February 18, 1959

RC records “What’d I Say” in New York. Released in July, it becomes his first million-seller and the biggest-selling single in the twelve-year history of Atlantic Records, reaching number one R&B and number six Pop.

November 1, 1959

Ray Charles signs a new long-term recording contract with ABC-Paramount that, among other favorable terms, grants him ultimate ownership of his master recordings.

February 1960

The Genius of Ray Charles (Atlantic) is the artist’s first LP to enter the *Billboard* chart. It peaks at number seventeen and remains on the chart for eighty-two weeks.

November 14, 1960

“Georgia on My Mind” becomes RC’s second million-seller and the first of three Ray Charles singles to reach number one on the Hot 100. The song spends eighteen weeks on the chart including five weeks at number one.

December 3, 1960

RC’s first album for ABC, *The Genius Hits the Road*, reaches number nine on the *Billboard* chart. His first Top Ten LP, it stays on the chart for fifty weeks.

April 12, 1961

At the third annual Grammy Awards, “Georgia on My Mind” by Ray Charles wins Best Vocal Performance, Single Record or Track—Male and Best Performance by a Pop Single Artist. *The Genius Hits the Road* wins for Best Vocal Performance, Male, and RC’s recording of “Let the Good Times Roll” wins for Best R&B Performance.

May 1961

Ray Charles headlines at Carnegie Hall in New York for the first time in his career.

October 9, 1961

“Hit the Road Jack,” written by Percy Mayfield, becomes the second Ray Charles single to top the Hot 100 (for two weeks) and the number one R&B song for five weeks.

April 21, 1962

Modern Sounds in Country and Western Music by Ray Charles enters the *Billboard* chart. By July, it is the number one album in the country and remains on the chart for 101 weeks including 14 weeks at Number One.

June 2, 1962

“I Can’t Stop Loving You,” the first single from *Modern Sounds in Country and Western Music*, becomes RC’s third number one Pop hit. It tops the Hot 100 for five weeks and the R&B chart for ten weeks.

November 17, 1962

Ray Charles’s recording of “You Are My Sunshine” enters the Hot 100, where it reaches number seven and also tops the R&B chart for three weeks.

October 31, 1964

RC is arrested at Logan Airport in Boston, and later indicted by a federal grand jury on four charges related to possession of heroin and marijuana.

July 26, 1965

The singer enters a heroin withdrawal program at St. Francis Hospital in Los Angeles.

November 1967

Having pleaded guilty to all charges, RC receives a five-year suspended sentence, four years on probation, and a \$10,000 fine.

March 2, 1967

In the ninth annual Grammy Awards, Ray Charles's hit single "Crying Time" (number six Pop/number five R&B) is named Best R&B Recording and Best R&B Solo Vocal Performance, Male.

December 1972

RC's final album through ABC Records, *Through The Eyes of Love*, peaks at number 186 on the *Billboard* chart.

April 24, 1979

Ray Charles's version of "Georgia on My Mind" is declared "the official song of the State of Georgia."

June 20, 1980

The Blues Brothers, directed by Jon Landis, opens in U.S. theaters. Ray Charles plays "Ray," a streetwise storeowner, and performs "Shake a Tail Feather."

January 21, 1985

RC performs during festivities for the second inauguration of President Ronald Reagan.

April 23, 1985

"Seven Spanish Angels," a duet by Ray Charles and Willie Nelson, reaches number one on the *Billboard* Hot Country Singles chart.

January 23, 1986

Quincy Jones inducts Ray Charles into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame at the organization's first induction dinner, held in New York City.

March 2, 1988

The National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (NARAS) presents RC with a Lifetime Achievement Award at the Thirtieth Annual Grammy Awards.

January 27, 1990

"I'll Be Good to You," a Quincy Jones-produced duet by Ray Charles and Chaka Khan, reaches number eighteen on the Hot 100—RC's first Top 30 Pop hit since 1967.

February 21, 1991

The Rhythm and Blues Foundation presents RC with its Legend Award at a ceremony in New York.

March 1, 1994

Ray Charles wins his twelfth career Grammy Award, for "A Song for You" as Best Male R&B Performance, in the Thirty-Sixth Annual Grammy Awards.

March 2, 1995

Ray Charles is given the Lifetime Achievement Award at the Rhythm and Blues Foundation's annual Pioneer Awards.

April 30, 2004

Ray Charles makes his final public appearance when his RPM Studios building at 2107 West Washington Boulevard is declared a Los Angeles historic landmark.

June 10, 2004

At the age of seventy-three, Ray Charles dies of hepatocellular carcinoma, a form of liver cancer, at his home in Beverly Hills, California.

August 31, 2004

Genius Loves Company enters the *Billboard* Top 200 at number two—the first Ray Charles album to reach the Top 10 since *Sweet and Sour Tears* in 1964. The twelve tracks feature Ray in duet performances with Natalie Cole, Elton John, Norah Jones, Gladys Knight, B.B. King, Johnny Mathis, Van Morrison, Bonnie Raitt, and James Taylor, among others.

February 13, 2005

In the Forty-Seventh Annual Grammy Awards, *Genius Loves Company* wins in eight categories including Album of the Year and Best Gospel Performance (for “Heaven Help Us All,” featuring Gladys Knight) as well as Record of the Year and Best Pop Collaboration with Vocals (both for “Here We Go Again,” featuring Norah Jones).

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Genius and Soul: The 50th Anniversary Collection

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The Complete Country & Western Recordings (1959–1986)

Ray Charles in Concert

Genius Loves Company

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9. Wexler, from the book accompanying *Pure Genius: The Complete Atlantic Recordings (1952–1959)*, Rhino R2 74731 (2005), p. 27.
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Courtesy of Photofest.

Chuck Berry

Scott Schinder

BROWN-EYED HANDSOME GENIUS

Attempting to credit one person with the invention of rock and roll is a misguided and pointless pursuit. But no early rocker played a bigger role in creating the basic template for guitar-driven electric rock and roll than Chuck Berry, and no artist of his era did a more effective job of merging an original musical vision with a cohesive and distinctive songwriting persona.

The St. Louis–bred singer/guitarist was rock’s first great songwriter/performer. In his first decade as a recording artist, Berry released a remarkable run of singles that became so deeply woven into rock and roll’s foundation that it’s difficult to imagine the genre existing without them. Long before Bob Dylan and the Beatles officially established it as a legitimate art form in the 1960s, Chuck Berry emerged as rock’s first great poet.

Berry made his name writing infectious, exuberant songs that used evocative wordplay and whimsical humor to document 1950s American teenage life. His compositions played a crucial role in chronicling and defining the youth culture that spawned rock and roll, and in introducing much of the cars-and-girls iconography of early rock and roll. Berry’s uncanny ability to tap into teen psychology and youthful slang was doubly impressive, given the fact that he didn’t begin his recording career until he was nearly thirty years old.

On such enduring anthems as “Roll Over Beethoven,” “Rock and Roll Music” and “Johnny B. Goode,” Berry celebrated the music’s liberating spirit. On “School Day,” “Sweet Little Sixteen,” and “Reelin’ and Rockin’,” he vividly documented teen social, recreational, and romantic rituals. His skill for shaggy-dog storytelling on “Nadine,” “You Can’t Catch Me,” and “No Particular Place to Go” was balanced by his knack for spinning such poignant vignettes as “Memphis” and “Havana Moon.” And with such numbers as “Brown-Eyed Handsome Man,” “Promised Land,” and “Back in the U.S.A.,” he conjured a colorful American landscape fraught with pitfalls but brimming with hope and promise.

Berry’s 1955 debut single “Maybellene” is considered by some to be the first fully realized rock and roll record, the first to fully synthesize the music’s blues and country influences into a cohesive and compelling style. Berry was also the first prominent rocker to write most of his own material, and the first to double on vocals and electric guitar.

While much of rock and roll’s foundation was laid by white musicians emulating and adapting African American musical forms, Berry demonstrated that the music’s influence was a two-way street. He forged his style by mixing country guitar licks and country-inspired narrative songwriting with a rhythm and blues beat and the rudiments of Chicago-style electric blues. He enunciated his lyrics with clear, careful phrasing that contrasted the raw conventions of blues singing. Berry’s synthesis of black and white influences, and his energetic performing style, made him the first black rocker to cross over from the R&B charts to achieve consistent success with white teenagers, without alienating his black audience.

Berry’s distinctive guitar style—drawn from elements of blues, country, and jazz—is generally considered to be the wellspring for modern rock and roll guitar. His playing was an essential cornerstone of rock and roll, and was emulated, to one degree or another, by virtually every significant guitar band of the 1960s. Most of those bands included Berry material in their repertoire.

Indeed, Berry remains one of the most-covered composers in pop history; his songs have remained essential staples of jukeboxes, oldies radio stations, and garage band set lists ever since.

But Berry's playful musical persona, and his energetic performing style, belie a complex, thorny personality embittered by years of racism, rip-offs, and government harassment. Obstinate, obsessively private, distrustful of outsiders, and mercenary to a fault, Berry has long squandered his legendary status and severely tested his fans' goodwill. Once renowned as one rock's most electrifying stage performers, for decades he's been notorious for delivering spotty, sloppy live shows. Berry's inelegant approach to live gigs long ago attained mythic status, with the artist typically turning up at the venue minutes before set time, receiving payment in cash prior to taking the stage, and playing with under-rehearsed (or unrehearsed) local pickup bands.

ST. LOUIS BLUES

Charles Edward Anderson Berry was born on October 18, 1926, in St. Louis, Missouri, the fourth of Martha and Henry Berry's six children. He grew up in the Ville, a six-by-nine-block neighborhood north of downtown St. Louis that was one of the few sections of the heavily segregated city where blacks were allowed to own property. Because the city's white institutions were so inhospitable, the Ville became a self-contained community within the racially divided city, an oasis of African American-owned businesses and cultural institutions.

Martha and Henry Berry were the grandchildren of Southern slaves, and were among the many rural blacks that had migrated to St. Louis in search of employment. Unlike most African American women of the era, Martha possessed a college education. Henry was a contractor and carpenter, as well as a deacon of the local Antioch Baptist Church. The middle-class Berry family maintained a strong grounding in the church, and stressed discipline, enterprise, and educational achievement as a means to prosper within the societal barriers of the time.

In his youth, Chuck did carpentry work for his father, and developed an interest in photography through his uncle Harry Davis (who would later shoot many enduring images of his nephew). Unlike his siblings, though, Chuck gravitated toward trouble in his teen years. He attended the prestigious Sumner High School, the first black high school west of the Mississippi, but bristled against its stringent educational and disciplinary standards.

Although he'd begun singing in his church's choir at the age of six, Chuck didn't take up the electric guitar until his teens. He was inspired to learn to play after singing Jay McShann's "Confessin' the Blues" (a song he would later record on his 1960 LP *Rockin' at the Hops*) at a school talent show, accompanied by a guitar-playing friend. While some faculty members strongly

disapproved of such down-and-dirty material, the positive crowd response drove Berry to pick up the instrument, developing his skills with some help from local jazz player Ira Harris.

In the fall of 1944, Berry dropped out of high school, and decided to head for California with two friends. They only got as far as Kansas City, where they were arrested and convicted for armed robbery. All three were sentenced to ten years in the Intermediate Reformatory for Young Men at Algoa, near Jefferson, Missouri.

Berry was released from the reformatory after three years, on his twenty-first birthday on October 18, 1947. A year and ten days later, he married Themetta “Toddy” Suggs, with whom he would eventually have four children. In addition to doing work for his father’s construction business, he worked as a photographer and as a janitor in an auto assembly plant, and trained to be a hairdresser and cosmetologist. He also continued to hone his guitar skills, drawing upon such influences as electric-blues pioneer T-Bone Walker, jazz innovator Charlie Christian and Carl Hogan of Louis Jordan’s Tympani Five. One of Berry’s favorite vocalists was Nat “King” Cole, whose combination of jazz/blues grit and cultured sophistication would influence Berry’s own musical sensibility, as well as his careful vocal enunciation.

By 1951, Berry had become a skillful enough guitarist that his high school classmate Tommy Stevens invited him to join his trio. The Tommy Stevens Combo worked the rough, sometimes violent clubs of East St. Louis, Illinois, just across the Mississippi River, and specialized in black blues and pop standards. Berry’s addition to the group brought out his natural sense of showmanship, and he expanded the group’s repertoire by adding country and novelty tunes.

At around this time, Charles Berry began adding an “n” to his last name and billing himself as Chuck Berryn, apparently in deference to the church ties of his father, who couldn’t have looked kindly on his son’s decision to play the devil’s music.

At the end of 1952, Johnnie Johnson (1924–2005), a local jazz/boogie-woogie piano player who’d recently arrived from Chicago, hired Berry to play a New Year’s Eve gig with his group, Sir John’s Trio, at the Cosmopolitan Club in East St. Louis, where they were a frequent attraction. He’d initially been hired to substitute for an unavailable musician, but Johnson was impressed enough with Berry’s abilities that he invited the guitarist to become a permanent member of the act. Before long, the newcomer would come to dominate the group.

As he had with his previous band, Berry energized Johnson’s sets, augmenting the pianist’s repertoire of 1930s and 1940s pop standards with his own up-tempo country-style numbers. Berry’s urban hillbilly act enhanced the group’s local reputation, drawing white patrons to the black club and establishing Chuck as a competitor to such local guitarists as Ike Turner, Albert King, and Little Milton. Although Berry’s humorous narrative songs had little precedent

in the blues at the time, black jump-blues bandleader Louis Jordan—an early Berry hero—had been doing something comparable, with considerable commercial success, since the early 1940s.

PLAYING CHESS

In the spring of 1955, Berry began making trips to the black musical mecca of Chicago, looking for contacts and recording possibilities. He met legendary electric bluesman Muddy Waters, who suggested that Berry contact Leonard Chess, who ran Chess Records, the influential independent label for which Waters recorded.

Chess Records, run by Polish-born immigrant brothers Leonard and Phil Chess, was already one of America's most successful specialists in recording and selling black music. The company's artist roster included such popular bluesmen as Waters, Howlin' Wolf, John Lee Hooker, Little Walter, and Sonny Boy Williamson, as well as the influential vocal groups the Flamingos and the Moonglows.

Doo-Wop at the Dawn of Rock and Roll

The vocal group harmony style, with roots in black gospel quartet singing, was an important part of the original rock and roll explosion of the 1950s. Years later, this sound became known as doo-wop, so called because the background singers often intoned such nonsense syllables to accompany the lyrics sung by the lead vocalist.

In some respects, the vocal groups were at a disadvantage in the intensely competitive and exploitive music industry of the period. Most did not write their own material or play instruments on their own recordings, so they were dependent on others for their material and backing. The reinforcement of the group image tended to obscure the individual members' identities, and often the group's name was owned by a manager or record company entrepreneur.

The person holding legal title to the name could hire and fire the group members almost at will. An entire group such as the Drifters could be reconstituted and then sent into the recording studio or out on tour. Meanwhile, former members continued to appear as (for example) Charlie Thomas of the Drifters. These practices created confusion and resentment among performers and fans alike—along with a tide of lawsuits, some extending to the present day.

Two of the most important black vocal groups at the birth of rhythm & blues were the Ravens and the Orioles. The Ravens' recordings of "Ol' Man River" and "Send for Me If You Need Me" (both 1948) contrasted the soaring tenor of Maithe Marshall (sometimes singing in falsetto) with the deep bass of Jimmy Ricks. It was a combination that other groups would emulate for

decades to come. The Orioles' overall vocal tone was less polished and slightly more soulful than that of the Ravens. On their number one R&B hit of 1949, "Tell Me So," a wordless falsetto entwined around Sonny Til's angelic tenor lead—another device that later would be appropriated on countless vocal group recordings.

The Orioles' success with R&B renditions of Tin Pan Alley standards ("What Are You Doing New Year's Eve?") gave rise to a host of so-called bird groups: the Penguins ("Earth Angel"), the Flamingos ("I Only Have Eyes for You"), and so on. In 1954, the Crows created one of rock and roll's greatest one-shot hits with "Gee." This song, wrote vocal group authority Philip Groia, "became the first recording of black street-corner singing to transcend the realm of R&B into the white pop market. It was a million-seller and the first doo-wop record to be recognized by the white media. In hindsight, it has often been referred to as the first rock and roll group record."

Andy Schwartz

"You could tell right away," Phil Chess recalled in Peter Guralnick's book *Feel Like Going Home*. "He had that something special, that—I don't know what you'd call it. But he had it."¹

Chess told the young hopeful to bring him a demo tape, so Berry went home and cut some songs on a borrowed wire recorder with Johnson's band. The resulting demo included the slow blues original "Wee Wee Hours" and an up-tempo reworking of a much-recorded country standard titled "Ida Red," which Berry knew from a popular 1938 version by western swing pioneers Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys.

Berry felt that "Wee Wee Hours" would be a natural for the blues-oriented Chess Records. But Leonard Chess, eager to tap into the emerging rock and roll market that had begun to eat into the sales of his label's blues releases, saw more potential in "Ida Red." Chess's preference was understandable. At the time, a successful blues single was unlikely to sell more than 10,000 copies, while a rhythm and blues hit could sell hundreds of thousands, and a rock and roll crossover might shift as many as a million.

"The big beat, cars, and young love," said Leonard Chess. "It was a trend and we jumped on it."²

At Chess's suggestion, "Ida Red" was renamed "Maybellene." The new title was inspired by the Maybelline cosmetics company, although Chess was careful to change the spelling to avoid potential legal problems. The retitled number was recorded at the Chess studio on May 21, with Johnnie Johnson on piano and Johnson's drummer Ebby Hardy, plus legendary Chess musician/songwriter Willie Dixon on bass.

Most of the elements of Berry's signature sound were already in place on "Maybellene," including his inventive blues/country picking style, his sly sing-

ing and the rhythm section's propulsive backbeat. Meanwhile, Johnson's rolling boogie rhythms and distinctive right-hand technique were already firmly in place, underlining the importance of the pianist's contribution to Berry's sound.

Beyond its snappy sound, "Maybellene" showcase Berry's already impressive lyrical gifts. He invests the song's simple story—an auto chase in pursuit of a wayward lover—with such a wealth of crafty wordplay and evocative detail that the narrative takes on the quality of an epic quest.

"Maybellene," with the more pedestrian "Wee Wee Hours" as its B-side, was released by Chess as Chuck Berry's first single in July 1955. By then, "Maybellene" had mysteriously acquired a pair of co-authors. The first was influential rock and roll disc jockey Alan Freed, with whom Chess Records had a close working relationship, and whose airplay could make a song a hit. The other was Russ Fratto, the landlord of the building where Chess's headquarters were located as well as the Chess brothers' partner in the pressing plant that manufactured the company's product. Credited as co-writers alongside Berry, Freed and Fratto were entitled to equal shares of the song's publishing royalties. Such exploitive arrangements were common in rock and roll's early days, and Berry was unaware of the chicanery until the song was released.

Great Groups and Solo Stars of the 1950s

Billy Ward was a Juilliard-trained musician and entrepreneur with an ear for talent. In 1950, he formed the Dominoes and recruited a series of exceptional singers to front the group. The first was Clyde McPhatter (1932–72), who injected the Dominoes' 1952 smash "Have Mercy Baby" with a blend of youthful abandon and adult sensuality, then later wept convincingly on their sentimental ballad "The Bells" (1953).

McPhatter left the group shortly thereafter to make an even bigger impact as lead singer for the Drifters on their number one R&B hits "Honey Love" and "Adorable." His successor in the Dominoes was a former Golden Gloves boxer from Detroit named Jackie Wilson (1934–84), who announced his arrival on the group's version of "St. Therese of the Roses" in 1956. It was not a chart hit, but Wilson's bravura performance attracted enough attention to propel him into a solo career soon after the record was released.

Frankie Lymon was a preternaturally gifted singer who became the first black teenage pop star at age thirteen when his group, the Teenagers, shot to number one R&B and number six Pop in 1956 with their first single, "Why Do Fools Fall In Love." Lymon's rich vibrato and jazz-tinged phrasing would exert a profound influence on artists ranging from Ronnie Spector to Michael Jackson, and great things were expected from his solo career when he left the group after just eighteen months. But neither he nor the other Teenagers ever re-

peated (or even came close to) their first astounding success, and Frankie Lymon was only twenty-six when he died from a drug overdose in 1968.

Amid the turbulent atmosphere of 1950s rhythm and blues, the Platters were one of the few black vocal groups to establish a stable career in the mainstream of show business. Under the careful guidance of manager and songwriter Buck Ram, the group scored twelve Top Ten R&B hits from 1955 to 1959, four of which reached number one on the Pop chart. The Platters' classic ballads "Only You," "The Great Pretender," and "Twilight Time" all featured the polished lead of Tony Williams within sumptuous male/female vocal blends and lush orchestrations.

Another black vocal group to enjoy great popularity with young white audiences was the Coasters, whose raucous, comedic musical mini-dramas were the virtual opposite of the Platters' staid elegance. In 1953, the L.A.-based quartet then known as the Robins joined forces with two young white songwriter/producers, Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, in 1953 to create the groundbreaking R&B protest number, "Riot in Cell Block #9."

When the Robins split up, lead singer Carl Gardner and bass man Bobby Nunn formed the Coasters, who continued to work with Leiber and Stoller. In 1957, the team struck gold with the two-sided hit single, "Searchin'" backed with "Young Blood," the former title topping the R&B chart for twelve straight weeks and reaching number three Pop. The following year, the Coasters scored a number one Pop hit with "Yakety Yak," then extended their hot streak with "Charlie Brown," "Along Came Jones," and "Poison Ivy." These songs, as carefully and imaginatively produced as any Madison Avenue television commercial, represented the final flowering of the original black vocal group sound.

A. S.

Not surprisingly, Freed played "Maybellene" enthusiastically on his popular show on New York's WINS. The exposure helped "Maybellene" to become one of the first national rock and roll hits, rising to the number one slot on *Billboard's* R&B chart and number five on the pop chart.

The crossover success of "Maybellene" demonstrated Berry's ability to transcend the racial barriers that ruled the music industry in the 1950s. At a time when it was common for discs by black performers to be outsold by watered-down cover versions by white acts, it was Berry's original that white teenagers bought, beating out cover attempts by Jim Lowe and Johnny Long, as well as one by future country star Marty Robbins.

Beyond the issue of writing credits, Berry would maintain an ongoing association with Alan Freed. After making his New York stage debut at Freed's all-star show at the Brooklyn Paramount theater during Labor Day weekend 1955, he would perform on several of Freed's multi-artist tours and appear with him in the quickie movie musicals *Rock Rock Rock*, *Mister Rock and*

Roll, and *Go Johnny Go*. Berry had a substantial speaking role in the latter film.

Thanks to the stage chops he'd honed in the clubs of East St. Louis, Berry quickly established himself as a magnetic, high-energy live performer, with such memorable trademark stage moves as his famed duckwalk. On some occasions, Berry would claim to have introduced the duckwalk during his Brooklyn Paramount debut. But he would also claim to have originated it as a child to entertain his mother and her friends.

Berry initially had trouble following up the crossover success of "Maybelene." "Roll Over Beethoven," a highly original ode to rock and roll's appeal invoking the names of classical composers, reached number twenty-nine on *Billboard's* pop chart in May 1956. But otherwise, the string of singles that Berry released in 1955 and 1956—songs like "Too Much Monkey Business," "You Can't Catch Me," "Thirty Days," and "No Money Down," all now acknowledged as classic examples of Berry's genius—performed well on the R&B charts, but failed to catch on in the more lucrative rock and roll market.

If those songs were less commercially successful than their predecessors, they were every bit as inventive and compelling, demonstrating Berry's eye for detail and knack for singular turns of phrase. "Too Much Monkey Business," for instance, cataloged an array of everyday irritations and injustices. If it wasn't exactly a protest song, it was certainly a masterful example of Berry's ability to use of humor to transcend life's indignities.

The B-side of "Too Much Monkey Business," "Brown Eyed Handsome Man," was equally noteworthy. The song is often cited as rock's first black-pride anthem, subtly acknowledging institutionalized racism while maintaining a sunny sense of optimism.

In the fall of 1956, Berry split with his original touring band of Johnnie Johnson and Ebby Hardy. Johnson and Hardy returned to the East St. Louis club scene, although both would work with Berry in the studio and on stage at various points in the future. Johnson's piano work would remain prominent on many of Berry's future Chess releases, although pianists Lafayette Leake and Otis Spann would also play on some Berry sessions. For rest of his career, Berry would usually travel alone and use local pickup bands as backup—an approach that would frustrate fans and critics to no end.

Berry's chart fortunes turned around decisively in early 1957, when "School Day"—an irresistible evocation of adolescent frustration and the transcendent uplift of rock and roll—reached number five on the *Billboard* pop chart. The song's success established Berry as a top draw on the live circuit, leading to him playing no fewer than 240 one-nighters that year.

Over the next two and a half years, Chuck Berry scored an impressive run of Top Ten hits—"Rock and Roll Music," "Sweet Little Sixteen," "Carol," and the seemingly autobiographical "Johnny B. Goode"—that neatly encapsulated the teenage experience and rock and roll's mythic pull. His minor hits during

this period—for example, “Sweet Little Rock and Roller,” “Almost Grown,” and “Back in the U.S.A.”—were no less memorable.

“Back in the U.S.A.” was one of Berry’s most impressive achievements. A vibrant ode to the artist’s homeland, written upon his return from his first tour of Australia, the song painted America as a day-glo wonderland of blaring jukeboxes, flashing neon signs and twenty-four-hour burger joints. Its original B-side, the slyly sentimental “Memphis,” was one of Berry’s most poignant efforts, and became a Top Ten hit after disc jockeys began flipping the single.

Berry also revealed an inclination for playful experimentalism that manifested itself both in offbeat lyrical subject matter, such as the Italian American themes of “Anthony Boy,” and the exotic musical elements heard in the Latin excursions “Havana Moon” and “La Juanda.” But he wasn’t above padding such early LPs as *One Dozen Berrys* (1958), *After School Session* (1958), and *Chuck Berry Is on Top* (1959) with silly novelties and throwaway blues numbers.

Berry toured extensively through the late 1950s, often performing on multi-act road shows alongside such fellow rock and roll pioneers as Buddy Holly, the Everly Brothers, Bill Haley and the Comets, Little Richard, and Carl Perkins. On one such package tour, a seventy-five-day trek hosted by Alan Freed, Berry was drawn into a rivalry with volatile piano pounder Jerry Lee Lewis, which gave rise to some memorable but largely apocryphal anecdotes. On a Boston date during that tour, fights broke out in the audience during Berry’s set. When the police turned on the theater’s house lights, Freed made some unflattering comments about the cops, which led to him being arrested for inciting a riot.

Berry’s 1958 appearance at the prestigious Newport Jazz Festival—an early example of rock and roll being accorded respect from the high-brow jazz world—was much calmer. The set, on which Berry was backed, somewhat awkwardly, by Jack Teagarden’s ten-piece jazz band, was captured for posterity in the acclaimed documentary film *Jazz on a Summer’s Day*.

With nearly twenty chart hits between 1957 and 1960, Berry became Chess Records’ best-selling artist, and the first Chess act to cross over to sell large quantities of records to white teenagers. Despite his success, Berry was still subject to the financial ripoffs and personal humiliations that routinely confronted rock and roll performers at the time.

When Berry discovered that his first road manager, Teddy Reig, was skimming money from his live appearances, he immediately fired Reig along with manager Jack Hooke, and took control of his own business affairs. Such experiences made a permanent imprint on Berry’s personality, making him suspicious of outsiders and causing him to maintain an obsessive level of control in financial matters.

“Let me say that any man who can’t take care of his own money deserves what he gets,” Berry later declared in a *Rolling Stone* interview.³

Berry's frugal on-the-road habits—sometimes sleeping in his car rather than hotels, and cooking meals on his own hotplate rather than dining in restaurants—would soon become legendary. But they likely had as much to do with a desire to avoid the indignities that faced an African American man traveling alone in 1950s America as they did with saving money.

HAVE MERCY, JUDGE

Berry's success allowed him the financial independence that his parents had always aspired to. In April 1957, he purchased thirty acres of land in rural Wentzville, Missouri, about thirty miles west of St. Louis. There, he built Berry Park, an amusement park complex that would open to the public in the summer of 1961, encompassing a hotel, a nightclub, a golf course, an outdoor bandstand, a recording studio, a guitar-shaped swimming pool, and Berry's fleet of Cadillacs.

In 1958, Berry opened Club Bandstand in a largely white business district of St. Louis. Not surprisingly, the presence of a racially integrated nightclub owned by a successful black entertainer in a city with St. Louis's troubled racial history didn't sit well with the local power brokers, and it didn't take long for Berry to come under the scrutiny of the authorities.

On December 1, 1959, following an engagement in El Paso, Texas, Berry visited nearby Juarez, Mexico. There, he met Janice Escalanti, a fourteen-year-old Native American waitress and sometime prostitute from Yuma, Arizona, and hired her to work as a hat-check girl at Club Bandstand. Berry brought her back to St. Louis, but fired her after two weeks. On December 21, Escalanti was arrested on a prostitution charge at a St. Louis hotel, leading to charges being filed against Berry for violating the Mann Act, which forbade interstate transport of women for "immoral purposes."

When the case first came to trial, Berry was found guilty, but some overtly racist courtroom remarks by the judge led to the verdict being overturned. A second trial in October 1961 arrived at the same verdict, and Berry was sentenced to three years in prison and a \$10,000 fine.

Berry began serving his sentence on February 19, 1962. While in prison, he took courses to earn his high school degree and continued to write songs. In his absence, his influence continued to be felt in the rock and roll world. In early 1963, for instance, the Beach Boys scored a hit with "Surfin' U.S.A.," a fairly blatant rewrite of "Sweet Little Sixteen." When Chess Records threatened legal action, Berry was granted writing credit for the song.

Meanwhile, across the Atlantic, a new generation of British guitar bands was making the most of Berry's influence, as well as covering his compositions on a regular basis. In June 1963, for example, the Rolling Stones released their first single, an earnest cover of Berry's "Come On," which they would follow with versions of nearly a dozen more Berry tunes. The Beatles also cut

popular versions of “Rock and Roll Music” and “Roll Over Beethoven,” while the Animals would dip into the Berry songbook more than half a dozen times. Indeed, of the countless U.K. rock and roll combos who sprang to life in the first half of the 1960s—not to mention the legion of American garage bands who would emulate them—it would be hard to find many whose set list didn’t include at least one Berry number.

After serving twenty months of his sentence at the Indiana Federal Prison, Leavenworth Federal Prison in Kansas, and the Federal Medical Center in Springfield, Missouri, Berry was released on his thirty-seventh birthday, October 18, 1963.

Although he would successfully resume his musical career following his release, most observers agreed that Chuck Berry’s experiences with the law left him bitter, distrustful, and suspicious of all but his closest friends. He felt, with some justification, that he had been unfairly targeted and persecuted by a bigoted legal system, and hounded by the press.

“Never saw a man so changed,” observed rockabilly pioneer Carl Perkins, who’d shared bills with Berry in the past and worked with him again on his British comeback tour in 1964. “He had been an easygoing guy before, the kinda guy who’d jam in dressing rooms, sit and swap licks and jokes. In England he was cold, real distant and bitter. It wasn’t just jail, it was those years of one nighters, grinding it out like that can kill a man, but I figure it was mostly jail.”⁴

However much his experiences had affected his personality, they didn’t diminish the quality of Berry’s songwriting. Between February 1964 and March 1965, he placed six singles in the *Billboard* Top 100, including the shaggy-dog tour de force “Nadine,” the rollicking “No Particular Place To Go,” the witty, French-themed “You Never Can Tell,” and the poignantly autobiographical “Promised Land,” which chronicles a cross-country journey from Norfolk, Virginia, to California.

The latter song was one of Berry’s most impressive achievements, a richly detailed, partially autobiographical account of a rock and roll pilgrim’s progress. The song’s sense of aspiration and optimism was all the more impressive in light of its author’s harsh experiences with his homeland’s darker side.

For a while, Berry was one of a small handful of American rock and rollers to maintain chart success during the British Invasion. But 1965’s “Dear Dad” would be his last chart entry for seven years.

In 1966, Berry left Chess to sign with Mercury Records. Although the deal was a lucrative one for Berry, the move proved disastrous in nearly every other respect. Where the small, family-owned Chess could accommodate the artist’s idiosyncratic personality and contrary streak, Mercury’s more formal corporate structure was a much less comfortable fit. And without the sympathetic studio treatment he received from the Chess brothers, Berry foundered musically.

Berry's four-year stint with Mercury began unpromisingly with *Chuck Berry's Golden Hits*, a pointless collection of lackluster remakes of his Chess classics, and continued with such underwhelming LPs as *Chuck Berry in Memphis*, *From St. Louie to Frisco*, and the bloated, jam-dominated *Concerto in B. Goode*. Far better was 1967's *Live at the Fillmore*, on which Berry received backup from the Steve Miller Band and demonstrated that he was still capable of turning in solid performances in the right circumstances. Otherwise, his Mercury output mainly served to make Berry sound like a disengaged relic of a bygone era.

It's unfortunate that Berry's recordings during this period were so shoddy, since his series of well-received appearances at San Francisco's Fillmore—a revered bastion of the new hippie musical culture—demonstrated that he could still appeal to the new underground rock audience. But Berry, still making good money performing one-nighters, seemed largely unconcerned with reinventing himself creatively or maintaining momentum as a contemporary artist.

Berry re-signed with Chess Records in 1970, and the change made for an upswing in the quality of his output. The three studio LPs he released after his return—*Back Home*, *San Francisco Dues*, and *Bio*—were something of a return to form, adapting Berry's sound somewhat to fit changing times without sacrificing his personality or songwriting style.

Berry's reignited inspiration was evident on *Back Home's* hippie-themed "Tulane," whose tale of a pot-dealing couple adapted his storytelling approach to the Woodstock era. Tulane's boyfriend Johnny is busted, and finds himself in court on the song's sequel, "Have Mercy Judge." That song, also included on *Back Home*, was one of Berry's more successful attempts to write in a blues vein.

But Chess Records was no longer the small family operation that Berry had originally known. The company had recently been sold to tape-manufacturing giant GRT, and Chuck's main mentor Leonard Chess had died of a heart attack a few months prior to his return. Leonard's brother Phil and son Marshall would leave the company by 1972, and Berry would soon follow.

By then, a widespread resurgence of interest in 1950s rock and roll had revitalized the careers of many vintage performers, and Berry found himself in increased demand as a live act. The revival actually had actually begun to gather steam in late 1969, when New York promoter Richard Nader staged a pair of all-star concerts at Madison Square Garden, with a bill that included Berry, Bill Haley, the Coasters, the Platters, and the Shirelles. Although Berry's sets were marred by business disputes with Nader, the shows were a smash, and Nader continued to stage similar events around the country, often with Berry on the bill.

Although Chess Records was on its last legs, Berry would score the biggest hit of his career in 1972. That year, he released *The London Chuck Berry Sessions*, which combined tracks recorded at a concert in Coventry,

England, with studio recordings made with British players including Faces members Ian McLagan and Kenney Jones. Although the album was patchy and unmemorable, it spawned an unlikely smash single in an edited version of the live “My Ding-A-Ling,” a sophomoric, double entendre-laden ode to masturbation.

While “My Ding-A-Ling” (which Berry had first recorded as “My Tambourine” on his 1968 Mercury LP *From St. Louie to Frisco*) credited Berry as writer, the song was actually written and recorded by noted New Orleans R&B bandleader Dave Bartholomew in 1952 and covered by the Bees as “Toy Bell” the following year.

Whatever its pedigree, the lightweight novelty tune became the best-selling single of Berry’s career in the summer of 1972, topping the pop charts on both sides of the Atlantic. Adding to the irony was the fact that it kept “Burning Love” by fellow 1950s icon Elvis Presley—who was then also in the midst of a chart resurgence—out of the number one slot in the United States. In England, the song’s risqué lyrics made it the first number one song not to be performed on the venerable TV pop institution *Top of the Pops*.

Veteran rock critic Robert Christgau noted the discomfort that the left-field hit had caused to many longtime Berry fans. “A lot of his raving fanatics are mortified,” Christgau wrote at the time. “We’ve always dreamed of another big single for our hero—his last was ‘You Never Can Tell’ in the Beatle summer of 1964—but ‘My Ding-a-Ling’ has been embarrassing us at concerts for years, and not because we wouldn’t sing along. It was just dumb, inappropriate to the sophistication of his new, collegiate audience. Anyway, that’s how the rationalization went.”

“Obviously,” Christgau reasoned,

what we meant was that it wasn’t sophisticated enough for us—his other stuff was so much better. But popularity has changed the song. I feel sure that it’s delighting all the twelve-year-olds who get to figure out that they’ve snuck something dirty onto the AM radio—a rock ‘n’ roll tradition that has been neglected since the concept of dirty became so passé—because I’m fairly delighted myself. Believe me, twenty-one thousand rock ‘n’ roll revivalists filling Madison Square Garden to shout along with a fourth-grade wee-wee joke constitutes a cultural event as impressive as it is odd, a magnificent and entirely apposite triumph in Chuck Berry’s very own tradition. . . . Unless we somehow recycle the concept of the great artist so that it supports Chuck Berry as well as it does Marcel Proust, we might as well trash it altogether.⁵

The London Chuck Berry Sessions produced another minor hit, a live version of “Reelin’ and Rockin’” that reached the U.S. Top Thirty. But it and “My Ding-A-Ling” marked Berry’s farewell to the charts. Thereafter, he would focus the bulk of his musical energies on live performing. Through the 1970s, he was a regular presence on the rock and roll revival circuit, playing numerous multi-act nostalgia concerts, including the Richard Nader concerts that were filmed for the popular 1973 theatrical documentary *Let the Good*

Times Roll. He also appeared as himself in *American Hot Wax*, a fictionalized 1978 Alan Freed biopic whose narrative climaxed with the Brooklyn Paramount shows that had helped to make Berry a star.

ALL ALONE

By now, Berry had developed a reputation for delivering sloppy, indifferent live performances, usually backed by local pickup bands whom he'd rarely met (let alone rehearsed with) before taking the stage. His standard touring method involved traveling alone with his guitar to gigs, where his standard performance contract called for promoters to provide two Fender Dual Showman amplifiers, a backup band, and payment in cash prior to the show. Promoters who violated the terms of the contract, even inadvertently, found themselves forced to pay additional fines before Berry would agree to perform.

Berry's cut-rate touring methods provided amusing and harrowing anecdotes for multiple generations of musicians who'd found themselves playing behind the prickly legend. One of those was Bruce Springsteen, who in the 1986 Berry documentary *Hail! Hail! Rock 'n' Roll* related his early experience of being hired to play guitar behind Berry, who showed up alone five minutes before show time, collected his cash, unpacked his guitar on stage, and barely acknowledged the musicians, who, in lieu of a set list, were left to pick up their cues from Berry's inscrutable onstage signals.

While some artists might find that story unflattering, Berry was proud enough to quote Springsteen's anecdote as the introduction to his autobiography. Springsteen, by the way, would back Berry once more, at a 1995 concert inaugurating the new Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

Chuck Berry would release only more album of new material in the twentieth century. 1979's *Rockit* was recorded in two days in Berry Park's in-house studio with several longtime cohorts including Johnnie Johnson. Berry delivered the finished album to Atco Records, accepting no A&R input from the label. *Rockit* was solid and workmanlike if not particularly inspired, and featured some scattered flashes of Berry's original wit and energy, including, the sly "Oh What a Thrill."

Not long after *Rockit's* release, Berry pleaded guilty to charges of tax evasion and filing false tax returns. The charges stemmed from his habit of taking undocumented cash payments for his live performances. The judge suspended his original three-year sentence, and instead sentenced Berry to serve four months in prison and perform 1,000 hours of community service. Berry would end up spending just over three months at Lompoc Prison Camp in California. Just three days before his sentencing, Berry had performed at the White House, as part of an event staged by the Black Music Association.

While serving his sentence at Lompoc, Berry began writing his version of his life story, which would be published in 1987 as *Chuck Berry: The Autobiography*. The book presented a colorful account of the author's musical, legal,

and sexual exploits, but glossed over many of his life's more troublesome issues, and ultimately did little to reveal what really made him tick.

In 1986—the same year that he became one of the new Rock and Roll Hall of Fame's first set of inductees—Berry was honored with a pair of star-studded sixtieth-birthday concerts that became the jumping-off point for *Hail! Hail! Rock 'n' Roll*, a high-profile feature film documentary that chronicled the shows and delineated Berry's musical legacy. The shows took place at St. Louis's Fox Theater, a venue that had once refused entrance to a young Berry and his father due to their skin color.

Rolling Stone Keith Richards, perhaps the most prominent acolyte of Berry's guitar style, signed on as the event's musical director. Richards assembled a first-rate band, with Johnnie Johnson on piano, determined to present his idol's songs with the respect they deserved.

But Berry, uncomfortable ceding control to others, had other ideas. He clashed constantly with Richards, with whom he'd tangled in the past (he'd punched Richards in the face at a New York show in 1981). Further tensions erupted between Berry and the film crew that director Taylor Hackford had assembled to document the shows.

"I signed on to this as a celebration of somebody who had had a major impact on our lives," Hackford said twenty years later, on the occasion of the film's DVD release. "So we went there to celebrate him, and we had every expectation to expect a lot of cooperation. . . . We found quite a different situation."⁶

Berry reportedly ate up a substantial percentage of the film's \$3 million budget by demanding daily cash payments just to show up for filming, despite being one of the film's producers. When the filmmakers and Berry visited a prison where he'd served time on his armed robbery conviction, the presence of Berry's provocatively attired girlfriend nearly drove the prisoners to riot, until Berry calmed the captives by playing for them. Although Hackford captured the dramatic incident on film, Berry refused to allow the director to use the footage in the film.

When it came time for the concerts, Berry—who'd lost much of his voice arguing with Richards during rehearsals—played out of tune, as well as changing arrangements and keys in mid-song, throwing the carefully rehearsed all-star backup band into chaos.

Most who witnessed the shows described them as disasters. But some substantial post-production retooling—including Berry rerecording his vocals in the studio, for which he charged the producers once again—made the performances presentable enough for the film and its soundtrack album.

Despite being put through the wringer by his subject, Hackford couldn't bring himself to speak ill of Berry. The director also suggested that no film could ever really do justice to Berry's essence.

"Nobody is ever gonna know what really goes on inside that head," Hackford stated. "No one's ever gonna do the entire picture of Chuck Berry because it's just too deep and dark."⁷

In the film, Richards expressed a similar mixture of irritation and fondness. Despite his frustrations working with Berry, Richards was thrilled to have the opportunity to work with Johnson, who had retired from music and was driving a van for the elderly at the time.

“I knew Johnnie and Chuck hadn’t been together for years and years, and I didn’t honestly know if Johnnie was still playing,” Richards recalled. “The most surprising thing was Chuck said, ‘Yeah, he’s in town, I’ll give him a call.’”⁸

“Johnnie had amazing simpatico. He had a way of slipping into a song, an innate feel for complementing the guitar,” Richards said. “I was fascinated by those huge hands, doing such incredibly precise, delicate work. I always compared (his fingers) to a bunch of overripe bananas. But he could do amazing things with those bananas.”

Beyond its troubled production process and flawed concert performances, *Hail! Hail! Rock ‘n’ Roll!*’s blend of live footage, interviews, and candid footage of Berry’s contentious interactions with Richards proved to be both a heartfelt tribute to, and a revealing portrait of, its prickly subject. Its highlights included some new performances filmed at the long-shuttered Cosmopolitan Club, interview footage shot at the now-crumbling Berry Park and enthusiastic testimonials from the likes of Little Richard, Bo Diddley, Bruce Springsteen, and even old rival Jerry Lee Lewis, who revealed that his own mother preferred Berry’s music to her son’s.

The Diva and the Dynamos: Little Richard, Ruth Brown, and Bo Diddley

Rhythm and blues and rock and roll brought forth a host of singular talents throughout the 1950s. Some, like Little Richard and Bo Diddley, were daring iconoclasts who broke or bent musical conventions to shape their own unique styles. Others, like Ruth Brown, were more conservative but still significant transitional figures bridging the gap between pre-rock popular music and the new big-beat sound.

Little Richard was born Richard Wayne Penniman in Macon, Georgia, in 1932. His early recordings (1951–54) were unexceptional blues numbers, but in 1955 Little Richard made an unexpected leap into flat-out rock and roll with “Tutti Frutti.” Much influenced by female gospel shouters like Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Richard seemed to be singing himself hoarse on this raving, almost nonsensical rocker that not only reached number two R&B but crashed into the Pop Top Twenty.

“Tutti Frutti” spawned a series of similar-sounding but no less potent follow-ups: “Long Tall Sally,” “Rip It Up,” and “Lucille” were all number one R&B hits.

A cross-over sensation, Little Richard performed the title song in the 1956 film *The Girl Can’t Help It* and thrilled audiences with his campy, high-energy stage shows. Suddenly, in late 1957, he left the music business to enter an Alabama Bible college; his subsequent gospel recordings passed unnoticed.

But in 1962 he returned to rock and roll for a rapturously received U.K. tour, and two years later the Beatles' cover of "Long Tall Sally" reintroduced his classic sound to a new generation. Although he never had another major hit record, his original seismic impact was enough to earn Little Richard a place among the first group of artists inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1986.

There was nothing especially wild or unpredictable in the blues and ballad singing of Ruth Brown. But she projected a sassy, proto-feminist energy on infectious danceable songs like her number one R&B classic "Mama, He Treats Your Daughter Mean." In the decade from 1949 to 1959, Brown accumulated twenty Top Ten R&B hits including the chart-toppers "Teardrops from My Eyes," "5-10-15 Hours," and "Oh What a Dream." Her label, Atlantic Records, became known in the music industry as "The House That Ruth Built."

None of these Ruth Brown recordings reached the Pop Top Forty, however, due in part to the release of competing cover versions on bigger labels. In her autobiography, Brown recalled that throughout her hit-making period she was forced to stand by as white singers copied her note for note and were featured on top television shows from which she was excluded.

Brown's career declined after 1960, and eventually one of the leading female stars of 1950s R&B was forced to seek work as a home health care aide. But beginning in the late 1970s Ruth Brown embarked on a new career in musical theater, including roles in the Broadway revue *Black and Blue* (for which she won a Tony Award) and in the John Waters film *Hairspray*. This exposure led to a new recording contract with Fantasy Records and in 1989 her album *Blues on Broadway* won the Grammy Award for Best Female Jazz Vocal Performance. The singer also waged a protracted struggle on behalf of royalty rights for veteran rhythm and blues artists, embodied by her own personal legal battle with Atlantic Records. Ruth's determined efforts led to the creation of the Rhythm and Blues Foundation, with funding from Atlantic and other major labels. She was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1993. Following surgery in October 2006, Ruth Brown suffered a heart attack and a stroke; she died a few weeks later, on November 17, at age seventy-eight.

On Bo Diddley's first self-titled hit "Bo Diddley" (which reached number two R&B in 1955), the singer/guitarist popularized an African-based rhythm pattern soon known as "the Bo Diddley beat." This beat became the basis for rock and roll classics ranging from "Not Fade Away" by Buddy Holly and "Willie and the Hand Jive" by Johnny Otis to the Who's "Magic Bus" and Bruce Springsteen's "She's the One." On "Say Man" and "Who Do You Love," Bo Diddley combined rock and roll music with a type of African American street slang known as "the dozens." His ritualized bragging and playful insults on these songs made him an early progenitor of rap.

He also designed and built his own rectangular-shaped guitars, constructed his own home recording studio, and was an early experimenter with futuristic guitar effects like sustain and feedback. In an essay written a few years after the artist's 1987 induction into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, Robert Palmer

called Bo Diddley “a singularly important catalyst in one of the most far-reaching transformations of post-World War II American music” and “one of the most versatile, innovative, and *complete* musical talents of our time.”*

A. S.

- * Robert Palmer, liner notes for the box set Bo Diddley (Chess/MCA CHD2-19502, MCA Records, 1990).
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Some of the film’s most compelling moments were provided by Berry’s onscreen refusal to address such topics as his prison terms and his extramarital affairs. At one point, he angrily cuts his wife off in mid-interview.

In one memorable scene shot during the concert rehearsals, Berry and Richards clash over the chords for “Carol,” which the Rolling Stones covered early in their career. In another segment, Richards accompanies Berry on a casual rendition of the pop standard “I’m Through with Love,” and Berry graciously compliments Richards on his guitar work. That brief, unguarded moment provides a rare glimpse into a more gentle, generous side that’s sometimes been described by Berry’s close friends but rarely displayed in public.

Berry was in more legal jeopardy in 1990, when several women alleged that he had videotaped them in the bathrooms at Berry Park and the Berry-owned Southern Air restaurant in Wentzville. When a former employee alleged that Berry had been trafficking in cocaine, Berry’s estate was raided by DEA agents who confiscated marijuana, hashish, and various pornographic films and videotapes. But Berry denied the cocaine charge, and no evidence was ever presented to suggest that it had any merit.

In November 2000, just a few days before Berry was awarded a prestigious Kennedy Center Honor in Washington, D.C., Johnnie Johnson sued Berry, claiming co-authorship of fifty-seven vintage Berry songs. According to many reports, the lawsuit was initially inspired by observations that Keith Richards had made in *Hail! Hail! Rock ‘n’ Roll*, regarding Johnson’s neglected contributions to Berry’s music. But a judge ruled that too much time had passed since the songs were written, and the matter never came to trial.

While Johnson wasn’t able to collect on his claims of co-writing Berry’s songs, his appearance in *Hail! Hail! Rock ‘n’ Roll* helped to spark a late-blooming career resurgence for the veteran musician. The resulting attention led to him releasing a series of solo albums—including 1992’s *Johnnie B. Bad*, on which Richards produced two tracks—and performing as a sideman on high-profile projects with a variety of artists.

In addition to playing on Richards’s 1988 solo debut *Talk Is Cheap*, Johnson was featured on subsequent albums by Eric Clapton, Aerosmith, Bo Diddley, Buddy Guy, John Lee Hooker, Al Kooper, Styx, Susan Tedeschi, and George Thorogood. Johnson also played live shows fronting his own band, up until his death on April 13, 2005. One of his last live appearances was sitting in with the Rolling Stones to play “Honky Tonk Women” on a Houston gig during their 2003 tour.

Regardless of the controversies that continue to surround him, Berry's musical contributions continued to be widely honored, and his classic work continued to inspire new generations of listeners. MCA's acquisition of the Chess catalog in the 1980s allowed Berry's greatest recordings to gain new exposure in the CD format, thanks to a lengthy series of digital reissues, including an acclaimed 1989 box set.

But Berry's ongoing prestige as one of rock and roll's living legends and elder statesmen didn't alter his approach to his musical career. He's maintained his working routine, continuing to play an endless stream of half-hearted one-nighters with an equally endless series of subpar pickup bands. Other than the *Hail! Hail! Rock 'n' Roll* soundtrack album, he released no new music in the quarter-century that followed *Rockit*; sporadic talk of new material has yielded no tangible results as of this writing, although new songs have occasionally found their way into Berry's live sets.

St. Louis residents have had regular opportunities to see Berry perform low-key club gigs in his hometown, where he still plays regularly at a club called Blueberry Hill, performing in the club's Duck Room (named after his famous stage walk) backed by a regular group of musicians familiar with his material as well as his moods.

Otherwise, Berry, in his sixth decade in music and his eighth decade of life, continues to operate, for better or worse, on his own terms, continuing to exasperate club owners and sidemen as well as his own fans, who continue to hold out hope of catching him on a good night. Considering the magnitude of his influence and the life-affirming brilliance of his greatest music, one can hardly fault them for keeping the faith.

Regardless of what Chuck Berry does in the rest of his time on Earth, his music has already transcended the bounds of his home planet. When NASA scientists assembled a record of music to travel on its *Voyager I* spacecraft to deliver the sounds of the human race to alien civilizations, the space agency chose Berry's original Chess version "Johnny B. Goode" to represent rock and roll alongside pieces by Bach, Mozart, and Stravinsky and ethnic recordings from around the world. As if his earthly achievements weren't impressive enough, Berry is now also the first rocker in outer space.

TIMELINE

December 31, 1952

Pianist Johnnie Johnson hires Chuck Berry to fill in with his band, Sir John's Trio, for a New Year's Eve gig at the Cosmopolitan Club in East St. Louis.

May 1, 1955

Chuck Berry signs with Chess Records.

May 21, 1955

Chuck Berry records "Maybellene" as his first Chess single.

August 1, 1955

“Maybellene” reaches number five on *Billboard’s* pop chart.

September 1955

Berry makes his New York stage debut at disc jockey Alan Freed’s all-star show at the Brooklyn Paramount theater.

May 1, 1957

Chuck Berry’s first album, *After School Session*, is released.

June 14, 1958

“Johnny B. Goode” enters the Top Ten.

May 31, 1961

Chuck Berry’s entertainment complex Berry Park opens in the St. Louis suburb of Wentzville, Missouri.

February 19, 1962

Berry begins serving a prison sentence for violating the Mann Act.

October 18, 1963

Berry is released from prison.

May 25, 1963

The Beach Boys score their first Top Ten hit with “Surfin’ USA,” Brian Wilson’s reworking of Chuck Berry’s “Sweet Little Sixteen.”

June 1, 1966

Chuck Berry leaves Chess to sign with Mercury Records.

October 21, 1972

Chuck Berry achieves the biggest-selling single of Berry’s career with the risqué novelty song “My Ding-A-Ling.”

March 1, 1978

American Hot Wax, a film biography of seminal rock and roll disc jockey Alan Freed, with Berry playing himself, premiers.

June 1, 1979

Chuck Berry performs at the White House at the request of President Jimmy Carter, a month before he begins serving a four-month sentence for income tax evasion. While in prison, Berry begins writing his autobiography.

February 26, 1985

Chuck Berry receives a Lifetime Achievement Award at the Twenty-Seventh Annual Grammy Awards. He is cited as “one of the most influential and creative innovators in the history of American popular music.”

January 23, 1986

Chuck Berry becomes one of the new Rock and Roll Hall of Fame’s first set of inductees. He’s inducted by Keith Richards, who in his induction speech confesses to borrowing every guitar lick Berry’s ever played.

October 8, 1987

Hail! Hail! Rock ‘n’ Roll, director Taylor Hackford’s documentary tribute to Berry, with Keith Richards as musical director, makes its theatrical debut.

November 2000

Chuck Berry receives a prestigious Kennedy Center Honor in Washington, DC.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

The Great Twenty-Eight, 1982
His Best, Vol. 1, 1997
His Best, Vol. 2, 1997
Anthology, 2000
Gold, 2002
The Definitive Collection, 2006

NOTES

1. Peter Guralnick, *Feel Like Going Home: Portraits in Blues and Rock 'n' Roll* (New York: Vintage, 1981), p. 234.
2. Ibid.
3. The Editors of Rolling Stone, *The Rolling Stone Interviews 1967–1980* (New York: St. Martin's Press/Rolling Stone Press, 1989), p. 229.
4. Bruce Pegg, *Brown Eyed Handsome Man: The Life and Hard Times of Chuck Berry* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 171.
5. www.robertchristgau.com/xg/bk-aow/berry.php.
6. "The Dark Side of Chuck Berry." Available online at www.cnn.com/2006/SHOWBIZ/Movies/06/22/leisure.berry.reut/index.html.
7. Ibid.
8. "Keith Remembers Johnnie." Available online at www.rollingstone.com/news/story/7250961/keith_remembers_johnnie.

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Berry, Chuck. *The Autobiography*. New York: Fireside, 1988.
 The Editors of Rolling Stone, *The Rolling Stone Interviews 1967–1980*. New York: St. Martin's Press/Rolling Stone Press, 1989.
 Groia, Philip. *They All Sang on the Corner: A Second Look at New York City's Rhythm and Blues Vocal Groups*. West Hempstead, NY: Philly Dee Enterprises, 1983.
 Guralnick, Peter. *Feel Like Going Home: Portraits in Blues and Rock 'n' Roll*. New York: Vintage, 1981.
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Courtesy of Photofest.

Buddy Holly

Scott Schinder

THE ROCK AND ROLL STAR NEXT DOOR

Buddy Holly was one of the key innovators of rock and roll's early years, and a crucial link between the music's 1950s roots and the more electric direction that it would take in the Beatles era. In his brief but incredibly productive career, the Texas-bred singer/songwriter/guitarist/producer created a remarkable body of work that permanently altered the face of contemporary music, leaving behind

the tantalizing potential of what else he might have achieved if he had not died in at the age of twenty-two.

Although he attained international stardom and scored a string of memorable hits, Holly's impact far outweighs his record sales. What makes his achievements all the more remarkable is that they took place during a mere eighteen months, between his first hit "That'll Be the Day" in the summer of 1957 and his death in a plane crash on February 3, 1959.

A distinctive songwriter, compelling performer, inventive stylist, and innovative sonic architect, Holly was instrumental in elevating rock and roll into an art form and a vehicle for personal expression, broadening rock's stylistic range and compositional sophistication without diluting its raw energy. A versatile craftsman who was equally adept at raucous rockers and gentle ballads, Holly's output balanced youthful exuberance, yearning romanticism, and playful humor. His sound provided a bridge between the raw rockabilly of Elvis's Sun Records sides and the more sophisticated styles that would follow.

Holly was also a strong-willed self-starter who possessed a clear musical vision, as well as the technical skills to create his music on his own terms. In his short life, he conquered the recording medium and achieved a remarkably swift musical evolution. He was also the first rocker to use his commercial clout to gain artistic control over his musical output—and the first with the talent to take advantage of that freedom.

If Elvis Presley personified rock and roll's sexuality, Little Richard embodied the music's unpredictable edge, and Chuck Berry was the bard who chronicled the rituals of teen culture, Holly's innovations were more musical in nature. With his band the Crickets, he pioneered the self-contained electric guitar/bass/drums format that was adopted by avowed Holly acolytes the Beatles and continued by the countless British and American combos who followed in their wake, and which remains rock's standard instrumental lineup to this day. Holly's guitar style, meanwhile, would provide the blueprint for the guitarists of the British Invasion and subsequent generations of pop rockers.

While Berry beat him to the honor of being the first major rock artist to write most of his own material and double as his own lead guitarist, Holly was the first to take charge of every stage of the creative process. In addition to his singing, songwriting, and guitar work, Holly's trailblazing experiments with such innovations as echo, overdubbing, and vocal double-tracking introduced enticing new sounds to the genre's limited early palette. He was also the first major rock and roll performer to move behind the scenes to produce and promote other artists, activities that he was actively pursuing prior to his death.

Where Elvis and most of his acolytes carried an enticing aura of danger, the lanky, bespectacled Holly wasn't a delinquent, an outlaw, or a sex symbol. His persona was as earthy and accessible as Elvis's was exotic and untouchable,

giving Holly an unpretentious everyman quality that was rare among 1950s rockers.

Those who knew Buddy describe him as polite, unassuming, and down-to-earth, yet incredibly focused and driven to succeed, motivated to embrace new musical challenges and pursue his abiding fascination with the recording process.

Holly's rise to prominence coincided with several of rock's original stars temporarily exiting the spotlight. In late 1957, Little Richard abandoned popular music for the ministry, and the early months of 1958 saw Elvis enter the army and Jerry Lee Lewis all but blacklisted after marrying his thirteen-year-old second cousin. The resulting void offered opportunities for new artists, and Holly was in the vanguard of a second wave of rock and rollers that kept the music vital in the late 1950s.

Buddy was born Charles Hardin Holley (he would drop the "e" after it was misspelled that way on an early contract) on September 7, 1936, in Lubbock, Texas, the youngest of Ella and Lawrence Odell Holley's four children. L.O., as Buddy's dad was known, had worked as a carpenter, cook, tailor, and boxing-ring timekeeper to support his family amid the privations of the Great Depression, and had moved with Ella to Lubbock from Vernon, Texas, in 1925, in search of the work which the town's cotton economy and its new Texas Technological College might provide.

Lubbock was a conservative city in the vast expanses of west Texas flatlands, whose preponderance of devout Christian sects had earned the town its nickname of the "City of Churches." At the time, it was illegal to serve liquor in Lubbock's public places (it would remain so until 1972), although a string of liquor stores and honky-tonks awaited just outside of town. When Buddy was born, Lubbock had only been a city for forty-five years. Its population numbered just 21,000, but was rapidly growing with the influx of new additions who, like Buddy's parents, had migrated from smaller towns and farming communities.

By all accounts, Buddy (who received his nickname from his parents during early childhood) was raised in a stable, loving household, and a musical one. Even when times were hard, Ella and L.O. managed to pay for music lessons for their children. Buddy's big brothers Larry and Travis each played multiple instruments, and often teamed up to play country-and-western songs at social functions and talent contests. Sister Pat often sang duets with her mother at the living room piano. And the entire Holley family sang hymns when attending Sunday services at the local Baptist church.

At the age of five, Buddy, and his brothers, had won a \$5 prize singing "Down the River of Memories," a song his mother had taught him, at a local talent show. Although he wouldn't take an active interest in music until his teens, he began taking piano lessons, at his mother's urging, at the age of eleven. He quickly showed a natural musical aptitude, but quit after nine months. He then took a few lessons in steel guitar before switching to acoustic guitar.

He learned his first guitar chords from his brother Travis, and took to the instrument immediately. He quickly mastered the guitar and was soon the best musician in the Holley family.

BUDDY AND BOB

By the time Buddy entered J.T. Hutchinson Junior High School in 1949, he was already proficient on guitar, banjo, and mandolin. He soon found a kindred spirit in fellow seventh-grader Bob Montgomery, an avid country-and-western music fan who sang and played guitar. The two became fast friends and musical partners, absorbing the repertoires of such country stars as Hank Williams, Bill Monroe, and Flatt and Scruggs, and studying the live performances they would hear on such regional radio broadcasts as Nashville's *Grand Ole Opry*, Shreveport's *Louisiana Hayride*, and Dallas's *Big D Jamboree*.

Montgomery would be a strong influence on Buddy's musical development, and his budding songwriting efforts would encourage Holly to develop his own writing skills. The pair's tastes would soon expand to encompass blues and R&B, thanks to the sounds they heard on the faraway radio stations whose powerful signals would drift in at night. Lubbock, like most of the South, was racially segregated, but Buddy, like many other white teenagers of the era, was drawn to the energy and passion of black music, and soon began to integrate it into his own work.

In addition to Montgomery, Holly played informally with various friends during junior high and high school, including guitarist Sonny Curtis, drummer Jerry "J.I." Allison, and bassists Larry Welborn and Don Guess. While many parents disapproved of the strange new music that their kids were listening to, Ella and L.O. appreciated black music and recognized its connection to their own favorite styles. They enthusiastically encouraged Buddy's musical pursuits, allowing him and his pals to conduct informal jam sessions at their home.

Billed as Buddy and Bob and advertising themselves as a "western and bop" combo, Holly and Montgomery initially patterned their act after such country duos as the Louvin Brothers and Flatt and Scruggs. They became a popular local attraction, playing country and bluegrass material at school and church events, teen parties, and local business events. They became a trio with the addition of Larry Welborn on standup bass, although they continued to be billed as Buddy and Bob. In September 1953, they won a half-hour weekly Sunday-afternoon slot on Lubbock's KDAV, which had just become the nation's first radio station to adopt a full-time country music format.

With KDAV disc jockey Hipockets Duncan serving as their manager, Buddy and Bob eventually graduated to more formal gigs at such venues as Lubbock's Cotton Club, as well as playing live remote broadcasts for KDAV advertisers.

Initially, Montgomery handled most of the lead vocals, with Buddy singing harmony, but the act's sound and repertoire expanded as Buddy began singing lead on more blues, R&B, and rockabilly numbers.

After graduating from high school in 1954, Holly and Montgomery took steps to pursue their musical careers more seriously. They undertook their first formal studio sessions, cutting a series of demo recordings of their compositions, and using their contacts with fellow musicians to try and get their demos into the hands of anyone who might be able to steer them toward a record deal.

The gradual cross-pollination of black and white musical styles that would form rock and roll's foundation was about to explode full-blown in the person of Elvis Presley, who would serve as a key inspiration in Holly's evolution from aspiring country musician to pioneering rocker. In early 1955, Buddy witnessed the young Presley's first Lubbock performance at a KDAV-sponsored show at the Cotton Club. The following day, Elvis played at the grand opening of a local Pontiac dealership, an event at which Buddy and Bob also appeared.

By all accounts, the experience of seeing Elvis on stage had a profound effect on Holly. "Presley just blew Buddy away," Sonny Curtis later recalled. "None of us had ever seen anything like Elvis, the way he could get the girls jumping up and down, and that definitely impressed Holly. But it was the music that really turned Buddy around. He loved Presley's rhythm. It wasn't country and it wasn't blues; it was somewhere in the middle and it suited just fine. After seeing Elvis, Buddy had only one way to go."¹

At one point, Presley offered to get Buddy and Bob a spot on the popular Louisiana Hayride radio show, on which he was a regular. Holly, Montgomery, and Welborn impulsively drove all the way to Shreveport to take Elvis up on his offer, but Presley was out on tour that week and the young hopefuls were shown the door.

Buddy and Bob often served as opening act on local KDAV-sponsored shows by touring country acts, and they had the opportunity to appear on the bill the next time when Elvis performed in Lubbock in October 1955. By then, the group had expanded to a quartet with the addition of Jerry Allison on drums (Buddy had decided to add a drummer when Elvis did), and had begun moving toward the rocking style that Holly would later perfect.

The day before they opened for Elvis, the Holly/Montgomery combo performed at Lubbock's Fair Park Coliseum on a KDAV bill that included early rock and roll pioneers Bill Haley and the Comets. That night, Holly impressed Nashville agent Eddie Crandall, who also managed country star Marty Robbins. When Buddy and Bob opened a show for Robbins two weeks later, Crandall offered to shop their demos around Nashville for a recording contract.

In early 1956, Crandall secured a deal with the Nashville division of the prestigious Decca Records. But the company was interested in Holly as a solo act, rather than Buddy and Bob as a team. Despite Holly's initial misgivings,

Montgomery (who would subsequently have a long and successful career as a Nashville songwriter and record producer) urged his friend to take advantage of the opportunity. The contract for Buddy's concurrent publishing arrangement with Cedarwood Publishing mistakenly omitted the "e" from his surname, and the artist adopted that spelling thereafter.

Buddy would make a smooth transition to his new solo status, but his stint with Decca would be a frustrating one. Rock and roll had already exploded as a commercial and social force, and Paul Cohen, A&R director of Decca's Nashville division, had signed Holly with the hope that he could appeal to traditional country audiences as well as rock and roll-loving teens. But Cohen, and Decca's Nashville arm, had no practical experience with the new music, and little experience making rock and roll records.

The conflicting agendas of artist and label became apparent at Holly's first Decca session on January 26, 1956. While producer Owen Bradley was one of Nashville's foremost hit-makers, Buddy clashed with the respected studio veteran, who wouldn't let him play guitar on the sessions and insisted on augmenting his new band—Sonny Curtis, Don Guess, and Jerry Allison, who was replaced by a session drummer—with country-oriented studio players.

The January Nashville session produced four songs. Two of those—"Blue Days, Black Nights," written for the occasion by KDAV announcer Ben Hall, and the Holly original "Love Me"—appeared as Buddy's first Decca single, released in April. The disc was an engaging enough effort, offering a promising glimpse of the artist's rockabilly-inflected style as well as his trademark vocal hiccup. But the collision between Holly's rock and roll vision and Bradley's relatively staid approach kept the tracks from realizing the transcendent exuberance that Buddy would subsequently achieve.

"Buddy couldn't fit into our formula any more than we could fit into his—he was unique, and he wasn't in a pattern. It was like two people speaking different languages," Bradley later reflected. "I think we gave him the best shot we knew how to give him, but it just wasn't the right combination, the chemistry wasn't right. It just wasn't meant to be. We didn't understand, and he didn't know how to tell us."²

Buddy's new status as a major-label recording artist was big news in his hometown, as an October 23 story in the *Lubbock Avalanche-Journal* noted. But the local hero would not achieve national prominence during his short stint with Decca. A second Nashville visit in July spawned another underwhelming single, "Modern Don Juan" and "You Are My One Desire," which Decca didn't issue until December. Like its predecessor, it didn't find much of an audience.

Although his recording career seemed stalled for much of 1956, Holly and his sidekicks spent a large part of the year gaining valuable stage experience, with touring slots on a couple of country package tours that traveled the Southwest, playing their own set as well as backing up such country stars as George Jones, Sonny James, Hank Thompson, and Faron Young.

In addition to polishing and sharpening his live act during this period, Holly also wrestled with the question of whether to wear his eyeglasses on stage. He'd briefly tried contact lenses, but gave up on that idea after losing a lens in mid-set. An attempt to perform sans eyewear proved impractical when he dropped a guitar pick and couldn't see well enough to find it. He also had his teeth capped, to disguise the hard-water stains that were common to those who'd grown up in the Southwest at the time.

No one was particularly surprised when Decca dropped Buddy Holly from its artist roster in January 1957. By then, Sonny Curtis and Don Guess had moved on to other pursuits, and Buddy and Jerry Allison spent a period playing locally as a drums-and-guitar duo. The two-man lineup allowed the pair to refine their rhythmic chemistry, as well as giving Buddy a chance to develop a distinctive, powerful lead/rhythm guitar style that would remain a touchstone for rock guitarists for generations to come.

ROCKIN' IN CLOVIS

Although his Decca tenure had been a disappointment, Holly's drive and determination were undiminished, and he soon devised a new route to revive his profile as a recording artist. The key to his future would be his discovery of independent producer Norman Petty's studio in Clovis, New Mexico. The studio was close to the Texas border, but light years away from the conservatism of the Nashville establishment.

Although he was only eight years older than Buddy, Norman Petty possessed a wealth of recording experience that would, for a while anyway, make him a useful mentor and father figure to the fledgling artist. Petty was no rock and roller, but he was an adept technician with an ear for what sounded good on the radio. His own musical tastes were reflected in the middle-of-the-road cocktail jazz that he and his wife Vi played as members of the Norman Petty Trio. The group had scored a minor 1954 hit with a version of Duke Ellington's "Mood Indigo," and Norman had used the proceeds to finance his studio.

As a musician, Petty had long been frustrated by the hourly rates routinely charged by studios. So when he opened his own facility, he adopted the artist-friendly policy of charging by the song rather than by the hour, an approach that was far more conducive to creativity and experimentation than the time constraints imposed on conventional sessions.

On February 25, 1957, Holly went to Petty's studio to record a pair of tracks, the new original "I'm Looking for Someone to Love" and an energetic reworking of "That'll Be the Day," an unreleased Holly/Allison collaboration that had been cut during the Nashville sessions. Buddy had borrowed the title from a catchphrase used by John Wayne in the Western classic *The Searchers*.

For the occasion, Holly assembled a new lineup of Lubbock chums, with old cohorts Larry Welborn and Jerry Allison returning on bass and drums.

Sonny Curtis had moved on to gigs backing Slim Whitman and playing with the Philip Morris tobacco company's touring country show, so Buddy brought in rhythm guitarist Niki Sullivan. Sullivan's lanky, bespectacled looks would have allowed him to pass for Buddy's brother; in fact, the two subsequently learned that they were distant cousins. Joe B. Mauldin, at the time still attending high school in Lubbock, would soon replace Welborn on standup bass, and the new lineup would come to be known as the Crickets.

Petty signed on as the group's manager and took control of the publishing rights to Holly's songs. Buddy would soon come to regret surrendering control of his business affairs, and Petty's questionable business practices would become a source of considerable consternation for him. But at the time, Petty's involvement was a godsend. The producer's open-ended studio policy and willingness to let Holly make music on his own terms offered an invaluable opportunity for him to develop his sound and master the mechanics of the recording process. And Petty's New York music industry connections enabled him to find his client a new record deal.

Petty used his relationship with Murray Deutch, executive vice president of the powerful music publisher Peer-Southern, to bring "That'll Be the Day" and "I'm Looking for Someone to Love" to the attention of Bob Thiele, head of Coral Records. Ironically, Coral was a subsidiary of Decca, the company that had recently given Holly the boot. Thiele, whose varied background encompassed jazz, R&B, and big-band pop, recognized Holly's commercial potential, and persuaded his skeptical superiors at Decca to release the tracks as a single on the company's R&B/jazz imprint Brunswick.

Recognizing Holly's capacity for delivering hits in multiple styles, Thiele cannily signed him to two contracts, enabling him to record under his own name for Coral and under the Crickets banner for Brunswick. Although the Crickets would back Holly on both group and solo releases, ballads were more likely to be credited to Holly while songs released under the Crickets' name tended toward harder-edged rock and roll material.

The Crickets' group moniker may also have initially been an attempt to disguise Holly's involvement in the new version of "That'll Be the Day," since his old Decca deal prohibited him from rerecording songs he'd already cut for the label. But the dual identities would prove useful in multiple ways. For one thing, the situation allowed the prolific Holly to release a wealth of varied material in a short period of time. It also allowed him to advance his musical evolution at an accelerated pace, while giving him more stylistic leeway than he might be granted otherwise.

The "That'll Be the Day"/"I'm Looking for Someone to Love" single, credited to the Crickets, initially stirred up little attention when it was released in June 1957. But a DJ in Buffalo, New York picked up on "That'll Be the Day" and began playing it with unusual frequency (although he didn't lock himself in his studio and play the track nonstop, as the spirited but highly inaccurate 1978 biopic *The Buddy Holly Story* would claim). The song continued to

break out in various regional markets, including Boston, Cleveland, and Philadelphia, even winning substantial airplay on several black R&B stations. By the end of September, it had hit number one on the *Billboard* sales chart. It also reached the Top Ten on the rhythm and blues charts, demonstrating how effectively Buddy had absorbed the influence of African American music.

“That’ll Be the Day” had yet to take off in June, when Coral released “Words of Love” under Buddy’s name. With a buoyant melody, swoony romantic lyrics, and Holly’s distinctive double-tracked guitar and vocals, the song demonstrated that Buddy’s skills were evolving at a rapid pace. It marked Holly’s first use of overdubbing which, in the days before multi-track recording, was still an uncommon practice that had to be achieved through painstaking trial and error. Despite the sonic uniqueness of “Words of Love,” a cover version by vocal quartet the Diamonds beat the Holly disc to the marketplace, stealing its chart thunder in the process.

One important factor in Holly’s musical development was the fact that Thiele allowed him to continue to record at Petty’s studio, far from the prying eyes and undue influence of record company personnel. This was highly unusual at a time when it was standard practice for artists to cut their records in their label’s own studios, overseen by the company’s A&R men, who usually chose the songs and musicians. Those formal sessions typically operated within the strict time restrictions imposed by record company policy and musicians union rules. The looser atmosphere in Clovis gave Holly the freedom to try new sounds and arrangement ideas, resulting in records that sounded like no one else’s.

As he continued to experiment in the studio, Holly’s songwriting gained in confidence and variety. Where in the past he had often relied on friends and bandmates to provide material, by now he was writing most of his own. That issue was blurred somewhat by Petty’s tendency to add his name to the writing credits of Buddy’s songs—including several that Holly is known to have recorded and/or performed before he’d even met Petty.

While Holly’s dual recording deals allowed him to release a prodigious quantity of material within a short period, his chart successes made he and his band—billed for live dates as Buddy Holly and the Crickets—an in-demand live act. For most of its existence, the group maintained a punishing touring regimen that allowed them to hone an exciting live show that maintained the raw energy of their recordings.

The quartet’s mettle was tested in August 1957, when they were booked for a package tour of East Coast theaters in African American neighborhoods, alongside such prominent R&B acts as Clyde McPhatter, the Cadillacs, and Lee Andrews and the Hearts. According to popular legend, they’d been hired by an unsuspecting agent who’d assumed “That’ll Be the Day” to be the work of a black act. The tour culminated in a well-received week-long run at New York’s Apollo Theater.

“That’ll Be the Day” was still a hit in September when Coral released a second Buddy Holly “solo” effort, “Peggy Sue.” The song was an exuberant embodiment of Holly’s rock and roll vision, driven by his hiccupy vocal and infectious guitar line, Allison’s rolling, echo-laden drumbeat, and a minimalist lyric that was as insistent as the music. It had originally been titled “Cindy Lou” after a former girlfriend, until Allison prevailed upon Buddy to retitile it in honor of his fiancée, Peggy Sue Gerron. The irresistible rocker became Holly’s second smash single, climbing to the number three slot on the Billboard chart. Meanwhile, “Peggy Sue”’s B-side, “Everyday,” revealed a knack for gentle, heart-tugging balladry that Holly would continue to refine.

Following their run at the Apollo, Buddy and the Crickets appeared on Dick Clark’s American Bandstand in Philadelphia and spent a week and a half performing in Alan Freed’s all-star show at New York’s Paramount Theater, alongside Little Richard, the Del-Vikings, the Diamonds, Mickey and Sylvia, the Moonglows and Larry Williams. They then hit the road as part of the Biggest Show of Stars for 1957, spending much of the next three months touring the United States and Canada with a racially mixed all-star bill that included Paul Anka, Lavern Baker, Chuck Berry, Fats Domino, the Drifters, the Everly Brothers, and Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers.

The package tour allowed Buddy and the Crickets to interact with many of their musical heroes, but it also forced them to confront the viciousness of racism once the tour hit the deep South. Although they’d grown up in segregated Lubbock, they were unprepared for such indignities as the tour’s black and white acts being prohibited from staying in the same hotels or eating in the same restaurants. At shows in Memphis, New Orleans, Birmingham, Chattanooga, and Columbus, Georgia, the Crickets and the tour’s other white acts did not perform because local laws forbade black and white entertainers from appearing on the same stage.

One positive aspect of the Biggest Show of Stars tour was that it gave Holly the chance to bond with the Everly Brothers, who shared his country-and-western roots but were considerably more worldly. The impeccably groomed duo had a significant impact on Buddy’s sense of style, instilling a taste for tailored suits. Phil Everly is also often credited for suggesting that he trade his half-frame glasses for the black horn-rim frames that would soon become his trademark. Holly and Bob Montgomery would later write and demo a pair of songs, “Wishing” and “Love’s Made a Fool of You,” for the Everlys, but the siblings’ commitment to only record songs controlled by the powerful publisher Acuff-Rose prevented them from cutting those tailor-made tunes.

A second Crickets single on Brunswick appeared in October 1957, the playful, urgent “Oh Boy,” by Petty-associated Texas rockabilly singer Sonny West and his songwriting partner Bill Tilghman. The B-side was the equally impressive Holly original “Not Fade Away,” which infused a blunt Bo Diddley-style beat with an unmistakable Texas twang. “Oh Boy” occupied the Top Ten

simultaneously with “Peggy Sue,” giving Buddy and company their third Top Ten hit in January 1958.

CHIRPING UP THE CHARTS

November 1957 saw the release of the Crickets’ first LP, *The “Chirping” Crickets*, consisting of the four Brunswick singles sides plus eight new tracks. At a time when rock and roll LPs routinely comprised one or two hits padded with inferior filler, it was a consistently dynamic set that ranks as one of rock’s most compelling debut albums.

The “Chirping” Crickets is divided between Holly compositions and Petty-controlled outside material. Not surprisingly, the originals—including “Maybe Baby,” which Brunswick would release as a single the following February—are the strongest, but Holly’s performances and the Crickets’ solid, subtly inventive rhythmic support assured that even the least impressive material was delivered with bracing conviction.

Buddy and the Crickets closed out 1957 with an appearance on Ed Sullivan’s hugely influential TV variety show, at the time one of the few national prime-time outlets for rock and roll acts. The quartet played two songs, and Sullivan gave his official thumbs-up by informing his mom-and-pop audience that the visiting Texans were “nice boys.”

Show Biz Kids: Rock in the Mainstream

By the time Buddy Holly died, rock and roll had been integrated into the mainstream of American show business. The changes that had occurred during the previous five years are evident from a look at the Top Five on the *Billboard* Pop chart for a single week in February 1959—the month of Holly’s fatal plane crash.

The number one song was “Stagger Lee” by the black rhythm and blues singer Lloyd Price. He had recorded steadily since 1952, but this was his first release to reach the Pop chart. Price’s early hits, beginning with the R&B number one “Lawdy Miss Clawdy,” appeared on the independent Specialty label. Now he was signed to ABC-Paramount, the first major label created after the start of the rock and roll era.

Other songs and artists in the Top Five during this particular week included “Sixteen Candles” (number two) by a white doo-wop group, the Crests, and “Donna” (number three), by the Chicano rock and roller Ritchie Valens, who died in the same crash that killed Buddy Holly. “Smoke Gets in Your Eyes” (number four) was a new version of an old standard (written in 1933) by the Platters, the top-selling black vocal group of the 1950s. “All American Boy” by Bill Parsons (number five) was a drawling, guitar-driven story-song that parodied Elvis Presley’s rise to stardom and subsequent induction into the army.

None of these songs had the raw excitement and untamed energy of “Lucille” by Little Richard or “Blue Suede Shoes” by Carl Perkins. But for teenage music fans, this Top Five was a marked improvement over that of February 1956. During that year, three out of five slots were held by non-rock artists: Italian American crooner Dean Martin (“Memories Are Made of This”), pop singer Kay Starr (“Rock and Roll Waltz,” which didn’t “rock” at all), and composer/arranger Nelson Riddle (“Lisbon Antigua”).

Chart positions and record sales were not the only indicators of rock and roll’s increasing (if often begrudging) acceptance by American show business and society at large. In addition to American Bandstand, the music was represented on television by various regional “dance party” shows hosted by local disc jockeys. Ed Sullivan’s hugely popular CBS network variety show featured rock and roll artists as early as 1955, beginning with an appearance that year by Bo Diddley.

Andy Schwartz

Four days after the Ed Sullivan appearance, Niki Sullivan left the Crickets. Although the official reason was exhaustion from the intense pace of the band’s roadwork, many believe that the guitarist’s departure was precipitated by Sullivan’s contentious relationship with Jerry Allison. The two musicians’ animosity had reportedly erupted into fisticuffs while they were in New York during the Apollo Theater engagement, resulting in Allison getting a black eye that had to be airbrushed from the cover photo of *The “Chirping” Crickets*. The fact that the group was able to continue as a trio—a format that was unprecedented in rock and roll at the time—was a testament to Buddy’s guitar skills.

Early 1958 saw Holly, Allison, and Mauldin embark on their first overseas excursion. In January, following a pair of shows in Honolulu, they undertook a week-long tour of Australia, on a bill that also included Jerry Lee Lewis and Paul Anka, along with Australian acts Johnny O’Keefe and Jodie Sands.

Buddy and the Crickets then spent most of March touring in England, where they played fifty shows in twenty-five days. Since the British touring circuit was not yet geared toward rock acts, the band found itself touring with a bill comprised of clean-cut mainstream pop performers.

Despite the inappropriate bill, the Crickets’ visit was greeted as a major event by English fans. Buddy was even more popular in Britain than in the United States; indeed, his impact there rivaled that of Elvis Presley, who never performed in Britain. Additionally, Buddy and the Crickets were only the second major American rock act (after Bill Haley and the Comets) to tour Britain. The shows were greeted by unprecedented fan pandemonium, and would continue to resonate in the consciousness of the young fans that would soon mount the next decade’s British Invasion. That impressionable audience

included the future Beatles, who would choose their combo's entomological moniker in honor of the Crickets.

It was easy for U.K. listeners to relate the Crickets' country-rooted sound to that of skiffle, the do-it-yourself folk-country style that had seized the imagination of young Brits who'd yet to gain access to electric instruments. Unlike such bigger-than-life figures as Elvis, Eddie Cochran, and Gene Vincent, Buddy struck young British teens as a regular guy who'd succeeded on the strength of his musical abilities rather than looks or mystique. His relatively low-key image resonated strongly with British kids, who saw in Holly an idol whom they could actually emulate. His U.K. tour was also the first chance that British audiences had to see an electric guitar—specifically Fender Stratocaster, reputedly the first Strat to arrive in England—in action.

Pioneers of Rock and Roll Guitar

The electric guitar was not the predominant solo instrument of 1950s rock and roll. The tenor saxophone held that position into the early 1960s, with guitar and piano vying for second place. But with the decline of the big bands and their multiple soloists, the role of the guitar expanded within the new small group format.

T-Bone Walker, B.B. King, and Muddy Waters all used a call-and-response pattern between voice and electric guitar that became a cornerstone of urban blues. In country music, skilled Nashville pickers like Hank Garland and Grady Martin enlivened countless sessions with their fluid, jazzy fills and solos. The guitar work of Scotty Moore was crucial to the sound and success of Elvis Presley's early hits: "Mystery Train," "Heartbreak Hotel," "Jailhouse Rock," and many more.

Only a few of the lead 1950s rock and roll singers were accomplished instrumentalists. Buddy Holly and Eddie Cochran were two notable exceptions, while Link Wray, and Roy Buchanan were known for their singular six-string skills.

On "C'mon Everybody" and "Summertime Blues" (both 1958), Eddie Cochran (1938–60) overdubbed multiple acoustic and electric guitar parts to create a primitive but powerful "wall of sound" that was highly advanced for its time. He unleashed some intense guitar choruses on the instrumental "Eddie's Blues," and played inventive Chuck Berry-style solos on up-tempo rockers like "Pink Pegged Slacks." Singer, songwriter, producer, engineer, and guitarist: Eddie Cochran seemed to have it all together when he was killed in a one-car accident while on tour in England. Nearly twenty years later, former Sex Pistols bassist Sid Vicious paid tribute to his legend with a punk rock version of the Cochran classic "Somethin' Else."

Link Wray (1929–2005) couldn't match Eddie Cochran for versatility, popularity, or good looks. But his signature 1958 instrumental hit "Rumble" was a seminal influence on successive generations of rock and roll guitarists.

The North Carolina native (who was part Shawnee Indian) created the power chord—the essential building block of hard rock and heavy metal. He expanded rock’s sonic palette with his pioneering use of fuzz, feedback, and distortion, achieving some of these effects simply by puncturing the speaker cone of his amplifier. Link Wray’s raw, rocking style was exposed to a new generation of fans when his 1950s songs were used in such films as *Pulp Fiction* (“Ace of Spades”) and *Twelve Monkeys* (“Comanche”). Wray was seventy-four years old, still touring, and still capable of igniting a firestorm of high-volume rock and roll when he was named one of the 100 Greatest Guitarists of All Time by *Rolling Stone* magazine in 2003.

Roy Buchanan (1939–88) was a “musician’s musician.” Long before the invention of the wah-wah pedal and the distortion booster, he was coaxing such effects from his Fender Telecaster with nothing more than six strings, ten fingers, and a medium-sized amplifier turned up to maximum volume. Buchanan could make his instrument sustain like a pedal steel guitar, or sound like two instruments (guitar *and* bass) played simultaneously. Throughout the 1960s, this dazzling innovator toiled for workman’s wages in a series of anonymous, unrecorded groups on the bar circuit of suburban Washington, DC. In 1971, “The Best Unknown Guitarist in the World” (as he was billed) starred in a public television special that included scenes of Roy expertly playing both country music with Merle Haggard and rhythm and blues with Johnny Otis. This national exposure led to the release of Buchanan’s self-titled major label debut album in the following year and launched a solo career that continued until his untimely death.

A. S.

Buddy Holly, the artist’s first official solo LP, was released in the United States in February 1958. Beyond its dreamy cover photo (atypically depicting Buddy without his glasses), the disc featured such soon-to-be-classic rockers as “Peggy Sue,” “Rave On,” and “I’m Gonna Love You Too” along with an assortment of ballads, most notably the lilting “Listen to Me.” The album also found Holly paying tribute to Elvis and Little Richard, respectively, with high-energy covers of “(You’re So Square) Baby I Don’t Care” and “Ready Teddy.”

Upon their return from Britain, Holly and the Crickets continued their grueling tour schedule with a forty-four-day run on Alan Freed’s Big Beat Show, kicking off with a show at the Brooklyn Paramount. Other artists on the tour included Chuck Berry, Screamin’ Jay Hawkins, Jerry Lee Lewis, Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers, the Shirelles, and Larry Williams.

The fact that Coral and Brunswick were subsidiaries of Decca didn’t keep the parent company from competing with Holly’s new releases, exploiting its cache of Holly recordings cut the previous year. In April, the company released *That’ll Be the Day*, an LP comprising the tracks Buddy had cut in Nashville

with Owen Bradley. The collection's title confused purchasers, who expected to hear the familiar hit but got the inferior original instead.

On their way home from the Alan Freed tour, Buddy, J.I., and Joe B. stopped off in Dallas and purchased a trio of new motorcycles, riding them home to make a splashy return to Lubbock. The fact that they now felt comfortable making such an impulsive purchase hinted that their commercial successes and overseas adventures had enhanced their sense of independence—and that they might be outgrowing the paternalistic influence of Norman Petty, who still tightly controlled the group's finances.

For the band's session in Clovis in May, Buddy relinquished lead guitar duties to Tommy Allsup, a talented twenty-six-year-old from Oklahoma with a background in western swing. Allsup contributed a distinctive lead on the fluid rocker "It's So Easy" and added a Latin flourish to the sweet ballad "Heartbeat," impressing Holly enough to invite Allsup to join up and make the Crickets a quartet once again.

In June, Holly visited Manhattan and—without Norman Petty or the Crickets—recorded a pair of Bobby Darin numbers, the splashy, gospel-flavored "Early in the Morning" and the upbeat pop tune "Now We're One." The session, on which Holly was backed by an assortment of New York jazz/R&B players, was done at the behest of Coral Records, which wanted the tracks out as a single after Darin's version had to be withdrawn from release for contractual reasons. Although "Early in the Morning" rose no higher than number thirty-one on the *Billboard* singles chart, the session provided Holly with valuable experience working in a different musical mode—and confirmation that he could make compelling music outside of the creative comfort zone provided by his usual producer and band.

While visiting Peer-Southern's Manhattan office, Holly met Maria Elena Santiago, Murray Deutch's receptionist. He fell in love with the Puerto Rico-born beauty immediately, asking her out within thirty seconds of their first meeting and proposing marriage on their first date. Buddy and Maria (whose aunt, Provi Garcia, ran Peer's Latin division) were married on August 15, 1958, less than two months after their first meeting. Following a quiet wedding ceremony at Buddy's parents' house, they honeymooned in Acapulco with fellow newlyweds Jerry and Peggy Sue Allison.

A disapproving Norman Petty reportedly advised that the nuptials be kept quiet, to keep Buddy's female fans from being alienated by his new status—and, perhaps, to keep less enlightened observers from taking offense at his "mixed" marriage. It has also been theorized that Petty may have been threatened by Maria's knowledge of the music business, or by her access to Peer-Southern files that might reveal irregularities in Petty's handling of her husband's affairs.

Whatever his reasons, Petty's attitude toward Buddy's marriage—and his condescending attitude toward the new bride—couldn't have done much to bolster Holly's diminishing regard for his mentor. The father figure who'd

once seemed so knowledgeable and well connected had begun to seem unimaginative and provincial, and his vague accounting practices caused Holly to question the trust he'd placed in Petty when he'd handed over control of his career. Holly, Allison, and Mauldin also resented the fact that, despite their status as international rock and roll stars, they still had to go to Petty any time they needed cash.

Despite his growing reservations, Holly continued to record at Petty's studio. In September, he brought renowned R&B saxophonist King Curtis in from New York to play on a pair of tracks, "Reminiscing" and "Come Back Baby." At the same session, Buddy produced a debut single, the classic Cajun tune "Jole Blon," for his old Lubbock friend Waylon Jennings. Jennings, a promising singer and sometime DJ on Lubbock's KLLL, would emerge more than a decade later as one of country music's most influential stars.

While he continued to make first-rate music, Holly's record sales had begun to slip somewhat. "It's So Easy" is now considered a classic, but it failed to make Billboard's Top 100 when it was released in September 1958. The breathy ballad "Heartbeat," co-written with old pal Bob Montgomery, stalled at number eighty-two when it was released under Buddy's name two months later.

In October 1958, Buddy and the Crickets embarked on another edition of the Biggest Show of Stars, this time sharing the bill with the Coasters, Bobby Darin, Dion and the Belmonts, and Clyde McPhatter.

If Holly was demoralized by his recent disappointing sales, he didn't show it, continuing to forge ahead with new challenges. He relocated to Manhattan, where he and Maria bought an apartment in Greenwich Village. Buddy enthusiastically embraced life in New York, enjoying being at the center of the entertainment business and the creative community—and relishing the opportunity to absorb new styles of music. He went to coffeehouses and enjoyed jazz gigs at the Village Vanguard, and developed an affinity for Latin music and flamenco guitar. He formulated plans to establish his own record label and build a recording studio in Lubbock, discussed the possibility of cutting gospel and Latin-style albums, and took steps to pursue his interest in writing and producing for other artists.

Rock and Roll in the Movies

Rock and roll also found a place in Hollywood movies. Most were of the "teen exploitation" variety, with flimsy plots, awkward acting, and low-budget production values. One of the first and best of the genre, *The Girl Can't Help It* (1956), was a funny, fast-paced film with memorable appearances by Fats Domino, Little Richard, Gene Vincent, and Eddie Cochran. *Don't Knock the Rock* (1957), on the other hand, was an excruciating hour of ersatz rock and roll according to a review in *Hollywood Rock: A Guide to Rock 'n' Roll in the Movies*.

Let's Rock! (1958) also may have been simply another rock movie with a non-rock lead and formulaic plot—an attempt to appeal to all ages. But a few choice lines of dialogue show just how far the new sound had come in a few short years. “When are you gonna come to the party?” manager Charlie (Conrad Janis) lectures recalcitrant singer Tommy Adano (Julius LaRosa). “Rock and roll’s been around a long time. It’s gonna be around a lot longer.”

A. S.

In New York, Holly recorded a quartet of ballads—“True Love Ways,” “Raining in My Heart,” the Norman Petty composition “Moondreams,” and the Paul Anka–penned “It Doesn’t Matter Anymore”—featuring lush string arrangements. The direction of those songs—his last formal recordings—have led some fans to speculate that Buddy was abandoning rock and roll in favor of a sophisticated adult pop style. But it seems more reasonable to assume that this was a one-off experiment by an adventurous artist exploring his options.

In early November, Holly informed Norman Petty that he was severing their business and creative relationship. He had initially convinced Allison and Mauldin to join him in breaking away from Petty and joining him in New York. But Petty managed to persuade the drummer and bassist that their prospects would be brighter if they’d stay with him and continue to record as the Crickets.

Although he was hurt and disappointed by his bandmates’ decision to stick with Petty, he gave them his blessing, granting them the rights to the Crickets name. More troubling was Petty’s announcement that he would be withholding Buddy’s record and publishing royalties until their disputes were resolved.

COLD WINTER

Although Holly was exhilarated by his new prospects and relieved to be free of the grind of touring, Petty’s refusal to pay his royalties put him in a financial bind. With Maria pregnant, his immediate priority in late 1958 was providing support for his growing family. So when he was offered the chance to headline the Winter Dance Party, a three-week tour of Midwestern one-nighters, he reluctantly accepted.

With Allison and Mauldin back in Texas attempting to relaunch the Crickets, Holly assembled a new set of musicians to accompany him and double as backup for the Winter Dance Party’s other acts. In addition to tapping latter-day Cricket Tommy Allsup to play guitar, he hired his protégé Waylon Jennings to play bass, despite Jennings’s unfamiliarity with the instrument; Buddy bought his friend an electric bass and gave him two weeks to learn to play it.

The lineup was completed by another Texan, drummer Carl Bunch. Despite his agreement to allow Allison and Mauldin to keep the Crickets name, Buddy's new touring band was billed as the Crickets.

Unlike some of the epic, star-studded package tours he'd done previously, the Winter Dance Party was a rather modest affair. Aside from Buddy, the bill featured three up-and-coming acts. Along with soulful Bronx doo-wop foursome Dion and the Belmonts, the show featured Ritchie Valens (née Valenzuela), a seventeen-year-old singer/guitarist from Pacoima, California, who'd become the first Hispanic rocker to hit the charts with his then-current Top Ten single "Donna," and the Big Bopper, aka J.P. Richardson, a garrulous songwriter and disc jockey from Beaumont, Texas, who'd recently scored a million-selling novelty smash with "Chantilly Lace." Rounding out the bill was now-forgotten crooner Frankie Sardo, who opened the shows with renditions of other artists' hits.

Even by the primitive standards of late 1950s touring, conditions on the Winter Dance Party were spartan. Rather than the big-city theaters that were the destinations of larger tours, most of the shows were booked into ballrooms in smaller, out-of-the-way markets, where the crowds consisted of music-starved teens—who rarely got the chance to see big-name rockers on stage. The performers traversed the frozen expanses of the upper Midwest in a series of cramped, worn-down, poorly heated school buses, which regularly broke down and had to be replaced by equally rickety vehicles.

To make matters worse, that winter was one of the most brutal in recent memory, with bitterly cold temperatures that sometimes dipped to -30°F , causing dangerously icy road conditions. It didn't help that the itinerary's convoluted routing forced the tour party to travel as far as 500 miles between shows. The schedule was so tight that the performers usually had to sleep on the bus as it traveled to the next night's venue, with little time for such niceties as laundry or showers.

By February 2, when the bedraggled troupe arrived at the Surf Ballroom in Clear Lake, Iowa, to perform their eleventh show in as many days, the tour had already been through six different buses. By then, drummer Carl Bunch had had to leave the tour after being hospitalized for frostbite, forcing Holly and Belmonts member Carlo Mastrangelo to take over drumming duties.

Following the Surf Ballroom performance, Buddy sought a respite from the miserable traveling conditions by chartering a private plane to carry himself and his sidemen to Fargo, North Dakota, the closest airport to the next tour date in Moorhead, Minnesota. The post-show flight would give them enough time to do their laundry and get a decent night's sleep in actual hotel room beds. At the last minute, the Big Bopper, who'd been suffering from the flu, talked Jennings into giving up his seat, while Allsup surrendered his seat to Valens after losing a coin toss.

In the snowy early morning hours of February 3, 1959, shortly after taking off from the airport in nearby Mason City, the four-seat Beechcraft Bonanza

aircraft carrying Holly, Valens, and Richardson crashed into a soybean field. All three passengers were killed instantly, as was twenty-one-year-old pilot Roger Peterson.

In the day's news coverage, the event was overshadowed by another, deadlier plane crash, which took sixty-five lives at New York's LaGuardia Airport. But the emotional impact of the Clear Lake crash registered immediately with young people on both sides of the Atlantic. Not only was it many teenagers' first exposure to fatal tragedy, it was also the first time that the young rock and roll genre had been forced to confront the specter of mortality. No major rocker had ever died before, so for three of them to perish in such an abrupt and random manner was particularly shocking. In the ensuing decades, the crash would retain a potent mythological resonance, symbolizing the music's loss of innocence and offering a premonition of the turbulence and loss that would dominate the next decade.

Buddy Holly's funeral took place in Lubbock on the following Saturday. His pallbearers were six of his closest musical associates: Jerry Allison, Joe B. Mauldin, Niki Sullivan, Sonny Curtis, Bob Montgomery, and Phil Everly. An estimated 1,800 mourners packed the Tabernacle Baptist Church for the memorial service, which was performed by the same pastor who'd presided over Buddy and Maria Elena's wedding ceremony just five months earlier. Although the pregnant widow flew in for the funeral, she couldn't bring herself to attend the service or visit her late husband's grave; she had a miscarriage soon after.

The deaths of Holly, Valens, and Richardson cast a veil of darkness over the rock and roll world, and the pall wouldn't completely lift until the Beatles' arrival on the scene a few years later. The three fallen heroes were widely eulogized in song; perhaps the most poignant tribute was "Three Stars," written by Bakersfield, California, disc jockey Tommy Dee and recorded by Eddie Cochran, among others.

Two years after the crash, eccentric but innovative English producer Joe Meek and singer Mike Berry delivered one of the better tribute discs with "Tribute to Buddy Holly" which borrowed its subject's musical style to offer a melancholy musical epitaph. Meek would later claim to be in contact with Buddy, and that the deceased icon was giving him songwriting help from the spirit world; in 1967, Meek committed a violent murder/suicide on the anniversary of Holly's death. Somewhat less obsessive were Manchester-based admirers Allan Clarke, Tony Hicks, and Graham Nash, who were so affected by Buddy's work that they named their popular British Invasion combo the Hollies.

Meanwhile, Holly's record company, with Norman Petty's help, would continue exploiting the departed star's recorded legacy for years to come. Petty cobbled together a motley series of "new" Holly LPs from an assortment of outtakes, demos, and early tapes of varying quality, often with awkward new instrumental overdubs provided by New Mexico combo the Fireballs, who made several notable Petty-produced records of their own.

Many of the posthumous Holly releases were top sellers in Britain, where Buddy's profile remained high. It was a different story in America, though. By the end of the 1960s, Holly had been largely forgotten in his home country, where none of his essential releases remained in print. But his Stateside reputation would undergo a major resurgence in the 1970s. By the end of that decade, Holly had become the first rock and roll artist to be honored with a major U.S. box set retrospective.

One early factor in the revival of interest in Holly was Don McLean's 1971 hit "American Pie," which used "the day the music died" as the departure point for a metaphorical journey through the musical, social, and political changes of the 1960s.

In 1975, longtime Holly fanatic Paul McCartney's company MPL Communications purchased Buddy's publishing catalog from a nearly bankrupt Norman Petty. The deal initially did little to benefit Holly's survivors and collaborators, who had long ago accepted meager cash settlements from Petty rather than attempt to sort out his tangled financial records. But McCartney's patronage proved to be a boon, for Buddy's posthumous prestige as well as the income of his heirs, bandmates, and co-writers, since McCartney's savvy exploitation of the Holly songbook (including an annual week of Holly tributes in London) did much to restore the artist and his songs to prominence.

Also helping to make Holly a household name in America again was 1978's *The Buddy Holly Story*. The film was wildly inaccurate, romanticizing and simplifying Holly's life to the point where Buddy's ultra-supportive parents were reduced to disapproving caricatures, as well as replacing the real Crickets with fictional characters, and leaving Norman Petty out entirely. Despite the movie's blatant disregard for historical accuracy, Gary Busey's impassioned, Academy Award-nominated performance captured Holly's vibrant essence, establishing the movie's subject as a living, breathing, rocking presence rather than an arcane oldies act.

The city fathers of Lubbock eventually awakened to the commercial benefits of promoting its status as Holly's hometown. In the 1980s, Lubbock unveiled a bronze statue of Buddy, followed by a park bearing his name, a memorial concert celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of his birth, and a Walk of Fame honoring notable Lubbock-born musicians. Lubbock's Texas Tech University now houses one of the world's largest collections of Holly memorabilia.

When the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame was established in 1986, Buddy Holly was among the first group of inductees. A 1990 auction of Holly memorabilia in New York raised over \$703,000, with Gary Busey paying \$242,000 for one of his guitars and the Hard Rock Café purchasing a pair of his eyeglasses for \$45,100. The 1990s saw the debut of *Buddy*, a successful stage musical documenting his career; the show ran for seven years in London's West End. And alt rockers Weezer invoked Holly's name as the title of their 1994 debut hit.

In Buddy's absence, the Crickets, in various configurations, have maintained a remarkably durable recording and performing career. As of 2007, the band continues to keep the Holly songbook alive on stage, with Allison, Mauldin, and Sonny Curtis still anchoring the lineup.

The crash in Clear Lake ended the life and career of an artist whose musical potential, perhaps more than any other rock and roll performer of his era, seemed limitless. There's no telling what Buddy Holly might have achieved if he'd lived. Whatever direction he would have taken, it's hard to imagine that the clear-eyed, level-headed Holly wouldn't have had a long and productive career.

Buddy Holly's musical legacy retains the same youthful freshness and unpretentious energy that first engaged listeners in the late 1950s. His songs continue to be covered by a wide variety of artists, while his musical and technical innovations have become deeply woven into the fabric of contemporary music.

TIMELINE

September 1, 1953

Buddy Holly and Bob Montgomery audition for Lubbock radio station KDAV, and are given a half-hour Sunday afternoon show, on which they perform country and bluegrass material.

October 14, 1955

Buddy and Bob, with Larry Welborn on bass, open for Bill Haley and the Comets in Lubbock and are seen by Nashville agent Eddie Crandall.

October 15, 1955

Buddy, Bob, and Larry open for Elvis Presley in Lubbock.

January 26, 1956

Buddy Holly's first official recording session, with veteran country producer Owen Bradley at Decca Records' Nashville studios. The session yields four tracks, including "Blue Days, Black Nights" and "Love Me," which will be released by Decca as Holly's Decca debut single.

February 25, 1957

Buddy Holly and the Crickets record "That'll Be the Day" at Norman Petty's studio in Clovis, New Mexico. The single, credited to the Crickets, will become the Holly's first single on the Brunswick label.

September 1, 1957

The band begins its first major tour with a four-night run at the Brooklyn Paramount Theater, launching the three-month Biggest Show of Stars tour.

September 23, 1957

"That'll Be the Day" becomes the number one single on *Billboard's* pop chart.

November 27, 1957

The Crickets' first LP, *The "Chirping" Crickets*, is released by Brunswick Records.

January 25, 1958

“Oh Boy!” becomes Buddy Holly’s third Top Ten hit.

January 30, 1958

Buddy Holly and the Crickets begin a seven-date tour of Australia.

February 20, 1958

Buddy’s first official solo album, *Buddy Holly*, is released by Coral Records.

March 1, 1958

Buddy Holly and the Crickets begin a month-long tour of England.

August 15, 1958

Buddy Holly marries Maria Elena Santiago in a quiet ceremony at Buddy’s parents’ house in Lubbock.

January 23, 1959

The Winter Dance Party, headlined by Buddy minus the Crickets, kicks off with a performance at the Million Dollar Ballroom in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

February 3, 1959

After performing at the Surf Ballroom in Clear Lake, Iowa, Holly charts a small private plane to get him to the tour’s next show in Fargo, North Dakota. The plane crashes shortly after takeoff, killing Holly and tourmates Ritchie Valens and the Big Bopper, as well as pilot Roger Peterson.

March 9, 1959

“It Doesn’t Matter Anymore,” recorded at Holly’s last studio session, becomes a posthumous hit.

July 1, 1976

Paul McCartney purchases Buddy’s entire publishing catalog from Norman Petty. Two months later, McCartney will stage the first annual Buddy Holly Week in London, celebrating the artist’s music.

May 18, 1978

The Buddy Holly Story, a fictionalized film biography starring Gary Busey as Holly, is released. The film will become a hit, with Busey’s performance getting an Academy Award nomination.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

The “Chirping” Crickets, 1957

Buddy Holly, 1958

Buddy Holly: Gold, 2006

NOTES

1. http://www.buddyhollycenter.org/Buddy%20Holly%20Gallery/buddy_bio.html
2. Goldrosen, John and John Beecher. *Remembering Buddy*. New York: Penguin, 1986, p. 36.

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Courtesy of Photofest.

The Beach Boys

Scott Schinder

AN AMERICAN FAMILY

The Beach Boys' long and turbulent saga is a uniquely American epic, encompassing triumph and tragedy, innovation and excess, massive success and crushing disappointment, the highest highs of artistic transcendence and the lowest lows of showbiz mediocrity—as well as family dysfunction, financial chicanery, mental illness, drug abuse, unfulfilled potential, and unexpected redemption.

The Beach Boys' story also involves some of the most innovative and original pop music ever created, thanks largely to the prodigious talents of the band's troubled but brilliant leader Brian Wilson. Regarded by many as the greatest American composer of the rock era, Wilson was the Beach Boys' sonic architect and main creative force, using the group as the vibrant vehicle for his innovative songwriting and arrangements, as well as his intricate, groundbreaking approach to vocal harmony.

To the generation that came of age in the first half of the 1960s, the Beach Boys will forever be identified with a bucolic vision of an innocent, carefree pre-Beatles America. The quintet's lengthy string of early hits mythologized middle-class teenage life and the mythical ideal of California, extolling the virtues of hot rods, surfing, and youthful romance, with an undercurrent of melancholy romanticism that would assert itself more strongly in the group's later work.

For much of the early 1960s, the Beach Boys were America's best-selling rock and roll act. When the British Invasion took hold of the American teen consciousness in 1964, they posed the only serious threat to the Fab Four's chart supremacy. As the decade progressed and rock's creative vistas expanded, Brian Wilson's musical achievements advanced rapidly, sealing his position as one of the period's preeminent musical visionaries. His knack for creating unique sounds and his mastery of the recording studio yielded such groundbreaking classics as the 1966 album *Pet Sounds* and the epic single "Good Vibrations," which were as advanced—sonically, compositionally, and harmonically—as anything being made in popular music at the time.

But those musical highs soon gave way to darker times, as Wilson's refusal to stick with the group's tried-and-true formula led to his ambitious magnum opus, *Smile*, being shelved. While *Smile* became rock's most famous unreleased album, Brian Wilson became rock's best-known casualty. His descent into mental illness and substance abuse led him to withdraw from his band and from the world—a retreat from which many assumed he would never return.

The Beach Boys spent much of the 1970s and 1980s torn between its dual identities as contemporary recording group and pandering oldies act. Their story belatedly gained closure of a sort, when a resurgent Brian Wilson returned from decades in the shadows to launch an unprecedented return to live performance, and to revive his lost masterpiece *Smile* on record and on stage.

By that point, the music of Brian Wilson and the Beach Boys had been embraced by a new generation of listeners raised on alternative rock, for whom the music's originality and emotional resonance transcended mere nostalgia.

CATCH A WAVE

The Beach Boys' story began in the Los Angeles suburb of Hawthorne, California, in the home of Murry and Audree Wilson. Murry worked in the heavy machinery industry, but was also a part-time songwriter who'd had a brief brush with success when his novelty tune "Two-Step Side-Step" was performed by bandleader Lawrence Welk on his national radio show.

Murry could be stern, demanding, and, by most accounts, emotionally and physically abusive. But he also passed his musical interests on to his sons Brian, Dennis, and Carl, indulging them with lessons and instruments, and gathering the family to harmonize around the living-room piano.

The Wilson siblings were often joined in song by their cousin Mike Love, the son of Murry's sister Glee. The Love family was also musically inclined, and often joined the Wilsons for parties that included family musical performances.

Despite being deaf in his right ear (a disability that he would later attribute to a childhood beating by Murry), eldest brother Brian demonstrated a prodigious musical ability early on. He became proficient on multiple instruments, while revealing a beautiful, remarkably flexible singing voice and an uncanny ear for vocal harmony. He was particularly fascinated by the evocative orchestral pop of George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue," and by the close harmonies of the Four Freshmen, who would provide the blueprint for the Beach Boys' intricate vocal blend.

Baby brother Carl also emerged as both a skillful guitarist and an excellent singer, with a beautiful tenor voice that would become an essential element of the Beach Boys' sound. He also developed a knack for acting as a peacemaker when Murry lashed out at his sons. These abilities would prove invaluable in the Beach Boys' more turbulent periods.

Although he would eventually develop into a musical talent in his own right, Dennis Wilson's teenage years were defined mainly by his rebellious behavior and his contentious relationship with his father. Although Dennis was too occupied with other pursuits to focus much on music, he was, largely at Audree's urging, included in his brothers' musical pursuits, channeling his natural aggression into his role as the group's drummer.

Although his rudimentary saxophone skills left something to be desired, Mike Love's cocky, extroverted personality made him a natural frontman. The group became a quintet with the addition of Brian's high-school football teammate Al Jardine, who was a capable rhythm guitarist and harmony singer.

Although the five teenagers had grown up near the ocean, the only actual surfer in the bunch was Dennis, who had embraced the popular sport and the culture that had sprung up around it in southern California. The surfing lifestyle had already inspired the beginnings of a musical genre, personified by guitarist Dick Dale, an avid surfer whose live performances at the Balboa Ballroom were popular among surfers. Dale's propulsive instrumental numbers replicated the physical sensations of the surfing experience, combing staccato picking with a reverb-heavy "wet" guitar sound.

It was Dennis who suggested that Brian try writing a song about surfing. With Dennis offering some helpful examples of surfer jargon, Brian and Mike came up with "Surfin'," a catchy, if primitive, ode to the sport.

Murry had put Brian in contact with Hite and Dorinda Morgan, who operated a small music publishing company that had handled some of Murry's

compositions. The Morgans also ran a small studio in Hollywood, and Brian approached them about doing some recording there.

On Labor Day weekend 1961, Murry and Audree took a short vacation to Mexico City, leaving their sons with \$200 in emergency cash. They used most of the fund to rent musical equipment from Wallichs' Music City in Hollywood, to allow the quintet to polish their performance of "Surfin'" for a prospective audition for the Morgans. Murry was furious when he found out, but softened after he heard the song.

On September 15, 1961—just a week after *Life* magazine had run a seven-page photo feature on the California surfing craze—the band cut an early take of "Surfin'" with the Morgans. On October 3, they recorded a more professional version at World Pacific Studios in Hollywood.

By then, the fledgling combo was calling itself the Pendletones, in honor of the plaid woolen Pendleton shirts that were popular among surfers. It wasn't until "Surfin'" was released as a single in December 1961, on the tiny local label Candix, that the group learned that Hite Morgan had rechristened them the Beach Boys. Another alteration was Murry's decision to speed up the master tape slightly, on the assumption that that would give the performance a more youthful sound. It wouldn't be the last time he'd use that gimmick—much to Brian's annoyance.

After making their public performing debut playing three songs at a Ritchie Valens tribute concert at the Long Beach Municipal Auditorium on December 31, the Beach Boys—with Mike as frontman, Brian on bass, Carl and Al on guitars, and Dennis on drums—embarked on a series of live appearances to promote "Surfin'." Authority figure Murry Wilson was often in tow, the better to put the kibosh on the sort of activities toward which five young men away from home might naturally gravitate.

Although it was primitive in comparison with the records that the group would soon be making, "Surfin'" became a regional hit on the West Coast, and sold well enough to reach number seventy-five on *Billboard's* national singles chart. The single was such a success that it soon bankrupted Candix Records, which had shipped so many still-unpaid orders that they couldn't afford to meet the demand for more copies.

Murry Wilson immediately appointed himself the Beach Boys' manager. Although his abrasive personality would eventually alienate outsiders as well as his own clients, at this stage Murry was largely a positive influence, instilling focus and discipline in the inexperienced combo.

Murry's biggest early achievement was winning the band a deal with Capitol Records, home of Brian's beloved Four Freshmen. Capitol A&R executive Nik Venet wasn't charmed by Murry's blustery sales pitch. But he was excited by the band's demos of a pair of new tunes: Brian and Mike's "Surfin' Safari," the surfer slang-filled sequel to their first hit; and "409," an insistent hot-rod anthem which Brian had written with Gary Usher, the nephew of a neighbor of the Wilson family.

Usher was Brian's first collaborator outside of the Beach Boys family, but he would soon run afoul of Murry's jealous nature and find himself frozen out of the band's inner circle. Following his exile, Usher would become a key figure in the surf music scene. One of his early successes was as leader and producer of the studio group the Hondells, which scored a Top Ten hit in 1964 with Brian's "Little Honda."

"409" was the first in a long series of car-themed Beach Boys songs that reflected the prominence of automobiles in the identity of American male teenagers of the era. Usher would be one of many songwriting collaborators for Brian, who had already mastered composing and arranging but generally preferred to brainstorm lyrics with a co-writer.

By then, the Beach Boys had experienced their first personnel change. Al Jardine, who had been instrumental in the band's formation, exited in February, in order to study dentistry in Michigan. To take his place, the band drafted David Marks, a fifteen-year-old neighborhood pal who lived across the street from the Wilsons. Marks was a competent rhythm guitarist, but would not be permitted to sing on the band's recording dates.

"Surfin' Safari" and "409" were paired as the Beach Boys' first Capitol single in June 1962, and showed the band to be far more accomplished than the neophytes who'd cut "Surfin'" a few months earlier. Capitol initially focused on promoting "409," figuring that surf-themed material would have limited appeal outside of California. But "Surfin' Safari" broke out on radio stations in such unlikely locations as New York and landlocked Phoenix, launching the song's rise to number fourteen on the national charts, while its flipside stalled at seventy-six.

"Surfin'," "Surfin' Safari," and "409" all appeared on the first Beach Boys LP, *Surfin' Safari*, released by Capitol in October. Although still primitive in comparison to what the group would soon achieve on a regular basis, the album was spirited and energetic, and an impressive effort at a time when rock and roll LPs routinely consisted of one or two hits plus ten tracks of throwaway filler.

While *Surfin' Safari* contained little evidence of the compositional genius that Brian Wilson would soon reveal, the fact that it was comprised largely of originals (written by Brian with Gary Usher and/or Mike Love) instantly distinguished it from most rock albums of the period. Although Nik Venet was credited as producer, Brian was already largely calling the shots on the Beach Boys' recording sessions, and in charge of coaching his inexperienced bandmates through their performances. Although he lacked studio experience, Brian gained an able collaborator in recording engineer Chuck Britz, a seasoned studio pro whom he'd met while the band was cutting demos at Western Recorders in Hollywood.

Britz became the Beach Boys' in-house engineer, a position that he would hold through 1967. His technical expertise would be a major influence in Brian learning to translate the sounds that he heard in his head onto tape. In the

1960s, when record companies still routinely released albums in both stereo and mono versions, Britz would also be in charge of mixing the stereo versions of the band's recordings, while Brian—whose partial deafness contributed to his natural affinity for mono—handled the mono mixes.

Britz also served as a useful buffer between Brian and his father, who was often an overbearing, bullying presence in the studio. Later, the band would attempt to placate Murry by giving him a fake studio console that wasn't actually connected to anything, allowing him to turn the dials to his heart's content while Brian and Britz got on with the actual business of making Beach Boys records.

Brian and the Beach Boys made a remarkable amount of musical and commercial progress between 1963 and 1965. In addition to their prolific recording output—nine studio albums and one live LP in just three years—the band maintained a punishing touring schedule. They also cultivated a clean-cut image that was consistent with the innocent fun portrayed in Brian's songs, and the quintet's wholesome vibe was accentuated by their trademark outfit of striped button-down shirts and white pants, which would remain the band's stage uniform through 1966.

Although it was recorded just a few months after *Surfin' Safari*, the Beach Boys' second album *Surfin' USA* was a considerable progression from its predecessor. Although it followed the established pattern of surrounding a couple of hit singles with surf and drag novelties and cover versions, the quality of Brian's songwriting and the band's performances had taken a noticeable leap.

Surfin' USA's title track included a checklist of surfing hot spots provided by Jimmy Bowles, brother of Brian's girlfriend Judy. But it shamelessly borrowed its melody from Chuck Berry's "Sweet Little Sixteen," and the resulting legal threats led to the song's authorship being credited to Berry on subsequent pressings.

Although its success played a significant role in launching a nationwide surfing fad, *Surfin' USA* also showed Brian to be a truly accomplished melo-dist and arranger. Beyond its surf and car material—and no fewer than five forgettable instrumentals—the album included a pair of breakthrough ballads, the lilting "Farmer's Daughter" and the stark, melancholy "The Lonely Sea." Both featured evocative minor-key melodies and sensitive lead vocals by Brian, conjuring a haunting sense of yearning that offered a preview of the emotional depth that he would soon achieve on a regular basis.

Surfin' USA became the Beach Boys' first gold album, spending eighteen months on the U.S. album chart, where it just missed making the top slot. It was also their first to make the charts in Britain, where the group would remain reliably popular for decades to come.

Despite the continuing presence of the sort of filler that was probably unavoidable in light of Capitol's constant demand for new product, the September 1963 release *Surfer Girl* charted Brian's continuing growth as a

composer and producer. The yearning title ballad carried a spiritual component that transcended its ostensible surf context, with the titular beach bunny a powerful metaphor for desire of a deeper nature. *Surfer Girl* also included Brian's most ambitious surf number to date in the majestic "Catch a Wave," on which Brian, Dennis, and Mike traded lead vocals. But the album's most arresting moment may have been "In My Room," a fragile evocation of solitude and vulnerability that was a startling demonstration of Brian's willingness to confront his fears in song.

Surfer Girl is also generally regarded as the first Beach Boys album to integrate substantial contributions from outside musicians, a practice that would become more prevalent in the band's recordings in the near future.

Del Shannon and Gene Pitney: Turning Heartaches into Hits

Tormented love stories and haunting minor-chord progressions set Del Shannon (1934–90) apart beginning with his 1961 number one hit, "Runaway." The Michigan-born singer/songwriter/guitarist remained a persistent chart presence for the next four years, thanks to such compelling originals as "Little Town Flirt," "Stranger in Town," and the Top Ten hit "Keep Searchin' (We'll Follow the Sun)." In 1963, Del released "From Me to You"—the first American cover of a John Lennon/Paul McCartney song to make the U.S. charts—and in 1965 the British duo of Peter and Gordon scored a Top Ten hit with Shannon's composition "I Go to Pieces." In 1982, Del Shannon reached the U.S. Top Forty for the last time with "Sea of Love," produced by Tom Petty. He committed suicide in 1990, after a long battle with depression.

Gene Pitney (1940–2006) began his career as a successful songwriter ("Hello Mary Lou" by Ricky Nelson). As a recording artist, the versatile Connecticut native specialized in dramatic orchestrated ballads like "I'm Gonna Be Strong," in which muffled drumbeats and swelling strings surged beneath his piercing, reedy voice. Pitney was only twenty-one when his first U.S. Top Twenty hit "Town Without Pity" was nominated for an Academy Award and he became the first rock and roller to perform on an Oscars telecast. His recording of "That Girl Belongs to Yesterday" was the first Mick Jagger/Keith Richards song to reach the American charts, and he played on the Rolling Stones' debut album. Along with Roy Orbison, Gene Pitney was one of the only American solo artists of the pre-Beatles era who continued to score major hits—"It Hurts to Be in Love" (1964), "Backstage" (1966), and more—on both sides of the Atlantic after the British Invasion. He remained a popular international concert attraction for decades until his death during a 2006 tour of Great Britain.

Andy Schwartz

The Beach Boys' punishing touring schedule took a particularly heavy toll on Brian, who had begun missing shows in 1963. That summer, the band

brought in Al Jardine, who'd had second thoughts about his earlier decision to quit, to sub for Brian on bass on some live dates. The original intention had been to keep the band a sextet in order to ease Brian's workload. But that plan fell by the wayside when Murry fired David Marks a few weeks later, and Jardine returned to his original rhythm guitar slot.

Although Marks was pictured on the cover of the band's next album *Little Deuce Coupe*, released in October 1963, Jardine was actually back in the lineup in time to play on the album. *Little Deuce Coupe* was something of a concept album, comprising the car songs that had become a popular element of the Beach Boys' repertoire. It was also somewhat redundant, with four tracks recycled from previous LPs, along with several new tunes co-written by Brian with Roger Christian. Christian was a disc jockey on local Top Forty station KFWB, as well as an avid hot-rod enthusiast whose familiarity with the subculture's lingo added authority to Brian's auto-inspired tunes.

The only *Little Deuce Coupe* song not to mention cars is the student-spirit anthem "Be True to Your School." It would subsequently become a Top Ten single in a rerecorded version that added cheerleader-style backup vocals by the Honeys, a female vocal trio that included Brian's girlfriend Marilyn Rovell and her sister Diane.

The Honeys were one of several acts for which Brian wrote songs and produced records during the Beach Boys' rise. Also benefiting from Brian's extracurricular pursuits was the popular surf duo Jan and Dean, to whom he gave "Surf City." It became a number one single for the pair in the summer of 1963. Murry Wilson was furious that his son had given away a smash hit, particularly since the Beach Boys had yet to top the charts themselves.

The next Beach Boys album *Shut Down Volume 2*—titled in recognition of a popular recent various-artists Capitol LP that reused "Shut Down" and "409"—contained such shameless throwaways as the contrived rank-out-fest "Cassius Love vs. Sonny Wilson" and the self-explanatory "Denny's Drums." But it also featured one of the band's best early rockers in the Chuck Berry-inspired Brian Wilson/Mike Love tune "Fun, Fun, Fun."

In later years, Love would, with considerable justification, be widely vilified by Wilson fans for his philistine tastes and his stubborn resistance to Brian's more experimental projects. But in the Beach Boys' early days, Love's contribution to the band was invaluable. As both a singer and lyricist, his assertive persona served as the self-assured counterpart to Brian's romanticism and sensitivity, embodying the youthful swagger of the band's car and surf songs.

Shut Down Volume 2 also introduced a pair of classic Wilson ballads, "Don't Worry Baby" and "The Warmth of the Sun." The former, co-written by Roger Christian, used a drag race as a vehicle to explore male insecurity, and featured production as advanced as anything being done in popular music at the time. Brian had initially offered "Don't Worry Baby" to the Ronettes, whose Phil Spector-produced "Be My Baby" was one of Brian's favorites. But the prickly Spector rejected it.

Princesses of Pop: The “Girl Group” Sound of the Shirelles, the Crystals, and the Ronettes

Women’s voices have been part of rock and roll from the music’s earliest days. In the 1950s, Ruth Brown, Lavern Baker, Etta James, and Esther Phillips represented the distaff side of rhythm and blues just as Wanda Jackson and Brenda Lee did for rockabilly and rock and roll.

But the “girl group” sound that flourished from 1960 to 1964 represented the fullest flowering of female rock and roll talent up to that time. Female groups and solo artists populated the charts in greater numbers than ever before, with songs and production that advanced the art of pop music. Behind the scenes, women achieved new heights of success as songwriters, producers, and record label entrepreneurs.

The Shirelles were the most successful black female group until the breakthrough of the Supremes. Beverly Lee, Doris Coley, Addie “Micki” Harris, and Shirley Owens were New Jersey high school students at the time of their first mid-chart hit, “I Met Him on a Sunday” (1958). Producer/songwriter Luther Dixon brought out the soulful innocence of their voices on “Mama Said” and “Baby, It’s You”—one of two Shirelles songs, along with “Boys,” later recorded by the Beatles.

In 1960, the Shirelles’ “Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow” became the first girl group record to top the chart, and the first number one record written and produced by the team of Gerry Goffin and Carole King. Over the next three years, the Shirelles placed twelve songs in the Billboard Top Forty, including six in the Top Ten. All were released on Scepter Records, the independent label founded by Florence Greenberg, a New Jersey housewife.

As temperamental and controlling as he was passionate and talented, Phil Spector was the greatest and most influential producer of girl group recordings. The Crystals and the Ronettes were the most prolific groups to record for Spector’s upstart Philles label, founded in 1961.

The Crystals gave the twenty-one-year-old producer his first Philles hit with “There’s No Other Like My Baby” (number twenty). But like many of their black vocal group predecessors, the Crystals (Barbara Alston, Mary Thomas, Delores “Dee Dee” Kennibrew, and Dolores “LaLa” Brooks) had no control over their recording career. When the Brooklyn-based quintet couldn’t make it to Los Angeles for one hastily scheduled session, Spector simply recorded “He’s a Rebel” with the Blossoms—a trio of female session singers led by the great Darlene Love—and released it under the Crystals’ name. In the fall of 1962, this socially conscious and infectiously danceable disc went all the way to number one.

The Ronettes’ “Be My Baby” may be *the* archetypal girl group record. The song was written by Ellie Greenwich and Jeff Barry—one of the genre’s top songwriting teams, along with Goffin and King—but the spotlight is on Ronettes lead singer Veronica “Ronnie” Bennett, who became Ronnie Spector

after she and Phil were wed in 1968 (the couple divorced in 1974). Her vulnerable, soulful vibrato is framed by Spector's trademark "wall of sound," a dense instrumental *mélange* propelled by thunderous drumming and Jack Nitzsche's sweeping string arrangement. "Be My Baby" peaked at number two in the fall of 1963; it has since been heard in numerous films, television shows, and commercials. In 1986, Ronnie Spector made an unexpected return to the Top Five when she sang the "Be My Baby" refrain on Eddie Money's song "Take Me Home Tonight." In 2006, this ultimate girl group survivor released *The Last of the Rock Stars*, a solid album of contemporary rock and roll featuring such longtime admirers as Patti Smith and the Rolling Stones' Keith Richards.

A. S.

"The Warmth of the Sun," which Brian co-wrote with Love, is a haunting meditation on loss and acceptance, inverting the imagery of the band's beach-based hits to achieve a spiritual depth at which "Surfer Girl" had hinted. The song's narrator loses the love of his life, but takes solace in his memories of her. The lyrics are all the more poignant in light of Brian's revelation that he and Love wrote them as an expression of their grief in the wake of President John F. Kennedy's assassination in November 1963. Both "Don't Worry Baby" and "The Warmth of the Sun" were graced by lead vocals that demonstrated the technical and emotional range of Brian's soaring falsetto.

In contrast to the scattershot *Shut Down Volume 2*, 1964's *All Summer Long* was the most consistent and satisfying Beach Boys album to date. The title track utilized such exotic instrumental textures as piccolo and xylophone, and balanced an irresistibly uplifting melody with a wistful, nostalgic lyric. The song's bittersweet sense of parting would inspire filmmaker George Lucas to use it as the closing theme of his era-defining *American Graffiti* a decade later. "Wendy" similarly combined an upbeat tune with regretful lyrics, while the surf-themed "Don't Back Down" mixed a surging arrangement with an undercurrent of lyrical anxiety that contrasted the self-assurance of the Beach Boys' earlier surf numbers. *All Summer Long*'s strongest rocker was the infectious "I Get Around," which became the band's first number one single.

The demand for new Beach Boys product was reflected in the popularity of the band's other two 1964 LPs, the live *Beach Boys Concert* and the holiday release *The Beach Boys' Christmas Album*, which were released virtually simultaneously in October. The former demonstrated how tight a performing unit the band had become. The latter combined seasonally themed originals (including the hit "Little Saint Nick") with slickly orchestrated standards and harmony-heavy carols that allowed Brian to indulge his Four Freshmen fixation.

The stress of touring, combined with the pressure of carrying the Beach Boys' creative load, finally pushed Brian over the edge on December 23, 1964.

On that day, the bandleader, who had married Honeys member Marilyn Rovell just two weeks earlier, suffered an anxiety attack on a flight to Houston, where the Beach Boys were scheduled to begin a series of shows. Returning home immediately upon his arrival in Texas, Brian announced that he would no longer be a touring member of the band, instead staying at home to focus on writing and recording (he would, however, continue to make television appearances with the band).

Brian's first replacement in the touring Beach Boys, playing bass and singing high harmonies while Carl Wilson assumed the lion's share of his brother's lead vocals, was Glen Campbell. Already a busy L.A. studio guitarist and a participant in many Beach Boys recording sessions, Campbell toured with the band for three months, but declined an offer to join permanently. Instead, he opted to return to session work (he would continue to play on numerous Beach Boys recordings) and pursue his budding solo career.

Brian repaid Campbell's service by writing and producing a single, "Guess I'm Dumb," for him. Although the song wasn't a hit, it was one of Wilson's most memorable outside productions. Within two years, Campbell had settled into a smooth country-pop style that would make him one of Capitol Records' biggest-selling artists.

A long-term replacement arrived in April 1965 in the form of Bruce Johnston. Already a key figure in the West Coast surf music scene, Johnston was a multi-talented singer, instrumentalist, and producer who began playing sessions while still in high school. Johnston had worked extensively with Terry Melcher, his fellow staff producer at Columbia Records. Johnston and Melcher had had a fair amount of success recording surf and drag material under various guises, scoring hits as Bruce and Terry as well as the Rip Chords, whose Beach Boys sound-alike "Hey Little Cobra" had been a hit in 1964.

Brian's decision to quit the road proved to be a major jolt to his creative evolution. Freed from the demands of touring, he flourished musically, creating multi-layered backing tracks using the cadre of top-flight L.A. session musicians known as the Wrecking Crew, many of whom had already worked on prior Beach Boys sessions. The Wrecking Crew included such noted players as Glen Campbell and fellow guitarists Barney Kessel, Billy Strange, and Tommy Tedesco; bassists Carol Kaye, Ray Pohlman, and Lyle Ritz; keyboardists Larry Knechtel, Don Randi, and Leon Russell; saxophonists Steve Douglas and Jay Migliori; and drummer Hal Blaine, who'd supplanted Dennis Wilson on many Beach Boys tracks since 1964. These were many of the same musicians that Brian's idol Phil Spector used on his legendary "Wall of Sound" productions.

The first fruit of Brian's new status as full-time studio artist was the March 1965 release *The Beach Boys Today!*, on which Brian's production and songwriting took a substantial leap forward. *Today!*'s suite-like structure, with the album divided into a side of fast songs and a side of ballads, presented an early manifestation of the rock album format being used to make a cohesive artistic statement—an idea that Brian would soon explore more fully.

Beyond its absence of surf or car songs, *The Beach Boys Today!* largely abandoned teenage concerns in favor of a slightly more mature view of love. Such up-tempo numbers as “Good to My Baby,” “Dance, Dance, Dance,” and “When I Grow Up (To Be a Man)” featured Brian’s most adventurous arrangements to date. On the ballad side, such introspective numbers as “Please Let Me Wonder,” “Kiss Me Baby,” “She Knows Me Too Well” and the Dennis-sung “In the Back of My Mind” were startling, both in their lyrical vulnerability and their distinctive arrangements.

Indeed, *The Beach Boys Today!* would have been the first Beach Boys LP to be sublime from beginning to end, were it not for the closing track “Bull Session with ‘Big Daddys,’” a silly bit of faux-spontaneous spoken-word tomfoolery whose status as obvious filler was all the more obvious in this context.

By comparison, the Beach Boys’ next LP *Summer Days (And Summer Nights!!)* was something of a step backward, with such energetic but lightweight fare as “The Girl from New York City” and “Amusement Parks U.S.A.” recalling the group’s carefree early days. But *Summer Days* also featured the musically and emotionally complex “Let Him Run Wild,” as well as the band’s most sonically sophisticated single yet in “California Girls,” which marked Bruce Johnston’s recording debut as a Beach Boy. *Summer Days* also contained the band’s second number one single, the Jardine-sung “Help Me, Rhonda,” an upgraded remake of a song that they’d first tackled on *Today!*

Another milestone on *Summer Days (And Summer Nights!!)* was the Beatles-esque pop tune “Girl Don’t Tell Me.” The fact that it marked Carl Wilson’s first lead vocal on a Beach Boys studio album is remarkable, considering the prominent role he had already begun to assume within the band.

One of the most revealing tracks on *Summer Days (And Summer Nights!!)* was one that must have seemed frivolous at the time. The seemingly lightweight “I’m Bugged at My Ol’ Man” found Brian bemoaning his unjust treatment at the hands of his cruel dad. Although it’s delivered with tongue in cheek, the track takes on added gravity in light of the fact that Brian had recently fired Murry as the Beach Boys’ manager, following a bitter confrontation during a recording session.

(Although Murry would retain a hand in the Beach Boys’ business affairs due to his control of Brian’s publishing catalog, he and Brian would maintain a strained relationship. In 1969, against Brian’s will, Murry sold Brian’s publishing company Sea of Tunes, a blunder that ultimately cost millions. When Murry died in 1973, neither Brian nor Dennis attended his funeral.)

The Beach Boys released a third album in 1965, the informal studio jam *Beach Boys Party!*, as well as the non-LP single “The Little Girl Once Knew.” The latter boasted Brian’s most idiosyncratic production yet, which may have explained why it was only the fourth Capitol Beach Boys single not to reach the Top Ten.

Recorded in a mere four days, *Beach Boys Party!* was a stripped-down, no-frills respite from Brian’s increasingly elaborate studio work, as well as an

early precursor of the “unplugged” trend, with the instrumentation limited to the band’s own acoustic guitars, bass, and bongos, augmented by party sound effects taped later at Mike Love’s house. Beyond a pair of reworked Beach Boys hits, the album comprised covers of some of the band members’ favorite tunes, including R&B hits by the Olympics and the Rivingtons, an Everly Brothers ballad, a trio of Beatles numbers, and even Bob Dylan’s protest anthem “The Times They Are A-Changin’.” *Beach Boys Party!* produced a surprise smash single in a spirited reading of the Regents’ 1961 doo-wop hit “Barbara Ann,” on which Brian shared lead vocals with studio visitor Dean Torrance of Jan and Dean. It became the band’s fourteenth Top Twenty single, climbing to number two in December 1965.

Dion: Blues from Belmont Avenue

Dion was born Dion DiMucci in 1939 in the Bronx, New York. His musical influences included country music legend Hank Williams and Mississippi Delta blues singer Robert Johnson: “I don’t sing black, I don’t sing white, I sing Bronx,” he told the *New York Times* in 2006. In the late 1950s, as lead singer for the Belmonts, Dion scored with “A Teenager in Love” and a doo-wop arrangement of the Rodgers and Hart standard “Where or When.” After going solo in 1960, he brought a street-smart swagger to such hits as “Runaround Sue” and “The Wanderer.” Heroin addiction derailed Dion’s career for a time, but in 1968 he quit drugs and earned (at number four) the highest-charting single of his career with the inspired folk-rock ballad “Abraham, Martin and John,” commemorating the lives of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and U.S. presidents Lincoln and Kennedy. The singer/songwriter went on to release many more albums, including several sets of Christian material and (in 2005) the country-blues collection *Bronx in Blue*.

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But *Party!*’s real purpose was to give Capitol some new Beach Boys product to sell during 1965’s Christmas season, buying Brian time to work on the new album that he was planning, which was to be his bravest and most cohesive musical statement yet.

PET VIBRATIONS

The Beach Boys’ 1966 album 1966’s *Pet Sounds* is regarded by many as Brian Wilson’s creative apex. Although it divided opinion within the band and was considered a commercial disappointment at the time of its release, it’s now embraced as one of rock’s most beloved and influential albums, cited as a touchstone by multiple generations of fans, critics, and musicians.

Pet Sounds had its genesis when Brian heard the Beatles' *Rubber Soul*. Impressed by the album's cohesiveness, Wilson, who had always regarded his British labelmates with a combination of admiration and competitiveness, felt challenged to come up with something equally good.

Wanting to break away from the Beach Boys' history and his own established methods, Brian decided not to work with any of his prior co-writers. Instead, he chose Tony Asher, a recent acquaintance who'd been working writing advertising jingles, to help craft his thoughts into finished lyrics. The two began writing together in early 1966, and came up with an emotion-charged song cycle that surveyed the emotional challenges accompanying the transition from youth to young adulthood.

Pet Sounds' lyrics were matched by music that marked a quantum leap in Brian's achievements as a composer, arranger, and producer. He cut the instrumental tracks for *Pet Sounds* during a four-month period in late 1965 and early 1966, working at his favorite Hollywood studios: Gold Star, Western Recorders, and Sunset Sound.

While the Beach Boys were out on tour, Brian toiled in the studio, putting the Wrecking Crew through their paces to produce the sounds that he envisioned. Although the self-taught perfectionist couldn't write or read musical notation, he often had the complex, elaborate arrangements worked out in his head, and found other ways to communicate his ideas to the musicians. The veteran players came to enjoy the creative interaction of Beach Boys tracking sessions, and to appreciate Brian's openness to the players' own suggestions, as well as his willingness to incorporate accidents and apparent mistakes into the final product.

Brian achieved *Pet Sounds'* richly textured, almost symphonic arrangements by employing unconventional combinations of instruments to produce new and exotic sounds. In addition to having multiple musicians playing guitar, bass, and keyboard parts simultaneously (a technique he'd borrowed from Phil Spector), he mixed conventional rock instrumentation with various exotic stringed instruments, theremin, flutes, harpsichord, bicycle bells, beverage bottles, and even the barking of his dogs Banana and Louie.

When the other Beach Boys returned from touring to record their meticulously layered vocal tracks, some of Brian's bandmates expressed reservations about *Pet Sounds'* radical shift in direction. Most vocal in his objections was Mike Love, who couldn't have been pleased at having been turfed out of his position as lyricist by Brian's decision to write with Tony Asher. Love was particularly critical of the lyrics of "Hang On to Your Ego," which he insisted upon rewriting as "I Know There's an Answer."

Lyricaly, *Pet Sounds* encompassed the loss of innocent idealism ("Caroline No"), the transient nature of love ("Here Today"), faith in the face of heart-break ("I'm Waiting for the Day"), the demands and disappointments of independence ("That's Not Me"), the feeling of being out of step with the modern world ("I Just Wasn't Made for These Times"), and the longing for a happy,

loving future (“Wouldn’t It Be Nice”). The album also featured a series of intimate, hymnlike love songs, “You Still Believe in Me,” “Don’t Talk (Put Your Head on My Shoulder),” and “God Only Knows.” The latter, with a gentle yet passionate lead vocal by Carl Wilson, would become one of Brian’s best loved—and most covered—songs.

Also on *Pet Sounds* was “Sloop John B.,” a rousing adaptation of a traditional Caribbean folk song that had been suggested by Al Jardine. It had been cut a few months before the main album sessions and had been a Top Five hit when released as a single in March 1966.

Pet Sounds also included a pair of richly atmospheric instrumentals, “Let’s Go Away for Awhile” and “Pet Sounds.” Both had been recorded with the intention of adding lyrics, but Brian decided that he preferred the tracks without them. “Pet Sounds” had originally been titled “Run, James, Run,” reflecting Wilson’s original intention of submitting it for use in a James Bond movie.

Beyond its alterations to the Beach Boys’ established sound, *Pet Sounds* felt more like a Brian Wilson solo effort than any prior album. Although Carl did standout work on “God Only Knows,” Love sang lead or co-lead on three songs and Jardine stepped up front for a few lines on “I Know There’s an Answer,” Brian sang the remainder of the album’s leads himself, driving home the songs’ melancholy beauty with some of the most expressive vocals of his career.

Whatever problems they may have had with the album’s divergence from the band’s hitmaking formula, the other Beach Boys graced *Pet Sounds* with some of the finest harmonies of their career (although Brian overdubbed all of the vocal parts himself on a few songs).

Upon its release in May 1966, *Pet Sounds*’ sales failed to match its artistic stature. Although it reached the Top Ten and produced an Top Ten single in “Wouldn’t It Be Nice,” sales were disappointing in comparison with the band’s prior LPs. It didn’t help that *Pet Sounds* received half-hearted promotion from Capitol, which signaled its lack of confidence in the album’s potential by issuing a slapdash greatest-hits set, *The Best of the Beach Boys*, two months after its release.

Pet Sounds fared considerably better in Britain, where it was widely recognized as a major work and celebrated by many of the music scene’s movers and shakers. It reached number two in England, where the Beach Boys beat out the Beatles as Group of the Year in *New Musical Express*’s influential year-end poll. Paul McCartney, who has long cited *Pet Sounds* as his all-time favorite album, acknowledged its influence on the Beatles’ psychedelic landmark *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*.

In the years since its release, *Pet Sounds* has steadily gained in reputation and prestige. In 1995, a panel of top musicians, songwriters, and producers assembled by *Mojo* magazine voted it the Greatest Album Ever Made. In 2004, it was one of fifty recordings chosen by the Library of Congress to be added to the National Recording Registry. In 2006, the German magazine *Spex* voted it the best album of the twentieth century. It also placed in the

number two slot on *Rolling Stone's* list of the 500 greatest albums of all time, right behind *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*.

Pet Sounds' enduring appeal was confirmed by the 1997 release of *The Pet Sounds Sessions*, a four-CD box set encompassing a new stereo mix of the album (which was originally only mixed in mono), plus three discs' worth of outtakes, rehearsals, and instrumental tracks. Five years later, after Brian's return to touring, he staged a well-received tour performing *Pet Sounds* as a complete work, backed by a full orchestra.

Brian was not used to having his creative autonomy challenged, and was accustomed to seeing his experiments achieve commercial success. He was hurt by his bandmates' resistance to *Pet Sounds*, and disappointed by the album's failure to gain a wider audience. But the lack of support didn't stop him from forging ahead with his plans for the next Beach Boys single, "Good Vibrations."

Originally intended for *Pet Sounds* but pulled from the album so he could devote more time to its production, "Good Vibrations"—with Tony Asher's original lyrics rewritten by Mike Love—introduced Brian's new technique of modular recording. Rather than record a complete performance, he broke the song into sections, recording and rerecording each portion and assembling a collage of his favorite takes into a backing track. At a time when singles were routinely cut in an hour or two, "Good Vibrations" was the most elaborate and expensive track pop music had ever seen, recorded in seventeen sessions in four studios over the course of six months, using over ninety hours of tape and racking up a then-unheard-of cost of \$50,000.

Although the rest of the band was skeptical about his unconventional recording approach, Brian's painstaking efforts proved worthwhile. "Good Vibrations"—which Brian described as a "pocket symphony"—was unlike any pop single that had come before it, covering a dizzying amount of musical ground in just over three and a half minutes. As on *Pet Sounds*, Brian made extensive use of instruments rarely heard in pop, with cello and electro-theremin prominent in the song's surging, insistent chorus.

Upon its release in October 1966, "Good Vibrations" became the Beach Boys' biggest hit yet; it went to number one on both sides of the Atlantic, and became the group's first million-selling single. With the song's success demonstrating that the general public could embrace his bravest musical adventures, Brian Wilson moved forward with his most ambitious project yet.

TRYING TO SMILE

The artistic and commercial triumph of "Good Vibrations" set the stage for Brian's plans for the next Beach Boys album, an extended suite of musically and thematically linked pieces that would be recorded using his modular technique. The project—initially titled *Dumb Angel* but eventually renamed

Smile—would incorporate a wide array of new sounds, textures, and arrangement ideas, as well as lyrical imagery and themes drawn from American history, with humor as a key element in the material. The idea of assembling an entire album from short musical fragments was a bold undertaking, and *Smile*—which Brian characterized as “a teenage symphony to God”—promised to be as much of a leap forward from *Pet Sounds* as *Pet Sounds* had been from *The Beach Boys Today!*

To provide lyrics for *Smile*'s musical vision, Brian tapped Van Dyke Parks, a young musical wunderkind (and former child actor) who'd already established himself as an up-and-coming figure on the L.A. scene. His new co-writer had come to Wilson's attention via producer Terry Melcher, who'd hired Parks to play on some Byrds sessions. But it was Parks's talent for evocative poetic wordplay, and his abiding interest in Americana, that made him an ideal *Smile* collaborator.

Wilson and Parks quickly formed a productive partnership; between April and September 1966, they wrote a series of songs that formed the foundation of the new album. Many of those tunes were written in the giant sandbox that Brian had had installed in the living room of his Bel Air home, in order to replicate the inspirational feel of the beach. Their pair's first collaboration was “Heroes and Villains,” followed by such key *Smile* tracks as “Wonderful,” “Cabinessence,” and “Wind Chimes.” This period also produced “Surf's Up,” which would become *Smile*'s spiritual centerpiece; Wilson and Parks reportedly wrote it in a single night.

At a time when rock had come to be dominated by British sensibilities, Brian was determined to create a fundamentally American work. At one point, he described *Smile* as a musical journey across America, beginning at Plymouth Rock and ending in Hawaii, and touching upon key points of history along the way, including the rise of the railroad and automobiles, and the settlement of the West and its effect on Native American civilization.

Brian began cutting tracks for *Smile* in August 1966, using many of the Wrecking Crew regulars and working at Gold Star Studios as well as Sunset Sound, Western Records, and Capitol Records' in-house studio. He worked intensively on the album for the next few months. But by the end of the year, his initial exhilaration had taken a darker turn.

Brian encountered resistance from Capitol, as well as the other Beach Boys, who worried that the new music was too radical a stylistic shift and that it would be impossible to reproduce on stage. The group also expressed concerns that Brian's artistic judgment may have been clouded by his growing use of marijuana and psychedelic drugs. Particularly fierce in his opposition was Mike Love, who complained about having to sing such poetic Parks lyrics as “Over and over the crow cries uncover the cornfield” on “Cabinessence”; the growing tensions would eventually cause Parks to leave the project.

The pressures of creating such challenging music in the face of heavy opposition, combined with his increasingly fragile mental state, took a heavy toll

on Brian's previously unshakable creative confidence. In late November, while working on "Mrs. O'Leary's Cow"—the "Fire" section of a planned suite encompassing the elements of earth, air, water, and fire—he reportedly became convinced that the music he was creating had been responsible for a series of blazes in the area. For years afterward, it was rumored that Brian (who had built atmosphere during the session by having the musicians wear firemen's helmets) had become so distressed that he burned the tapes; although he did not actually destroy the recordings, he did abandon work on the track.

Brian continued working on *Smile* through the early months of 1967, tinkering with various combinations of takes and mixes. Despite his prior reputation for working efficiently in the studio, he failed to complete the album, missing a series of deadlines for its delivery to Capitol. By then, he'd recorded countless hours of music for the album, although some tracks were still waiting for the Beach Boys to add their vocals. As a series of proposed release dates came and went, Capitol sent out promotional materials to distributors and retailers, and placed ads for *Smile* in *Billboard* and various teen magazines. Meanwhile, 466,000 copies of the gatefold album cover, designed by artist Frank Holmes, sat in a warehouse in Pennsylvania, where they would remain for the next two decades.

In early May 1967—just a few weeks before the release of the Beatles' groundbreaking, *Pet Sounds*-influenced *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*—it was officially announced that *Smile*'s release had been canceled.

In the decades following its non-release, *Smile* became a source of endless speculation and mystique. Its reputation as a lost masterpiece cast a powerful spell over fans, and was further enhanced by the tantalizing evidence provided by the handful of *Smile* tracks that emerged over the years on various Beach Boys LPs.

While he remained reluctant to discuss the traumatic project, Brian insisted in several interviews that *Smile* was unfinished and did not exist in releasable form. When bootleg releases collecting large amounts of unreleased *Smile* material began to appear in the early 1990s, they strongly suggested that the album had been much closer to completion than Wilson had admitted. It also became clear that, even in incomplete form, *Smile* was a profoundly original and deeply moving work. That was confirmed in 1993, when the career-spanning box set *Good Vibrations: 30 Years of the Beach Boys* debuted a treasure trove of rare *Smile* material.

In 1967, though, the *Smile* debacle became the catalyst in Brian Wilson's abrupt and tragic descent into mental illness and drug abuse. When he had begun work on the album, Wilson was at the top of his game and the height of his influence, with seemingly unlimited creative horizons. After the abandonment of *Smile*, he would retreat from the spotlight and abdicate his leadership of the band that he had previously dominated. It would take decades of short-lived comebacks and false starts before Brian would resume a full-time musical career.

While *Smile*'s non-release set its creator on a precipitous decline, its effect upon the Beach Boys' career was almost as damaging. Mike Love had derided Brian's insistence upon subverting the band's winning formula. But it seems likely that, had *Smile* been released at the time, it would have established the Beach Boys in the vanguard of the seismic changes that were about to permanently alter the direction of rock—changes that would render the group's original sound commercially unfashionable. As the Beatles continued to open up new creative vistas, the Beach Boys, who had been making equally adventurous music, would come to be viewed as a relic of a more conservative age. Although they still had a fair amount of worthwhile music in their future, the Beach Boys would spend the rest of their career struggling to regain their lost momentum as a recording act.

The Beach Boys' hip credibility took a further hit when the group withdrew from a commitment to perform at the historic Monterey International Pop Festival in the summer of 1967. That event, on which they would have performed alongside the leading lights of the emerging rock counterculture, may well have given the group a high-profile shot of relevance amidst the social and cultural upheavals of the Summer of Love.

In August 1967, the public got a tantalizing taste of the abandoned *Smile* with the single release of one of the album's key tracks, the Wild West fantasy "Heroes and Villains." Although the truncated single omitted some of the sections recorded for the album version, its multi-part structure still exemplified Brian's *Smile* approach, overlaying a relatively simple song with complicated vocal and instrumental arrangements. "Heroes and Villains" peaked at number twelve on the U.S. pop chart, and made the Top Ten in England.

A month later, fans who'd been primed for the groundbreaking brilliance of *Smile* instead got *Smiley Smile*, a perplexing hodgepodge that included "Good Vibrations" and "Heroes and Villains" along with drastically scaled-down rerecordings of several *Smile* numbers, recorded by the band in Brian's new home studio. Although its newly recorded tracks possessed a certain ramshackle charm, and the album has gained admirers over the years, *Smiley Smile* was released to general incomprehension. While *Smile* might have divided the Beach Boys' fans had it been released, *Smiley Smile* merely baffled them. Although it made the Top Ten in Britain, *Smiley Smile* peaked at an ignominious number forty-one in the United States.

Whatever its musical merits, *Smiley Smile*—the first album to bear the credit "Produced by the Beach Boys"—was significant in that it marked the beginning of the other Beach Boys taking up the creative slack in the face of Brian's diminishing participation. Hereafter, all of the band members would share songwriting duties, with Carl Wilson becoming the band's driving force in the studio, just as he'd stepped up as leader of the live band when Brian quit the road.

Although they were distributed by Capitol, *Smiley Smile* and the "Heroes and Villains" single were the first releases to bear the logo of the Beach Boys'

new, band-owned imprint, Brother Records. Brother's formation had originally been motivated by a desire to maintain creative control in the face of Capitol's resistance to Brian's more daring projects, and by a series of financial disputes between the group and Capitol.

Wild Honey, released in December 1967, was considerably more cohesive than *Smiley Smile*. With Brian once again co-writing with Mike Love, the album—again recorded at Brian's house—consisted largely of upbeat, stripped-down rock and roll, whose unpretentious exuberance contrasted *Smile*'s wide-screen grandeur and *Smiley Smile*'s druggy haze. Much of its energy arose from the sound of the Beach Boys playing as a band; indeed, *Wild Honey* marked the first album in several years on which the Beach Boys played the majority of the instruments. Equally notable was Carl's emergence as a persuasive lead vocalist on such tunes as the wailing title track and the catchy "Darlin'," which became a Top Twenty single. *Wild Honey*'s minute-long coda, "Mama Says," was originally recorded as a section of *Smile*'s "Vegetables," making it the first of several *Smile* numbers to appear as the closing track of subsequent Beach Boys albums.

Just as *Pet Sounds* and *Smile* had reflected Brian's preoccupations at the time, *Wild Honey*'s unpretentious simplicity embodied the simpler lifestyle he'd adopted in the wake of *Smile*'s grand failure. The low-key vibe continued with 1968's *Friends*, on which such Brian-led tunes as "Busy Doin' Nothin'," "Wake the World," and the playful title track offered warmly intimate portraits of the artist as gentle homebody.

Notably absent from much of *Friends* was Mike Love, who had recently become a devotee of transcendental meditation, and was away in India studying with the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (along with the Beatles, Donovan, and actress Mia Farrow) during most of the recording. A more surprising development on *Friends* was the revelation of Dennis Wilson, the Beach Boys' trouble-prone but charismatic dark horse, as a broodingly soulful songwriter and singer on two tracks, "Little Bird" and "Be Still."

Despite the quality of *Friends*, 1968 saw the Beach Boys' popularity dip to perilous new lows. While they remained in demand in England, *Friends* peaked at number 126 in the United States—a humbling comedown for the band that had topped the charts with "Good Vibrations" just two years earlier. An ill-conceived tour pairing the Beach Boys with the Maharishi was a financial disaster, with several dates canceled after the New York show drew a paltry 200 fans.

Coincidentally or not, *Friends* would be the last Beach Boys album to comprise mostly songs written by Brian Wilson, whose participation in the group would grow more limited in the years to come.

Nineteen sixty-eight also saw the release of *Stack-O-Tracks*, which collected the instrumental tracks of fifteen previously released Beach Boys numbers. Although such archival projects would become commonplace in the CD era, *Stack-O-Tracks* was unprecedented at the time, underlining the esteem in which

Brian Wilson's artistry was still held by his peers. Unfortunately, the album's release coincided with the band's decline in popularity, and it became the first Beach Boys LP to fail to reach the charts on either side of the Atlantic.

In contrast to *Friends'* focused intimacy, 1969's *20/20*—assembled mainly to complete the band's contractual obligation to Capitol—was a patchwork of singles, leftovers from other projects (including *Smile*), and solo efforts by various members. The album benefited from the inclusion of “Do It Again,” a nostalgic throwback to the band's early fun-in-the-sun style that had had been a Top Twenty single the previous summer. *20/20* spawned another minor hit in Carl's reworking of the Ronettes' girl group classic “I Can Hear Music,” whose layered production demonstrated how much he'd learned from observing his big brother's studio methods.

Brian's limited involvement in *20/20* finally gave Bruce Johnston—his replacement in the touring Beach Boys but also an experienced writer and producer—a chance to get his own material onto a Beach Boys LP. Fittingly, Johnston's moody instrumental “The Nearest Faraway Place” was largely inspired by Brian's work on *Pet Sounds*.

20/20 also featured a trio of contributions from Dennis, including the haunting “Be with Me” and the sweet “All I Want to Do,” the latter sung by Dennis's frequent nemesis Mike Love. The third song credited to Dennis, “Never Learn Not to Love,” was actually a reworking of “Cease to Exist,” written by a then-unknown criminal, cult leader, and aspiring songwriter named Charles Manson, whom Dennis had befriended shortly before work on the album began. According to some reports, Manson was incensed when the song was released without his writing credit, and threatened to murder Dennis. Dennis's involvement with Manson caused considerable concern within the Beach Boys camp, and became more frightening after Manson directed a group of his followers to murder seven people, including actress Sharon Tate, on August 9, 1969. It was later theorized that Manson's original target had been the previous tenant of Tate's rented house, record producer (and Bruce Johnston's former recording partner) Terry Melcher, who had apparently rebuffed Manson's earlier attempts to win a record deal.

The Beach Boys followed *20/20* with the non-LP single “Break Away,” on which Brian's credited co-writer, Reggie Dunbar, was a pseudonym for none other than Murry Wilson. Although it was one of the band's strongest releases of the period, “Break Away” stalled at number sixty-three (it made the Top Ten in England). The song's commercial failure reportedly had a demoralizing effect on Brian, hastening his retreat from active musical duty.

SAIL ON

With their Capitol commitments complete, the Beach Boys moved to Reprise/Warner Bros., probably the hippest and most artist-friendly major label of

the time. The new deal seemed to offer the prospect of reestablishing the Beach Boys as a relevant musical entity, and the group rose to the occasion with their Brother/Reprise debut, 1970's *Sunflower*, which many fans rate as their best post-*Pet Sounds* album. Brian was only prominent on a handful of *Sunflower* tracks, most notably the magnificent "This Whole World," sung by Carl. But his influence loomed large over the sunny, harmony-driven album, with the other band members coming up with material that merged the group's classic 1960s sound with a more adult sensibility. Despite critical acclaim, *Sunflower* was a commercial disappointment.

During the *Sunflower* sessions, Dennis Wilson recorded his first solo single, the Brian-influenced "Sound of Free," credited to "Dennis Wilson and Rumbo" and released overseas but not in the United States.

As part of the Beach Boys' Reprise deal, the company had expected the band to deliver a releasable version of the already-legendary *Smile*. But Brian, the only person who could reasonably be expected to assemble the mountains of tape into a cohesive work, remained unwilling and/or unable to complete the album.

"Surf's Up," one of *Smile*'s most powerful songs, became the title track of *Sunflower*'s 1971 follow-up. Brian had publicly unveiled the richly poetic epic four years earlier, performing a solo piano rendition on *Inside Pop: The Rock Revolution*, a CBS TV special hosted by conductor Leonard Bernstein, but the track had never been completed for *Smile*. "Surf's Up"—whose 1971 version was completed by Carl—was a major addition to the Beach Boys canon, as was Brian's new "'Til I Die," whose heart-tugging sonic tapestry recalled *Pet Sounds*. *Surf's Up* also included a pair of impressive songwriting contributions from Carl, but lacked the solid group dynamic that had elevated *Sunflower*.

During the *Surf's Up* sessions, Dennis put his hand through a plate glass window, leaving him temporarily unable to play the drums. Early in 1972, the Beach Boys' lineup got some new blood with the additions of guitarist Blondie Chaplin and drummer Ricky Fataar—both former members of the South African band the Flame, for whom Carl Wilson had recently produced an album. The two new members would help to push the band's live shows toward a tougher sound, and would lend a more prominent R&B feel to the next Beach Boys album, the spotty *Carl and the Passions*—"So Tough," made with minimal participation from the increasingly reclusive Brian. Reprise hinted at its lack of faith in the album by releasing it as half of a two-LP set with a reissued *Pet Sounds*, making the underwhelming new disc sound even weaker in comparison.

Carl and the Passions—"So Tough" marked the departure of Bruce Johnston, who had become so disenchanted with the band's new manager Jack Rieley that he quit the group. Former DJ Rieley won the position with a strategy to reestablish the Beach Boys' hip credibility, but his efforts further divided the already fractious band. Rieley somehow managed to get Reprise to foot

the bill to send the Beach Boys, along with family, staff, and a massive amount of recording equipment, to Holland to record their next album. The change of scene was an effort to shake the group out of its creative doldrums and snap Brian out of his unproductiveness. The trip quickly turned rocky, but the resulting album, titled *Holland*, was a modest improvement upon its predecessor, winning the band some FM airplay and spawning a minor hit in “Sail On, Sailor,” whose lead vocal was provided by Blondie Chaplin and whose five credited co-writers included Brian and Van Dyke Parks.

Holland was followed by the double album *The Beach Boys in Concert*, which reflected the band’s growing emphasis on touring. The live album also marked the final recorded appearances of Chaplin and Fataar, who would depart in late 1973 and late 1974, respectively. By then, the combination of flagging record sales and Brian’s growing reclusiveness didn’t seem to bode well for the band’s future.

But in June 1974, amidst a resurgence of nostalgic interest in vintage rock and roll, Capitol Records released *Endless Summer*, a two-LP compilation of the Beach Boys’ surf and car hits. The collection became a surprise pop-culture phenomenon, spending much of that summer at the top of the American album charts and remaining a top seller for the next two years, making it the Beach Boys’ longest-charting release.

The success of *Endless Summer* instantly revitalized the Beach Boys’ fortunes as a live act, and the group increasingly tailored their concerts to focus on their crowd-pleasing early hits. While some complained that they’d become a pandering human jukebox, their new status as America’s highest-grossing concert act spoke more loudly than any criticism.

While the Beach Boys were on the road reaping the benefits of *Endless Summer*’s success, Brian Wilson had fallen deeply into mental illness, spending much of his time in bed and indulging heavily in alcohol, drugs, and binge eating. A series of psychologists were unable to treat him successfully, until Brian began seeing the unconventional therapist Eugene Landy in the fall of 1975. Despite the controversy surrounding Landy’s radical twenty-four-hour treatment, Brian seemingly improved substantially under his care.

Although the Beach Boys had more or less retired from recording after *Holland*, the momentum created by *Endless Summer* built demand for a new studio album. Brian’s modest upswing was enough to inspire the band and its label to launch a high-profile “Brian’s Back” campaign, trumpeting the tragic hero’s return to the producer’s chair for a new studio LP featuring the Beach Boys’ classic lineup. Brian even rejoined the band on stage for several concerts, looking nervous and awkward. He seemed equally uncomfortable in several high-profile TV appearances, including a prime-time NBC-TV special honoring the Beach Boys and a solo performance on *Saturday Night Live*.

The ballyhoo surrounding Brian’s return to active duty proved premature when *15 Big Ones* was released in June 1976. Despite the hype, the album was largely a letdown, comprised largely of lackluster remakes of rock and

roll oldies, along with a handful of lightweight but charming new songs by Brian. While *15 Big Ones* possessed surprisingly little of the Beach Boys' classic sound, it nonetheless produced a Top Five single in a remake of Chuck Berry's "Rock and Roll Music."

A more rewarding comeback project was *15 Big Ones'* follow-up, *The Beach Boys Love You*. The album was entirely written and played by Brian, whose extensive use of Moog synthesizer gave it a loopy funhouse ambience. The playfully primitive album sharply divided fans and critics, some of whom proclaimed it a work of eccentric genius while others dismissed it as childish and trivial. Like *15 Big Ones*, *Love You* incorporated outtakes originally recorded for prior albums, which resulted in Brian's coarse 1977 voice, ravaged by years of cigarette smoking and other abuse, appearing alongside his sweeter tone on the *Sunflower*-era "Good Time."

Also in 1977, Dennis Wilson became the first Beach Boy to release a solo album with *Pacific Ocean Blue*. Despite the fact that years of hard living had reduced his voice to a throaty croak, the album was an impressive achievement, with lush, imaginative production and a distinctive lyrical vision that surveyed both the California landscape and the artist's own tortured psyche. Dennis began work on a second album, to be titled *Bamboo*, but the distractions of his turbulent personal life, his escalating substance abuse, and his increasingly strained relations with the other Beach Boys would help to keep that project from being completed.

Meanwhile, Brian Wilson once again regressed into drug use and mental illness. He was credited as executive producer of 1978's *M.I.U. Album*, but the album—a lightweight grab-bag of oldies remakes and Brian compositions rejected from earlier projects—was overseen by Al Jardine, with the sessions taking place at Maharishi University in Iowa. Although Brian was present for much of the recording, his participation was minimal. Carl and Dennis were largely absent as well, hinting at the band's internal instability at the time. One of *M.I.U.*'s cover tunes, an energetic Jardine-led revival of the Del-Vikings' doo-wop classic "Come Go with Me," later became a Top Ten hit 1981, when it was included on the compilation *Ten Years of Harmony*.

Despite Brian's perilous condition and the band's general disarray, the Beach Boys signed a new recording deal with Caribou/Epic, a deal that stipulated Brian Wilson's creative involvement in each album. When Brian proved not to be up to the task, Bruce Johnston—who in his years as an ex-Beach Boy had written the MOR smash "I Write the Songs" for pop superstar Barry Manilow—was called in as producer of 1979's *L.A. (Light Album)*.

Despite the fact that relations within the group were severely strained, *L.A.* featured solid work from all five Beach Boys. Contractual commitments aside, Brian's contributions amounted to a pair of older outtakes completed by Carl: the heavenly "Good Timin'" and a tongue-in-cheek reworking of the standard "Shortenin' Bread." The album also found the Beach Boys attempting to jump on the disco bandwagon with a dance-oriented update of the *Wild Honey* tune

“Here Comes the Night”; although the song got as high as number forty-four, it proved so controversial with fans that it was removed from the band’s set list after a handful of shows.

Another attempt to coax Brian back as producer for 1980’s undistinguished *Keepin’ the Summer Alive* proved unproductive, leading to Johnston again taking the reins in the studio. An increasingly volatile Dennis Wilson exited early in the recording; he would never record with the group again.

Keepin’ the Summer Alive’s lack of success was one indication of the malaise that hung over the splintered Beach Boys in the early 1980s. Although Johnston returned to the performing lineup, Carl Wilson, frustrated with the band’s reliance on the oldies, temporarily quit to record a pair of solo albums, and Dennis’s unpredictability got him ejected from the band for a while. Meanwhile, Brian Wilson’s condition had gone so far downhill that Dr. Eugene Landy was brought back to treat him in 1983. The existence of a touring Beach Boys lineup with no Wilson brothers seemed to suggest that the band’s days were numbered.

Although their recording career had grown moribund, the Beach Boys maintained their status as an iconic American institution. That status was demonstrated in 1983, when James Watt, President Ronald Reagan’s Secretary of the Interior, canceled the band’s annual July 4 concert on Washington, DC’s Mall, replacing them with the more ostensibly wholesome Wayne Newton. When Watt’s ban caused a media uproar, the image-savvy Reagan proclaimed himself a Beach Boys fan and welcomed the group to the White House for a face-saving visit. The Watt situation proved to be a publicity bonanza for the group, which would be back playing on the Mall on the following July 4.

When the Beach Boys next won national media attention a few months after the James Watt flap, the news was much sadder. On December 28, 1983, Dennis Wilson drowned while diving from a friend’s boat, attempting to recover items that he had angrily thrown overboard.

The five surviving band members regrouped and returned to recording with 1985’s *The Beach Boys*, recorded with English producer Steve Levine, fresh from his hit work with Culture Club. While longtime admirers bemoaned the album’s trendy, synthetic production and noted its paucity of memorable songs, *The Beach Boys* got the band back into the Top Forty—and even onto MTV—with the catchy Mike Love/Terry Melcher song “Getcha Back,” whose choruses featured a prominent falsetto part by Brian Wilson. In an omen of things to come, two of Brian’s four new compositions credited Dr. Eugene Landy as co-writer.

Despite the relative success of *The Beach Boys*, the band did not record a follow-up album. Instead, they continued working as a lucrative touring act while recording individual songs for a series of film soundtracks and various-artists albums. The most successful of these was the Love/Melcher tune “Kokomo,” which appeared in the Tom Cruise vehicle *Cocktail*. Although undeniably catchy, “Kokomo” was derided by purists as evidence of Mike Love

pushing the band toward shallowness and irrelevance. But in the summer of 1988, “Kokomo” became the Beach Boys’ first number one single since “Good Vibrations” twenty-two years earlier.

The fact that Brian Wilson’s voice did not appear on “Kokomo” was reportedly the result of Dr. Landy forbidding him to attend the session. Many questioned the ethics of Landy’s unorthodox and expensive treatment, in which his patient was monitored twenty-four hours a day by the doctor’s staff, who apparently controlled nearly every aspect of Brian’s life. But Landy did manage to curb Brian’s drug use and get him into physical shape, making it possible for him to sign a new record deal with Sire/Warner Bros. and release his first-ever solo album, *Brian Wilson*, in the summer of 1988.

Although a somewhat tentative return—thanks in large part to stiff 1980s production that contrasted the organic sound of his vintage work—*Brian Wilson* contained enough moments of emotional and musical truth, such as the open-hearted ballads “Love and Mercy” and “Melt Away,” to offer hope to fans.

Indeed, Brian’s return seemed almost miraculous, and it seemed likely that Landy had saved his life. But Landy’s methods, and the fact that he was now Wilson’s personal manager and songwriting partner as well as his doctor, was troubling to many observers. The appearance of impropriety was reinforced by the voluble Landy’s tendency to make self-aggrandizing media appearances alongside Brian, who often seemed disengaged.

The situation was apparently a source of concern to Brian’s new label, which declined to release a second Landy-influenced Wilson album, *Sweet Insanity*. The apparent conflicts of interest inherent in Landy’s medical, musical, and business relationships with his patient/client, soon came under legal and media scrutiny. Brian’s family took legal action, leading to Landy being forced in 1991 to sever his relationship with Brian, and to surrender his license to practice psychology in California. By then, Landy had already reportedly received one third of the \$250,000 advance for Brian’s ghostwritten autobiography *Wouldn’t It Be Nice*, which portrayed Landy in glowing terms—and which Brian later claimed not to have even read.

Free of Landy’s influence, Brian Wilson turned to more conventional psychiatric treatment, and tentatively resumed his solo career in the 1990s. He participated in *I Just Wasn’t Made for These Times*, a 1995 film documentary tribute directed by musician/producer Don Was. The same year, Brian rekindled his collaboration with his *Smile*-era collaborator Van Dyke Parks on *Orange Crate Art*, a collection of California-themed Parks compositions with Wilson providing lead vocals.

Two years later, Brian teamed with his daughters Carnie and Wendy—who had already tasted pop stardom as members of Wilson Phillips, a slick vocal trio that also included Chynna Phillips, daughter John and Michelle Phillips of 1960s stars the Mamas and the Papas—on the one-off album *The Wilsons*.

Roy Orbison: Pop Vocal Pyrotechnics

Roy Orbison (1936–88) recorded for five years with only modest success until hitting his artistic and commercial stride in 1960 with “Only the Lonely.” This number two hit was the Texas-born singer’s first in a series of beautifully produced pop classics (many of which he co-wrote) that set his towering tenor within a seamless backdrop of rhythm, strings, and voices. Inducting Roy into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1987, Bruce Springsteen invoked the near-operatic emotional power of songs like the 1961 number one “Running Scared” and 1964’s Top Ten hit “It’s Over.” While in planning for his own landmark album *Born to Run*, Springsteen admitted, “most of all, I wanted to sing like Roy Orbison.”

The hits dried up after 1964, although Orbison was still a charismatic live performer. In early 1988, Roy formed the Traveling Wilburys with such long-time admirers as George Harrison and Tom Petty; he was in the midst of a major comeback when he suffered a fatal heart attack in December. Roy Orbison’s posthumous honors included the highest-charting album of his career (*Mystery Girl*, at number five), the Top Ten single “You Got It,” and a 1990 Grammy Award for Best Pop Vocal Performance, Male.

A. S.

Meanwhile, the Beach Boys remained a highly profitable touring machine. 1992 saw the band, without Brian, release the oppressively electronic *Summer in Paradise*, which served mainly to confirm fans’ darkest fears of what the Beach Boys would sound like with Mike Love in charge.

Brian participated in 1996’s equally ill-advised *Stars and Stripes, Vol. 1*, a collection of country artists covering Beach Boys songs, with the band providing backup harmonies. Brian and the Beach Boys also discussed the possibility of reuniting for an album of new Wilson songs, but that plan faded when Carl Wilson died in February 1998, following a long battle with lung cancer.

Brian’s next solo release was 1998’s *Imagination*, which featured a few bright spots but suffered from soupy overproduction. More notable than the album was the fact that, more than three decades after he’d sworn off touring, Wilson conquered his fears to reinvent himself as a live performer. Fronting a sympathetic live band that included former Beach Boys sideman Jeffrey Foskett and the members of the Wilson-influenced L.A. alt-pop quartet the Wondermints, Brian undertook a series of well-received tours, including full performances of *Pet Sounds*.

By 1999, no fewer than three Beach Boys–related acts were on the road, with Brian competing for ticket sales with Mike Love and Bruce Johnston, who continued to tour under the Beach Boys name, and Al Jardine, performing with his own group.

In 2004, Brian Wilson shocked even his most optimistic fans by reviving *Smile*. Although he’d long declined to discuss his mythic lost album, other

than to insist that it would never be released, Brian and band debuted *Smile* in concert at London's Royal Festival Hall on February 20. He released *Smile* in a rerecorded studio version recorded with his touring group and incorporating some newly penned Van Dyke Parks lyrics.

The reappearance of *Smile* on record and on stage—and the rapturous response of fans and critics—vindicated Brian Wilson's expansive musical vision. Released thirty-eight years after its creator had begun working on it, *Smile* still sounded ahead of its time while maintaining a timeless emotional resonance. The same can be said of all of Brian Wilson and the Beach Boys' best work.

TIMELINE

October 3, 1961

The Beach Boys record their first single, "Surfin'," at World Pacific Studios in Hollywood.

December 31, 1961

The Beach Boys make their first major public appearance, performing at a Ritchie Valens Memorial Concert at the Long Beach Civic Auditorium.

May 25, 1963

The Beach Boys score their first Top Ten hit with "Surfin' USA," Brian Wilson's reworking of Chuck Berry's "Sweet Little Sixteen."

December 23, 1964

Brian Wilson suffers an anxiety attack on a flight to Houston. He will soon announce that he will no longer tour with the Beach Boys and will concentrate on writing and recording.

May 16, 1966

Pet Sounds is released.

August 1966

Brian Wilson begins recording tracks for the projected next Beach Boys album, *Smile*.

December 10, 1966

"Good Vibrations" tops the U.S. pop charts.

May 1967

It is officially announced that the release of *Smile* has been canceled.

September 18, 1967

Smiley Smile is released in place of *Smile*.

August 31, 1970

Sunflower, the first album under the Beach Boys' new deal with Reprise/Warner Bros., is released.

June 24, 1974

Capitol Records releases *Endless Summer*, a compilation of vintage Beach Boys hits that will spend the next two years on the charts.

June 28, 1976

15 Big Ones, the first Beach Boys album in a decade to be completely produced by Brian Wilson, is released.

July 12, 1988

Brian Wilson releases his first-ever solo album, simply titled *Brian Wilson*.

February 20, 2004

Brian Wilson debuts the resurrected *Smile* in concert at the Royal Festival Hall in London.

September 28, 2004

Brian Wilson's newly recorded edition of *Smile* is released.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

The Beach Boys

Surfin' USA, 1963

Surfer Girl, 1963

All Summer Long, 1964

The Beach Boys Today!, 1965

Pet Sounds, 1966

Wild Honey, 1967

Friends, 1968

Sunflower, 1970

Surf's Up, 1971

The Beach Boys Love You, 1977

Good Vibrations: Thirty Years of The Beach Boys (box set), 1993

The Pet Sounds Sessions (box set), 1997

Brian Wilson

Brian Wilson Presents Smile, 2004

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Courtesy of Photofest.

James Brown

Andy Schwartz

THE LAST SHOW

On the morning of December 28, 2006, dawn in Harlem broke cold and damp under cloudy skies. But the bleak weather had not kept hundreds of people from lining up, beginning shortly after midnight, at the entrance to the historic Apollo Theater on West 125th Street.

They were mostly black, mostly between the ages of thirty and sixty. They waited patiently and good-naturedly to bid a final farewell to the man whose body would soon rest in an open casket on the Apollo stage. That stage had been the site of some of his greatest career triumphs—the same stage where he had ruled, with fiery music and matchless showmanship, on so many nights down through the decades.

Hours later, the lines from the Apollo extended both east and west, down both ends of the long block, and then around the corners of Adam Clayton Powell and Frederick Douglass Boulevards. All along the route, the dead man's recordings poured forth from makeshift sound systems attached to stores and restaurants: "Try Me," "I Feel Good," "I'll Go Crazy," "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag," "Sex Machine," "Living in America." The police had closed 125th Street to traffic, and the crowds strained against the temporary metal barriers erected at the edge of the sidewalk.

At a few minutes past 1 P.M., a white carriage turned onto the thoroughfare. It was drawn by a pair of plumed white horses, driven by two men wearing formal dress and top hats, and bore a gold-painted coffin built of sixteen-gauge steel. It held the body of a man known by many appellations: "Soul Brother Number One," "The Hardest-Working Man in Show Business," "The Godfather of Soul." But as the carriage moved slowly and solemnly down the street toward the doors of the Apollo, a chant rose up from the throng and his real name rang out:

"James Brown! James Brown! James Brown!"

Born into abject poverty in the segregated South, possessed of both immense talent and indomitable will, James Brown is one of a handful of twentieth-century artists of whom it can truthfully be said that they changed music—not just *black* music, not just *American* music, but the sound of popular music around the world.

In the 1920s another African American genius, Louis Armstrong, defined the role of the instrumental soloist and forever changed the sound of jazz. In the 1960s, James Brown transformed rhythm and blues into funk and thereby laid the sonic groundwork for virtually all subsequent rhythm-based pop music forms. The critic Robert Palmer wrote: "The chattering choke-rhythm guitars, broken bass patterns, explosive horn bursts, one-chord drones, and evangelical vocal discourses he introduced in the mid-sixties became the *lingua franca* of contemporary Black pop, the heartbeat of the discotheques and a primary ingredient in such far-flung musical syntheses as Jamaican reggae and Nigerian Afro-beat."¹

In Brown's best and most influential recordings, the *song* was virtually inseparable from his *sound*. That sound was raw, intense, and indisputably black in its diction and delivery, and it could not be easily emulated or copied by white performers.

Much more than a singer, James Brown conceived and commanded a complete stage show involving crucial elements of timing and sequence. It encompassed a large instrumental group, backing vocalists, and dancers, all of whose roles were endlessly rehearsed and revised. The James Brown Show functioned as a quasi-religious revival meeting, a variety show, and a communal tribute to both Brown's innate talent and his relentless striving for success. Along with his recordings, album covers, publicity photos, and television appearances, the James Brown Show served as a forum through which he introduced new dances, slogans, and hair and clothing styles. All of these changes were closely followed, especially in the 1960s and early 1970s, by an international fan base that stretched from Manhattan to Mali.

The James Brown story is a classic American saga of upward mobility from impoverished origins to the pinnacle of pop stardom. At the peak of his influence, Brown was a figure of profound social significance in black America whose actions and statements inspired admiration, controversy, and derision. He freed himself from record company interference to gain creative control over his music and established a diversified business enterprise that included record labels, publishing companies, and radio stations.

The story also reveals the limits of the singer's real power within the music industry; it is marred by personal tragedy, professional decline, and numerous acts of willful egomania. None of these things have diminished the global impact of James Brown's greatest music, or the pleasure and inspiration that generations of listeners have taken from it.

COMING UP HARD

Although varying dates and locales have been reported over the years, today it is generally accepted that James Joseph Brown Jr. was born on May 3, 1933, in rural Barnwell, South Carolina, the only child of Joe and Susie Brown. Four years later, James's mother abandoned the family; he would not see her again for twenty years. Joe Brown, with only a second-grade education, toiled for meager wages on farms and plantations, in turpentine camps, and later as a gas station attendant. Driving a vegetable delivery truck, he earned \$4 per week.

Father and son, along with a succession of Joe's female companions, "lived about as poor as you could be," James later recalled. Their unpainted wooden shack in the woods outside of town "didn't have windows except for shutters that you could pull together; and there was no electricity or indoor plumbing. . . . We ate black-eyed peas and lima beans, fatback [dried and salt-cured pork fat] and syrup, polk salad that we picked in the woods, and cornbread."²

Joe Brown was overwhelmed by the responsibilities of single fatherhood and at age five, James was sent to live with his aunt Handsome “Honey” Washington in the black section of Augusta, Georgia, known as “The Terry” (for “territory”). Her two-story dwelling at 944 Twiggs Street was in fact a working brothel presided over by Honey and her bootlegger brother, Jack Scott. Often as not, James was forced to fend for himself in this house full of adult strangers coming and going at all hours, which was raided regularly by the local police.

Trombonist and arranger Fred Wesley Jr., who served two lengthy stints with the James Brown Show, later explained to writer Cynthia Rose: “We’re talking about a three, four-year-old child who actually didn’t live anywhere. Nobody fed him, nobody bathed him. He didn’t *have* a place to live. He survived on sheer guts.”³ When beds were scarce in the overcrowded house, James slept on a wooden pallet on the floor. He did not own a pair of store-bought underwear until he started school at age seven; at times he was sent home from class, humiliated, for having “insufficient clothes.”

Much later in life, Brown cited music as “one of the things that helped me to survive . . . It was just there in the community and I fell into it, the way you will.”⁴ He heard the country and pop tunes played on local radio stations and tried his hand at any instrument within reach, including harmonica, piano, and guitar. (James also claimed to have taken a few lessons from Hudson Whittaker, the legendary blues singer and guitarist known as Tampa Red.)

But what most impressed the eager adolescent were the shouting, ecstatic crowds and blaring brass bands that, every Sunday, filled the “sanctified” churches like Bishop “Daddy” Grace’s House of Prayer in Augusta. Back at Aunt Honey’s house, James and his cousin Willie “Junior” Glenn, along with other friends, would try to imitate the singing of such popular male gospel groups as the Five Trumpets and the Golden Gate Quartet.

In his eponymous 1986 autobiography, James recalled attending revival services where the preacher “was just screaming and yelling and stomping his foot, and then he dropped to his knees. The people got into it with him, answering him and shouting and clapping time. After that . . . I watched the preachers real close. Then I’d go home and imitate them, because *I* wanted to preach.”

Brown continued: “Audience participation in church is something the darker race of people has going [*sic*] because of a lot of trials and tribulations, because of things that we understand about human nature. It’s something I can’t explain, but I can bring it out of people. I’m not the only person who has the ability, but I *work* at it, and I’m sure a lot of my stage show came out of the church.”⁵

Before he reached the age of twelve, James had dropped out of school and into the world of low-wage, unskilled labor. He picked cotton, cut sugarcane, and washed cars. After his day’s work was done, he’d set up a shoeshine stand outside radio station WRDW; to attract customers, James would dance on the sidewalk, sometimes singing to accompany himself. That part of his earnings not contributed to his extended family was often spent at the local colored

movie theater. James was thrilled by the performances of 1940s rhythm and blues star Louis Jordan, in such all-black-cast screen musicals as *Reet Petite & Gone* and *Look Out, Sister*.

The odd jobs mixed with small-time crimes and street hustles: “The reality of black existence at this time, when Georgia vied with Mississippi for the national lynching championship, was that in any attempt to be something besides a subservient menial worker, one could hardly avoid breaking the law, and even that didn’t make life easy.”⁶ In 1949, sixteen-year-old James Brown was convicted on four counts of breaking and entering (into cars), and given eight to sixteen years in a state penitentiary. When this draconian sentence was reduced, James was transferred to the Alto Reform School in Toccoa, Georgia. He became popular among the inmates for his gospel singing in chapel and trained as a boxer although he was only five feet, six inches tall and weighed 137 pounds. James also played baseball and showed impressive pitching skills until injuries put an end to his dream of a career in the Negro Leagues.

When a young gospel singer-pianist named Bobby Byrd came to perform at Alto, the two teenagers struck up an acquaintance. On June 14, 1952, James was paroled after serving three years and went to live with the Byrd family temporarily while he looked for a place to stay in Toccoa. (As a condition of his parole, James could not return to the county where his family resided.) When not working a variety of low-paying jobs, he sang with Bobby in the Ever Ready Gospel Singers. This group was affiliated with the Mount Zion Baptist Church, where James met Velma Warren—the first of his four wives. They were wed in Toccoa on June 19, 1953, and settled down there; within five years, Velma had given birth to Teddy, Terry, and Larry, the couple’s three sons.

James’s local performances brought him to the attention of Clint Brantley, the manager of Little Richard (not yet nationally famous), who urged Brown to relocate to Richard’s home base in Macon. Soon, Brown had moved into a room above the Two Spot nightclub in Macon and found a day job with the Lawson Motor Company. In his off hours, he sang with such locally popular groups as the Gospel Starlighters and the R&B-oriented Four Steps of Rhythm (James also played piano and drums).

Bobby Byrd also moved to Macon and formed a new gospel outfit with Nafloyd Scott and Sylvester Keels called the Three Swaneees. When first Johnny Terry and then James Brown joined the group, it became the Swanee Quintet; after switching to secular music, over the next year their name was changed to the Flames and then again to the Famous Flames. Whatever the name or style, Brown seems destined to have become the de facto leader and on-stage focus of this group, as he eventually did. He may or may not have been the best pure singer in the Flames, but he was almost certainly the most distinctive. Even at this early stage, James combined raw talent with a determined work ethic and an outsized ego fueled, in part, by envy and insecurity.

“He has no real musical skills,” trombonist Fred Wesley Jr. told Cynthia Rose, “yet he could hold his own on stage with any jazz virtuoso—because of

his guts. Can you understand that? James Brown cannot play drums at all. But he would sit down on drums and get that look on his face like he's playin' 'em, and you would just play along with him. . . . He doesn't understand losing and he *truly* understands surviving. It's not that James wants to win every time—it's that he will not *lose*."⁷

BREAKING THROUGH

Without a record contract, the Famous Flames worked hard to build up their reputation on a black club circuit that extended from Chattanooga, Tennessee, south to lower Florida and west from Savannah, Georgia, into Mississippi. Their career at this stage was characterized by long hours, low pay, and exhausting, sometimes dangerous travel conditions across the segregated South. Macon disc jockey Ray "Satellite Poppa" Brown sometimes traveled with James in these early days. "Finding a motel room—that was unheard of, man," he later recalled. "You'd sleep in your car or stay at the club until daybreak."⁸

Mostly the group sang other people's hits, including "Please Don't Go," a Top Ten R&B entry for the Orioles in 1952. The Famous Flames' extended live version of this song became an audience favorite and gradually evolved into "Please, Please, Please," a hypnotically repetitive ballad credited to James Brown and Johnny Terry that pitted James's raspy, emotive lead vocal against the Flames' doo-wop background. In late 1955, the group recorded a rough version of the song at Macon radio station WIBB in a session overseen by disc jockey Hamp "King Bee" Swain: "I put it on the air and we got a tremendous reaction. *Immediately*. The phone lines just lit up."⁹

In January 1956, A&R man Ralph Bass heard the song on an Atlanta station while traveling through the South on a talent-scouting trip for King Records of Cincinnati. He tracked down the Famous Flames at a small club near Milledgeville, Georgia, and promptly signed the group for an advance of \$200, then brought them to the King studios to re-cut the song with professional studio players. King's rotund, cigar-smoking founder Syd Nathan declared "Please, Please, Please" to be one of the worst songs he'd ever heard and told Ralph Bass he was crazy to have even paid James's train fare from Macon to Cincinnati. But Nathan changed his tune when the record began to sell throughout the South.

"Brown was way ahead of his time," Ralph Bass later recalled. "He wasn't really singing R&B. He was singing gospel to an R&B combo with a real heavy feeling. . . . He wasn't singing or playing music—he was transmitting *feeling*, pure feeling."¹⁰

"Please, Please, Please" was released in March 1956 on Federal Records (a King subsidiary) with label credit inscribed to "James Brown & the Famous Flames." The disc hung on the *Billboard* R&B singles chart for nineteen

weeks, peaking at number five; over time, it sold more than a million copies. The group's success attracted the interest of Ben Bart, the white founder and head of the potent New York booking agency Universal Attractions. Previously, Bart had managed the careers of swing bandleader Jimmy Lunceford, singer Dinah Washington, and a pioneering vocal group the Ravens; it was a big step up for the Famous Flames when he agreed to become their booking agent. Ben Bart later became the singer's manager, business partner, and beloved father figure, and the only person ever to refer to James Brown as "Jimmy" (Brown called him "Pop"). Their close and complex relationship lasted until Bart's death in 1968.

Nine more single releases followed, yet not one reached the *Billboard* R&B chart—perhaps because most were overly derivative of recent hits by better-established performers, including Little Richard ("Chonnie-On-Chon") and Ray Charles ("That Dood It"). Syd Nathan's personal distaste for Brown's music and his tight-fisted attitude toward promotional expenditures on behalf of any King artist also may have been significant factors. This string of failures, combined with Ben Bart's expressed desire to make James its front-and-center star, caused the original group to dissolve in 1957. Later, Bobby Byrd returned to Brown's organization for the long haul through the 1960s with the trio of male singer-dancers always billed as the Famous Flames—but always in a supporting role to Brown himself.

STAR TIME

By the fall of 1958, Syd Nathan was ready to drop James Brown from the King/Federal roster when the singer came up with another slow, bluesy ballad, "Try Me." To the surprise of all concerned, the song shot to number one R&B in early 1959—and from that time until 1982, a year would not pass in which James Brown didn't place at least one song on the *Billboard* R&B chart. ("Try Me" also crossed over to the Hot 100, peaking at number forty-eight.)

Brown became increasingly conscious of the need to maintain his own permanent road band. It was a bold and expensive move that harkened back to the big bands of Count Basie and Duke Ellington as well as Louis Jordan's Tympani Five. Many leading R&B performers of the period, including Sam Cooke and Jackie Wilson, traveled with just a guitarist and a drummer while recruiting other players as needed. But a James Brown *band* could be trained to play his music the James Brown way, night after night. It would also be available around the clock for spontaneous recording sessions in any studio convenient to the singer's never-ending tour itinerary. Among his first recruits (circa 1959) were bassist Bernard Odum, drummer Nat Kendrick, and saxophonists J.C. Davis and Albert Corley.

When James had regained his footing on the charts with "Try Me" and "Think" (number seven R&B), he moved from Federal to the parent King label.

Now commanding a degree of grudging respect from Syd Nathan, he was free to write and produce his own material with his own musicians. Brown had no say over King's release schedule, however, and it was not unusual for six months or more to pass between the recording and the release of a new song like "Night Train." (In 1962, "Night Train" became James's eighth Top Ten R&B hit and his second Top Forty Pop entry.) When Brown suggested the idea of an instrumental based on a dance he called the mashed potatoes, Nathan told him to forget about it. James cut the track at his own expense (dubbing disc jockey King Coleman's voice over his own vocal interjections) and licensed the song to Henry Stone's Dade Records in Miami. Credited to Nat Kendrick and the Swans, "(Do The) Mashed Potatoes (Pt. 1 & 2)" reached number eight R&B in 1960.

Another, more significant confrontation between the artist and his label resulted in one of the key albums of James Brown's entire career. By 1962, his skin-tight, endlessly rehearsed live show was tearing up audiences across the country. Even James's best studio recordings couldn't capture the intensity of his on-stage delivery and the fervor of his fans' collective response. He needed a live album, and Ray Charles had shown the way with *Ray Charles in Person*, a Top Fifteen bestseller in 1960.

James proposed the idea to Syd Nathan—and was turned down flat. The label chief simply didn't believe that fans would buy an album of songs they'd already purchased in studio versions, and he was loath to pay the costs of location recording. In the fall of 1962, James opened the fifth extended engagement of his career at the Apollo Theater in Harlem—the premier showplace in "The Capital of Black America." On October 24, the performance was recorded at Brown's own expense for \$5,700. The tapes were pared down to a thirty-two-minute LP so carelessly edited that the break between the first and second sides came right in the middle of the climactic track, an intense 11-minute version of "Lost Someone." When the album was released in January 1963, King initially pressed just 5,000 copies.

Live at the Apollo was an immediate and unprecedented smash. It made no stylistic concessions to the pop mainstream, simply capturing a typically heated James Brown performance before an enraptured black audience. Yet *Live at the Apollo* rose all the way to number two among *Billboard* Top Pop Albums and hung on the chart for sixty-six weeks—in a year when the top-selling album artists included musical humorist Allan Sherman, folk trio Peter Paul and Mary, and crooner Andy Williams. Reaction among black radio listeners was so intense that disc jockeys would often play both sides of the album in full, with commercial spots inserted in the break.

Forty years later, *Live at the Apollo* was ranked at number twenty-four on *Rolling Stone* magazine's list of the 500 Greatest Albums of All Time. In 2004, it was one of fifty recordings added to the National Recording Registry at the Library of Congress, alongside *Pet Sounds* by the Beach Boys and the Vladimir

Horowitz/Arturo Toscanini recording of Tchaikovsky's *Piano Concerto No. 1, Pp. 23, Bb minor*.

MAKE IT FUNKY

James Brown's music continued to evolve as new personnel came into his band. Among the key additions of the early 1960s were saxophonists Maceo Parker and St. Clair Pinckney, guitarist Jimmy Nolen, and drummers Clyde Stubblefield and John "Jabo" Starks. Stubblefield is often credited with a crucial shift in emphasis from the second and fourth beats (as in traditional blues) to the first and third beats—"The One," as this rhythm dynamic became known in the lexicon of funk. Alfred "Pee Wee" Ellis, a saxophonist and arranger who joined Brown's revue in 1965, explained the importance of Clyde Stubblefield's "New Orleans beat" to Cynthia Rose:

If, in a studio, you said "Play it funky," that could imply almost anything. But "give me a New Orleans beat"—you got exactly what you wanted. And Clyde Stubblefield was just the epitome of this funky drumming. There was a way his beat was broken up—a combination of where the bass and the snare drums hit—which was topsy-turvy from what had been goin' on.¹¹

With the success of *Live at the Apollo*, James felt compelled to relocate to the center of the American music business; with Velma and their children, he moved into a twelve-room Victorian house in Queens, New York. Brown and Ben Bart formed an independent company called Fair Deal Productions. The singer's attorney, Marty Machat, took the position that James's agreement with King had expired and signed him, through Fair Deal, to a lucrative new contract with Smash, a subsidiary of Mercury Records. Syd Nathan promptly filed suit, alleging breach of contract, but Brown recorded prolifically for Smash while the case wended its way through the legal system.

In the summer of 1964, his Smash recording "Out of Sight" became James's tenth Top Ten R&B hit and a number twenty-four Pop entry. On this track, "you can hear the band and me start to move in a whole other direction rhythmically," Brown later wrote. "The horns, the guitar, the vocals, everything was starting to be used to establish all kinds of rhythms at once. . . . I was trying to get every aspect of the production to contribute to the rhythmic patterns."¹²

In October 1964, he appeared at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium in Los Angeles before a predominantly white audience as a part of a star-studded cast assembled to film *The T.A.M.I. [Teen Age Music International] Show*, a concert documentary that was released to theaters the following year. The bill included the Beach Boys, Marvin Gaye, the Supremes, and the Rolling Stones but James pulled out all the stops in an explosion of song and dance.

Motown Records

The Sound of Young America

Berry Gordy Jr. was a former prizefighter and auto plant worker turned songwriter who co-wrote Jackie Wilson's first solo hit "Reet Petite" (1957). Like Stax, Motown Records began as a small family affair: Berry's sisters, Esther, Anna, Gwen, and Loucye, were all early Motown employees, as was his second wife, Raynoma Liles. But in the crossover appeal of its black artists to white audiences, the young company quickly surpassed Stax Records, its Memphis counterpart. The Motown Sound brought rhythm and blues to new heights of polish and sophistication; in the process, Berry Gordy built one of the most important black-owned businesses in American history.

This sound was perfected through a style of record production modeled on a Detroit automobile assembly line. Motown staff writers would compose a song that was then registered with Motown's publishing company, Jobete Music. Motown staff producers worked with the Motown house band in the Motown studio to create a finished instrumental track. Only then would the new song be presented to the Motown artist or group whose vocals would be added to the song. Record production was a seven-day-a-week, nearly around-the-clock operation, conducted in an atmosphere of intense competition—both with other record labels and within Motown itself, where everyone seemed to be striving for Berry Gordy's approval.

Motown Records relocated from Detroit to Los Angeles in 1972, by which time the label's first golden era of explosive growth and unsurpassed creativity was several years in the past. But individual artists like Marvin Gaye and Stevie Wonder were making the most important music of their careers; a youthful group called the Jackson 5, fronted by preternaturally gifted Michael Jackson, had scored seven Top Ten Pop hits (including four consecutive number ones) in three short years. Berry Gordy Jr.—the tough, canny visionary—was still in control, and Motown still had musical history to make.

The Hitmakers of "Hitsville"

The Miracles, the Marvelettes, and Mary Wells were among Motown's leading hit makers in the company's first five years. The Miracles' superb lead singer, William "Smokey" Robinson, was also a gifted songwriter who wrote or co-wrote all of the group's biggest hits from their first R&B number one ("Shop Around," 1960) through their last ("The Tears of a Clown," 1970). In 1961, the Marvelettes' "Please Mr. Postman" became the first single on any Motown-affiliated label (in this case, Tamla) to reach number one on both the R&B and Pop charts. Sweet-voiced Mary Wells had the first number one R&B/Pop single on Motown proper in 1964 with Smokey's lilting song "My Guy."

But Mary Wells and the Marvelettes were pushed aside when the Supremes (Diana Ross, Mary Wilson, and Florence Ballard) broke through with "Where

Did Our Love Go" in the summer of 1964. The trio's unprecedented run of twelve number one Pop hits included "Come See About Me," "Stop! In the Name of Love," and "You Can't Hurry Love"—all written and produced by the team of Eddie Holland, Lamont Dozier, and Eddie's brother Brian Holland. The Supremes became the most successful African American group of the 1960s. Florence Ballard, who left in 1967, later died in poverty at age thirty-two; Diana Ross became a top-selling Motown solo artist and an Oscar-nominated film star (*Lady Sings the Blues*).

Holland-Dozier-Holland's most successful Motown act after the Supremes was the Four Tops. When the producers prodded the Tops' lead vocalist Levi Stubbs into singing at the top of his range, a bland supper-club act was transformed into a powerhouse soul group on the R&B/Pop number one hits "I Can't Help Myself" (1965) and "Reach Out I'll Be There" (1966).

Founded in 1960, the Temptations struggled with personnel changes and mediocre material until their first number one R&B/Pop hit in 1965. "My Girl" is *the* classic "Tempt" song, a Smokey Robinson composition sung by Melvin Franklin, Otis Williams, David Ruffin, Eddie Kendricks, and Paul Williams. The Temptations were legendary for their immaculate stagecraft and luxuriant vocal blend, the leads alternating between Ruffin's grainy tenor and Kendricks's ethereal falsetto. After Dennis Edwards replaced David Ruffin in 1968, the group rebounded with two more number one songs, "I Can't Get Next to You" (1969) and "I Wish It Would Rain" (1971). Among Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductees, Motown is well represented by the Four Tops, the Temptations, Smokey Robinson, the Supremes, Holland-Dozier-Holland, and Berry Gordy Jr.

Andy Schwartz

"[I] hit the stage on fire, just because I was told by so many people not to push my heat button too hard. I mean, I torched those songs. . . . The minute we kicked in with our opening number, 'Out of Sight,' all those white kids in the audience went crazy!" It was, he recounted proudly, "the first time anybody in that neck of the woods had got a dose of real soul, James Brown style."¹³

The T.A.M.I. Show captured on film the so-called cape routine, a key ritual of James's live performance. "In a drama that would play itself out many times during the course of a single concert, Brown, supposedly overcome by torturous emotional and physical cravings, would drop prayerfully to his knees, unable to continue. Only when his seconds, the Famous Flames, draped a velvet cape across his shoulders and led the shambling singer from the stage would he again find the strength to continue."¹⁴

James's career took a curious turn when King obtained a court injunction which dictated that he release *instrumentals* on Smash and *vocals* on King. Mercury was forced to withdraw the *Out of Sight* album and instead put out instrumental sets like *Grits and Soul* and *James Brown Plays New Breed*, all

featuring Brown on organ. Meanwhile, Syd Nathan delved into the King vaults and cobbled together “new” James Brown vocal releases from tapes recorded years earlier.

Stax Records

Soulsville USA

No one can say for certain just when “rhythm and blues” became “soul.” By about 1960, the word “soul” was frequently used in the lexicon of African American music: in 1958, for example, Ray Charles and jazz vibraphonist Milt Jackson released an album titled *Soul Brothers*. Nor is it easy to describe the musical elements that differentiate soul music from earlier styles of R&B. James Brown’s hard-hitting, syncopated rhythms marked one evolutionary change; so did Jerry Butler’s deep, gospel-infused lead vocal with the Impressions on their 1958 ballad hit, “For Your Precious Love.”

Once soul music took hold, small and large record companies in urban centers across the nation began pumping out countless records in the new style. In 1959, Jim Stewart and his older sister Estelle Axton created Stax Records (initially as Satellite Records) in Memphis, Tennessee.

Unusually for its time and place, Stax Records was an integrated operation. Its white partners built their offices and recording studio in a converted movie theater in the heart of Memphis’s black community. The artist roster was virtually all black, but Booker T. and the MGs—the house rhythm section that played on most of the label’s greatest hits—comprised two black musicians (drummer Al Jackson Jr., keyboards player Booker T. Jones) and two white ones (guitarist Steve Cropper, bassist Donald “Duck” Dunn). Black producer/songwriters like Isaac Hayes and David Porter worked alongside the white recording engineer Ron Capone.

In 1959, Rufus and Carla Thomas provided the fledgling company with its first national hit, “‘Cause I Love You.” Rufus’s daughter Carla became the label’s most popular female artist with such songs as “B-A-B-Y” and “I Like What You’re Doing to Me.” In 1967, she recorded a humorous, funky duet called “Tramp” with Otis Redding, whose music epitomized the Stax sound.

Otis Redding was a classic “down home” soul singer whose gritty voice sounded older than his years, especially on pleading ballads like “I’ve Been Loving You Too Long.” He sang with a pronounced Southern accent, punctuating the lyrics with trademark phrases like “GOT-ta, GOT-ta” and “my-my-my.” Otis wrote or co-wrote many of his best-known songs, including “Respect” (later a career-making hit for Aretha Franklin) and “Pain in My Heart” (which was covered by the Rolling Stones). Redding died at age twenty-six in a plane crash in Madison, Wisconsin, on December 10, 1967, soon after recording an unusual new song. With its prominent acoustic guitar and

surf sound effects, "(Sittin' on) the Dock of the Bay" was a striking but wholly natural departure from Redding's usual down-home style. Released posthumously, it became his first and only number one hit (on both the Pop and R&B charts) and won two Grammy Awards.

After Otis Redding's death, soul-blues man Johnnie Taylor brought Stax back to the top of the charts in 1968 with "Who's Making Love" (number one R&B/number five Pop). The Staples Singers' blend of social consciousness and funky gospel fervor on "I'll Take You There" and "Respect Yourself" made them one of the most popular R&B groups of the early Seventies.

Sam and Dave and Isaac Hayes

Sam Moore and David Prater Jr., known as Sam and Dave, recorded some of the most enduring songs in the Stax catalog: "Hold On, I'm Coming," "Soul Man," "I Thank You." These discs were written and produced by Isaac Hayes and David Porter—a top Stax production team until 1969, when Isaac's *Hot Buttered Soul* album propelled him into a hugely successful solo career as soul music's first "underground" artist. With some tracks running as long as eighteen minutes, *Hot Buttered Soul* became the first Stax album to sell over one million copies.

"Up to this point," wrote Stax historian Rob Bowman, "virtually everyone in the record industry simply assumed that the black audience was neither economically equipped nor aesthetically interested in purchasing LPs in large numbers . . . *Hot Buttered Soul* unquestionably proved that black artists could sell LPs, and singlehandedly revolutionized the notion of the length and musical palette appropriate for black artists" (p. 184). In 1971, Hayes's Stax soundtrack for the Gopalon parks film *Shaft* shot to number one, and its proto-disco title song won an Academy Award—the first ever earned by an African American composer.

Today, the Stax Museum of American Soul Music commemorates the label's historic achievements. Isaac Hayes, Otis Redding, Sam and Dave, Booker T. and the MGs, and Jim Stewart all have been inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

A. S.

A BRAND NEW BAG

The year of the Beatles' American breakthrough, 1964, visited setbacks and tragedy upon a number of James's fellow soul stars. His friend and former King Records label mate, Little Willie John, was charged with assault in Miami; he died in a Washington State prison in 1968. In October, Ray Charles was arrested for possession of marijuana and heroin in Boston. In December, Sam Cooke was shot and killed by a motel owner in Los Angeles. Jackie Wilson did not have one Top Ten R&B hit in 1964; Solomon Burke had several,

mostly sung in a smooth ballad style. Wilson Pickett was between record contracts and Otis Redding had not yet emerged as a national star from his Southern base.

All of these circumstances reinforced James Brown's position as the pre-eminent soul singer of the day. He criss-crossed the continent at the head of a troupe that now numbered nearly two dozen musicians and vocalists. When James's musical career began, the conditions of his parole prohibited him from remaining within the Augusta city limits for more than twenty-four hours. Now he could, by his insistence on playing to mixed audiences, effectively integrate first the Macon City Auditorium and then Bell Auditorium in Augusta—months before President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act into law on July 2, 1964.

Under a renegotiated contract with King, James was releasing a new single every few weeks. Two of these—"Papa's Got a Brand New Bag" and "It's a Man's Man's Man's World"—were among the best-selling and most influential songs of his entire career.

"Papa's Got a Brand New Bag" is a blues in form but with a sound far removed from the deliberate, Mississippi-bred style of Muddy Waters or Jimmy Reed. Brown's brusque vocal rides a taut, hard-hitting beat as he name-checks various dance crazes like the twist, the jerk, and the boomerang. At the end of each verse, everything drops away for a few seconds of jazzy chicken-scratch chording by guitarist Jimmy Nolen and a blast of horns, signaling a repeat of the chord sequence. Like another world changing hit from the summer of 1965, Bob Dylan's "Like a Rolling Stone," "Papa" feels like it could go on for a very long time. In fact, the complete original recording is over seven minutes in length: King's two-minute single edit was only part one of a three-part track.

"Papa" became the first James Brown single to reach the Top Ten of the *Billboard* Hot 100 and held the R&B number one position for eight weeks; it spawned a best-selling album of the same title that reached number two R&B and number twenty-six Pop. In 1999, "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag" was given a Grammy Hall of Fame Award as a recording "of lasting qualitative or historical significance."

"It's a Man's Man's Man's World" was the stylistic opposite, a slow minor-key ballad co-written by Brown and songwriter Betty Jean Newsome. James had produced an earlier version of the song for Tammi Terrell, a singer with his touring revue; it passed unnoticed when released under the title "I Cried." But Brown's own rendition is a moody masterpiece, with dark clouds of orchestration shadowing his lead vocal and the almost inaudible rhythm section. His tormented delivery, with its dramatic sobs and shouts, infused the lyrics with deeper, more universal emotions. Perhaps the depiction of "a man's world" that "would be nothing without a woman or a girl" reflected the pain of James's breakup with Velma, from whom he separated in 1964 (they divorced in 1969).

Released in April 1966, “It’s a Man’s Man’s Man’s World” topped the R&B chart and cracked the Pop Top Ten, peaking at number eight. The chord sequence and melody of “Fallin’,” Alicia Keys’s massive Grammy Award–winning hit of 2001, are startlingly similar to James’s song—even though “Fallin’” is credited only to Keys.

BLACK AND PROUD

Brown enjoyed his greatest crossover success in the period 1967–68, when three of his number one R&B hits all reached the Pop Top Ten. “Cold Sweat” and “I Got the Feelin’” were funk masterpieces, but “Say It Loud – I’m Black and I’m Proud” was that and something more. The song was released in September 1968, a year in which the United States was rocked by political assassinations, the Tet offensive in South Vietnam, widespread protests against the Vietnam War, and the violence that erupted during the Democratic National Convention in Chicago.

On April 4, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee. The next night, Brown was scheduled to headline Boston Garden in Boston, Massachusetts. At first, Mayor Kevin White wanted to cancel the show. Instead, a plan was formulated to broadcast the show live over Boston’s public television station WGBH. A few thousand ticket-holders showed up that night; on stage, James paused several times in the course of his show to speak to the audience, cooling tempers and heading off confrontations between young blacks and the police stationed inside the arena. His words were heard by a much larger audience that had stayed home to watch the show for free—and although civil disturbances broke out that night in nearly 100 cities across the nation, Boston remained calm.

In June, James flew overseas to entertain U.S. troops in Korea and Vietnam—an opportunity he’d been denied, despite his repeated requests to the USO, until Vice President Hubert Humphrey interceded on the singer’s behalf. Brown and his band (stripped down to just five musicians for the trip) often played several shows in a day; they traveled in military helicopters that came under enemy fire on several frightening occasions.

James returned to the United States and in August recorded “Say It Loud” in Los Angeles. For the session, he recruited an amateur chorus of schoolchildren and adults to chant the title phrase. His lead vocal is quite literally a “rap,” a string of spoken couplets, while the horn section and an unforgettable bass line provide the melodic content.

“Say It Loud—I’m Black and I’m Proud” became a rallying cry and a powerful expression of self-affirmation. Almost overnight, it seemed, terms like “colored” and “Negro” fell out of the African American lexicon. Through the expressive power of this song and its constant airing on black radio, James Brown “named an entire people: *Black* Americans,”¹⁵ wrote journalist

Glen Ford, whose first full-time radio news job was on WRDW Augusta, one of three radio stations owned by Brown in the late 1960s.

“The phenomenon built upon, but was more far-reaching than, Stokely Carmichael’s popularization of ‘Black Power’ two years earlier. Carmichael’s slogan called for—demanded—power for Black people. But James Brown’s anthem actually empowered ordinary Black folks to signal to their leaders and oppressors—the whole world, in fact—the fundamental terms of any dialogue: how they were to be addressed.”¹⁶

Brown’s politics were complicated, contradictory, and rooted in personal experience. He was a member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. In the summer of 1966, he performed in Tupelo, Mississippi, in support of James Meredith, who’d been shot in the back while making his March Against Fear from Memphis, Tennessee, to Jackson, Mississippi. But racial pride didn’t prevent James from hiring white musicians or working with white managers and agents. Later in life, he even spoke of George Wallace and Lester Maddox with admiration and forgiveness despite the fact that both men had bitterly opposed the civil rights movement when they served as the governors of, respectively, Alabama and Georgia.

The title of a 2006 book by business author Tyrone L. Cypress—*Say It Loud . . . I Sell and I’m Proud*—may have been a crude manipulation of the song’s true historical meaning. But it was also consistent with the recurring theme of black capitalist uplift that ran through Brown’s worldview and public rhetoric. For proof that America was indeed a land of opportunity in which hard work and determination could pay off beyond anyone’s wildest dreams, James Brown needed to look no further than the nearest mirror. His economic philosophy might have been summed up by the title of his number three R&B/number twenty Pop hit of 1969: “I Don’t Want Nobody to Give Me Nothing (Open up the Door, I’ll Get It Myself).”

In a real-life demonstration of the song’s credo, Brown faced down a local campaign to prevent his realtor from closing on a large house that the singer intended to purchase in Walton Way, an upscale white section of Augusta. In October 1969, following his divorce from Velma, James married Deidre “Deedee” Jenkins and moved into the new home with his new wife who later gave birth to their daughters Deanna and Yamma.

LARGE AND IN CHARGE

Republican President Richard Nixon “made Brown feel he was a key example of black capitalism at work, which appealed to the singer’s gigantic ego,” wrote Nelson George. “Brown didn’t understand the nuances of Nixon’s plan—reach out to showcase some black business efforts while dismantling [Lyndon] Johnson’s Great Society programs, which for all their reputed mismanagement had helped a generation of blacks begin the process of upward mobility.”¹⁷

James endorsed Nixon in his 1972 re-election campaign—one of the few black entertainers to do so, besides Lionel Hampton and Sammy Davis Jr. In May 1973, during a return engagement at the Apollo Theater, black demonstrators picketed the theater with signs that read “James Brown, Nixon Clown” and “Get That Clown Out of Town.”

James was a temperamental and often vindictive employer of musicians and other personnel. Underlying nearly all his actions was, as Arthur Kempton noted, “his conviction that every inch of his way up had been bought and paid for by his own unreasonably hard effort”¹⁸ as well as “the classic Napoleonic little man’s disposition to take any subordinate’s challenge as a towering affront.”¹⁹

When trombonist Fred Wesley Jr. joined James’s organization in early 1968, he was grateful to receive a salary of \$350 per week regardless of whether “Mr. Brown” (as he demanded to be addressed by everyone, at all times) was working or not. Wesley soon found out that this system was stacked in favor of the boss, who regularly worked 300 days of the year. The same weekly salary could cover multiple shows in the same venue or gigs in two cities in the same day; the musicians received nothing extra for recording sessions or television appearances. The payroll remained at about \$6,000 a week, a paltry sum given Brown’s earning power, “and he acted like he didn’t want to give you that.”²⁰

In addition, band members were forced to endure “horror rehearsals” during which James would harangue and insult them for hours on end. He also imposed fines for on-stage offenses ranging from wrong notes to unshined shoes. Fred felt deeply that such manipulation was “unnecessary to the creation of an act as exciting as the James Brown Show. But, on the real side, there has never been a show that exciting, that tight, that completely entertaining. There also has never been a man so dedicated, so determined, so focused.”²¹

In 1970, just hours before a show in Columbus, Georgia, the musicians threatened to quit unless Brown promised to change his ways. Instead, he summarily fired most of the band including Maceo Parker, Clyde Stubblefield, and Jabo Starks. James then dispatched his Lear jet to Cincinnati to pick up a local group called the Pacesetters, led by eighteen-year-old William “Bootsy” Collins on bass and his brother Phelps “Catfish” Collins on guitar. They arrived in Columbus, were driven directly to the venue, and carried their equipment on stage as the other musicians were removing their own. Despite a few hours’ delay, the James Brown Show went on as scheduled.

James changed the Pacesetters’ name to the JBs. It was this group—later rejoined by Parker, Starks, and Fred Wesley Jr.—that provided the backing for many of his best and biggest funk hits of the Seventies. This series of inspired singles included “Get Up—I Feel Like Being Like a Sex Machine,” “Super Bad,” “I’m a Greedy Man,” “Soul Power,” and “Get On the Good Foot—Part 1.” In 1974 alone, James scored three R&B number one hits with “The Payback—Part 1,” “My Thang,” and “Papa Don’t Take No Mess—Part 1.”

The relentless repetition of beats, riffs, and vocal phrases, over tracks that (in their album versions) sometimes ran for ten minutes or more, was not a drawback but an essential element of the James Brown sound. The individual songs seemed to form a non-stop and continuously evolving jam, with the leader verbally cuing one of the tightest and most versatile bands in all of popular music through the chord changes, horn solos, and drum breaks.

After nearly twenty years on the road, James remained a galvanizing live performer whose volcanic intensity and spontaneous eruptions could provoke near-hysterical reaction from audiences throughout Europe, Africa, and North America. In 1970, at a huge outdoor sports arena in Dakar, Senegal, “James demonstrated his endurance . . . by jumping off the ten-foot-high stage and running a lap around the stadium, wearing his ‘Please, Please, Please’ robe, after singing and dancing for two hours.”²² In Lagos, Nigeria, James communed with Nigerian superstar Fela Kuti. In the fall of 1974, the singer performed in Kinshasa, Zaire, as part of an African American music festival attached to the heavyweight title fight between Muhammad Ali and George Foreman.

Syd Nathan, the founder of King Records, died March 5, 1968, and in October his company was sold to Starday Records of Nashville. Starday itself was then sold to Lin Broadcasting, which sold James Brown’s contract and catalog to Polydor Records of Germany in July 1971. James was a vital addition to the Polydor roster as the company sought to establish itself in the all-important U.S. market. In addition to Brown’s own unending flow of singles and albums (including the two-LP sets *Revolution of the Mind*, *The Payback*, and *Get On the Good Foot*), he founded a new label, People Records, to distribute his productions of other artists: Hank Ballard, Bobby Byrd, Lyn Collins, and assorted instrumental configurations of the JBs.

TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS

In his off-stage life, however, the singer was under increasing personal strain. Beginning in 1968, he became embroiled in protracted disputes with the IRS, which claimed that he owed millions in back taxes. Eventually, Brown lost ownership of his three radio stations, his two private planes, and even his Augusta home to the agency. At times, he felt certain he was under government surveillance.

In August 1973, James’s eldest son Teddy, age nineteen, was killed in a car accident in upstate New York, leaving his father “on my knees with grief.” In his darkest moments, Teddy’s death felt like “a kind of punishment for me that I could never be pardoned or paroled from, or a sin I could never properly atone for.”²³ His marriage to Deedee began to disintegrate, although they were not legally divorced until 1981.

But the greatest threat to Brown’s career was the advent of a kind of music—disco—that could never have existed without him. His complex polyrhythms

were smoothed out into one metronomic dance beat; his jazzy horn riffs were replaced by sweeping string arrangements. In general, the new style was more adaptable to the melodic voices of female singers like Donna Summer and vocal groups such as the O'Jays. James derided disco as "a very small part of funk, like a vamp. The difference is that in funk you dig into a groove, you don't stay on the surface. Disco stayed on the surface."²⁴

Competition arose on another front from Parliament-Funkadelic, the extravagant "funk mob" led by George Clinton and featuring such former JBs as Bootsy Collins and Fred Wesley Jr. P-Funk's sprawling, wildly costumed live shows were filling the sports arenas and municipal auditoriums that had been Brown's live domain a few years earlier. Meanwhile, Stevie Wonder and Marvin Gaye were selling millions of copies of their progressive soul masterpieces like *Talking Book* and *What's Going On*. In contrast, James's albums seemed to be assembled from a stockpile of recordings while he was on tour or otherwise engaged; the paintings that adorned some of his LP covers had the weirdly sincere look of what later became known as "outsider art." In the course of his career, Brown placed forty-nine releases on the Billboard Top 200 Albums chart but only one—*The Payback*, from 1974—has been certified gold by the Recording Industry Association of America.

REJUVENATION

Toward the end of the 1970s, the singer began to encounter a new and enthusiastic audience in new wave rock clubs, where hip young whites hailed him as influence and innovator. In 1980, diehard James Brown fans John Belushi and Dan Aykroyd cast him in the role of a singing sanctified preacher in their hit movie *The Blues Brothers* (which also featured appearances by Aretha Franklin and Ray Charles). That same year Brown recorded "Rapp Payback (Where Iz Moses)," one of his best late-career tracks. With his Polydor deal now expired, James licensed the song to T.K. Records, a label run by Henry Stone—the same Miami music entrepreneur who'd picked up "(Do The) Mashed Potatoes (Pt. 1 & 2)" two decades earlier. "Rapp Payback" only reached number forty-five among Billboard R&B Singles but it would be a long time before James Brown again attained even this modest level of chart success.

Two years later, the singer met makeup artist Adrienne Rodriguez on the set of the TV show *Solid Gold*. She moved into James's new South Carolina home a few months later and they were married in 1984. In the same year, Brown released "Unity," a new single and video performed with Afrika Bambaataa—a Bronx DJ and rapper whose position in New York's hip-hop nation was comparable to Brown's role in traditional R&B.

In 1985, James's career was revitalized temporarily by his recording of "Living in America," the theme song from the movie *Rocky IV*. He had no

hand in writing or arranging the song, which others had completed by the time James cut his lead vocal. Nonetheless, “Living in America” went all the way to number four to become the highest-charting Pop hit of his career as well as a number ten R&B entry, and won the Grammy Award for Best Rhythm & Blues Recording.

As the song climbed the Hot 100, James Brown was among the inaugural group of musicians to be inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. He attended the black-tie ceremony at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York on January 23, 1986, and later “spoke of it as the culmination of his career.”²⁵ On the morning of January 28, the space shuttle *Challenger* exploded, killing the seven astronauts on board. Twelve hours later, James’s first headlining appearance at New York’s prestigious Radio City Music Hall began with a solemn invocation offered by Reverend Al Sharpton, the New York political activist who’d become the singer’s close friend and confidant after Teddy Brown’s death. James Brown then went through the motions of his performance in a manner that suggested either deep despair over the *Challenger* disaster or the fogged-in condition of drug use. Rather than a celebration of a triumphant comeback, the Radio City show was a harbinger of worse things to come.

Nonetheless, the *Rocky IV* soundtrack sold over a million copies and led to a new recording contract with Scotti Brothers Records. *Gravity* (1986), produced by pop hit-maker Dan Hartman, was described by critic Robert Christgau as “not a James Brown album—a James Brown–influenced Dan Hartman record, with James Brown on vocals.”²⁶ *I’m Real* (1988) was a more artistically successful collaboration with the producer/performers of New York hip-hop group Full Force. The album yielded Brown’s final number one R&B hit (“I’m Real”) and a number five follow up (“Static”) but only reached number ninety-six on the *Billboard* Pop Albums chart. If contemporary listeners were no longer receptive to new James Brown songs, perhaps it was because *old* James Brown songs were saturating the radio and MTV airwaves in the form of JB samples on innumerable rap hits.

James Brown: The Godfather of Soul, the first and best of the singer’s two memoirs, appeared in 1986. Even if some of the reconstructed conversations didn’t ring true, Brown’s capacious memory created a richly detailed narrative that blended personal history with philosophical musings on poverty, politics, racism, marriage, and stardom.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Financial pressures, career decline, marital strife, and drug use all came to a head for James Brown in 1988. He was arrested repeatedly on charges ranging from leaving the scene of an accident to domestic violence involving Adrienne. In September, attendees at an insurance seminar in Augusta were confronted by a shotgun-wielding James Brown who demanded to know if

anyone had used his office's private restroom on the same floor. He then fled the building and a high-speed police chase ensued, back and forth across the Georgia–South Carolina state line. James's arrest resulted in multiple charges including assault on a police officer, possession of the animal tranquilizer PCP, and carrying an unlicensed pistol.

The singer later insisted that "I never did anything the police said I did. It was simply a vengeance sentence, made worse by my celebrity. Because I was a famous black performer, busted roadside in the South, I had to pay the price."²⁷ Refusing to plead guilty, Brown was sentenced to a total of six years but served only fifteen months in a South Carolina prison. Even as he protested his innocence, James admitted that his incarceration was "a much-needed break from the crazy merry-go-round of booze and drugs. . . . I was tired, my resistance was low, and I needed a place to get myself together."²⁸

After ten more months in a work-release program, Brown was paroled in February 1991. (Later the singer was arrested a few more times—for drug possession and domestic violence—but never re-incarcerated.) In June, he returned to public performance with a show at the Wiltern Theater in Los Angeles. Still on board were such longtime allies as manager Charles Bobbitt and emcee Danny Ray, whose immortal line "Are you ready for star time?" had kicked off the first *Live at the Apollo* in 1963. The James Brown Show was now a slicker, more Las Vegas–style affair that incorporated, among other bits of razzle-dazzle, a troupe of female singer-dancers. One of them, Tomi Rae Hynie, became the fourth Mrs. James Brown—and the mother of his son, James Brown II—after Adrienne Rodriguez died in 1996 while undergoing cosmetic surgery.

Novelist Jonathan Lethem witnessed the spectacle in the course of writing a lengthy, revealing, and often hilarious profile of the artist for *Rolling Stone* magazine. A James Brown performance, he wrote, is

the ritual celebration of an enshrined historical victory, a battle won long ago, against forces difficult to name—funklessness?—yet whose vanquishing seems to have been so utterly crucial that it requires incessant restaging in a triumphalist ceremony. The show exists on a continuum, the link between ebullient big-band "clown" jazz showmen like Cab Calloway and Louis Jordan and the pornographic parade of a full-bore Prince concert.²⁹

In 1991, James's recording career was surveyed on *Star Time*, a carefully compiled and critically acclaimed four-CD box set; new albums such as *Universal James* (1992) and a fourth *Live at the Apollo* set (1995) came and went without much media attention or commercial impact. But at this point—forty-five years after "Please, Please, Please" first hit the charts—it really didn't matter. A Kennedy Center honoree, the winner of a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award, with his own star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, the ragged boy from Twiggs Street was now an icon of global pop culture—and the show would go on. "We could work for a hundred years," one member of his Soul

Generals band told Jonathan Lethem. “Because he’s James Brown. It’s like we’re up there with Bugs Bunny, Mickey Mouse. There’s no other comparison.”³⁰

When not on the road, the singer—diabetic and in remission after a bout with prostate cancer—retreated to his home in Beech Island, South Carolina. It was just across the Savannah River from Augusta, where Ninth Street was now James Brown Boulevard and where the civic center was renamed the James Brown Arena in August 2006.

FINAL DAYS

Brown’s final tour was a two-week trek across Eastern Europe that included a private fiftieth birthday party in Moscow (the other “entertainment” was Jennifer Lopez). The concluding show, in Croatia, was the last he ever played with his own band. The musicians flew home to the United States but James traveled to London. On November 14, 2006, he was honored by the U.K. Music Hall of Fame in a televised ceremony; backed by a stage band, he sang “I Got You (I Feel Good).” Four decades earlier, in 1965, the song had topped the Billboard R&B Singles chart for straight six weeks. No one could have predicted that it would be James Brown’s last live performance.

On the Friday before Christmas, James Brown participated in his fifteenth annual holiday toy giveaway, at the Imperial Theater in Atlanta, Georgia. On Sunday, he was admitted to Emory Crawford Long Hospital in Atlanta with a diagnosis of pneumonia. A show in Connecticut was canceled but the singer told associates that he looked forward to performing at B.B. King’s Club in New York on New Year’s Eve, as he’d done annually for several years. At 1:45 A.M. on December 25, 2006, James Brown died of congestive heart failure.

LEGACY

The news of James Brown’s death prompted a flood of tributes from his contemporaries and admirers. Soul queen Aretha Franklin said, “He was an original, [like] a Rembrandt or a Picasso.”³¹ “For oppressed people,” rap star Common declared, Brown’s music “was the light at the end of the tunnel.”³² In the *Village Voice*, writer/musician Greg Tate hailed James Brown as “the embodiment of all the working-class African blood that got us through . . . all our collective love, joy, ingenuity, and indefatigability, all our spirited and spiritual survivalist complexity, all our freedom jazz dance. . . . In a nutshell, JB was our grand black unifier.”³³

At a time when even such soul music pioneers as Ray Charles were moving toward a smoother, more pop-oriented sound, James Brown brought American black music back to its African-derived polyrhythmic roots even as he pushed it forward into the future. Although he never scored a number one Pop hit, Brown is one of an elite group of artists to have placed a song in the

Top Ten of the *Billboard* Hot 100 and/or Top R&B Singles chart in each of four decades from the 1950s through the 1980s. He holds the *Billboard* R&B Singles record for Most Chart Hits (118), Most Top 40 Hits (100), Most Top Ten Hits (60), and Most Crossover Hits (88), that is, songs that “crossed over” from the R&B chart to the Hot 100.

Traces of James Brown’s sound can be heard in the music of Sly and the Family Stone, Talking Heads, Parliament-Funkadelic, Fela Ransome-Kuti, Miles Davis, and Public Enemy, to name but a few. Hip-hop producers and MCs have sampled his recordings countless times, creating new contemporary hits from his classic beats, horn lines, and vocal refrains.

“Funky Drummer,” one of Brown’s lesser hit singles from 1970, contains a drum break played by Clyde Stubblefield that is probably the most sampled beat in hip-hop history. It has been used in songs by A Tribe Called Quest, the Beastie Boys, George Michael, Public Enemy, and Sinéad O’Connor, among others. Additional James Brown samples were employed by Biz Markie on “Vapors” (“Papa Don’t Take No Mess”), by Gang Starr on “Words I Manifest” (“Bring It Up”), and by Rob Base and D.J. E-Z Rock on “It Takes Two,” which sampled James’s production of “Think (About It)” by Lyn Collins.

“He was dramatic to the end—dying on Christmas Day,” the Reverend Jesse Jackson told the Associated Press. “Almost a dramatic, poetic moment. He’ll be all over the news, all over the world today. He would have it no other way.”³⁴

TIMELINE

May 3, 1933

James Brown is born in Barnwell, South Carolina. He is raised in poverty in Augusta, Georgia, forty miles away.

1949

At age sixteen, Brown is convicted on four counts of breaking and entering (into cars) and sentenced to a term of eight to sixteen years in a Georgia state penitentiary. The sentence is later reduced and James is transferred to the Alto Reform School in Toccoa, Georgia.

June 14, 1952

Brown is paroled and remains in Toccoa, where he sings with the Gospel Starlighters, a vocal quartet led by his friend Bobby Byrd.

June 19, 1953

James Brown and Velma Warren are married in Toccoa. The couple will have three sons: Teddy, Terry, and Larry.

November 1, 1955

As lead singer of the Famous Flames, a secular vocal group, Brown records the original version of his song “Please, Please, Please” at radio station WIBB in Macon, Georgia. The song receives considerable regional airplay.

January 23, 1956

Producer and A&R man Ralph Bass travels to Macon to sign James Brown to King Records.

February 4, 1956

James Brown and the Famous Flames re-record “Please, Please, Please” at King/Federal studios in Cincinnati.

March 3, 1956

“Please, Please, Please” is released as the group’s debut single on Federal Records, a King subsidiary.

April 11, 1956

“Please, Please, Please” by James Brown and the Famous Flames reaches number six on the *Billboard* R&B Singles chart. The single sells over one million copies.

April 1957

The original Famous Flames disband when nine follow-up singles fail to make the charts.

November 10, 1958

“Try Me” by James Brown enters the *Billboard* R&B Singles chart and eventually becomes the best-selling R&B single of 1958. It is the first of the singer’s seventeen R&B number one hits, his first song to make the Hot 100 (at number forty-eight), and his second million-seller.

October 24, 1962

Using \$5,700 of his own funds, Brown records his live performance at New York’s Apollo Theater.

June 15, 1963

James Brown hits number eighteen with “Prisoner of Love,” the peak Hot 100 listing of his career thus far.

June 30, 1963

James Brown’s *Live at the Apollo* is released and reaches number two on the *Billboard* Pop Albums chart. It becomes the most successful LP ever released on the King label.

September 1963

With manager Ben Bart, Brown forms his first record label, Fair Deal, and a song publishing company, Jim Jam Music.

October 28–29, 1964

The T.A.M.I. Show, a concert documentary, is filmed in Santa Monica, California. It features live performances by James Brown, the Beach Boys, Chuck Berry, the Rolling Stones, and the Supremes.

February 1, 1965

James Brown records “Papa’s Got a Brand New Bag.” Released in July, the song tops the R&B chart for eight weeks and reaches number eight on the Hot 100—the singer’s first Top Ten Pop hit.

March 15, 1966

“Papa’s Got a Brand New Bag” wins the award for Best New R&B Recording in the eighth annual Grammy Awards.

May 1966

The singer makes his prime-time network TV debut, appearing on *The Ed Sullivan Show*.

June 4, 1966

James Brown's number one R&B hit, the orchestrated ballad "It's a Man's Man's Man's World," peaks at number eight on the Hot 100.

August 1967

Alfred (Pee Wee) Ellis joins the James Brown Show as musical director. As one of Brown's chief collaborators, Ellis is crucial to the singer's transition from gospel-influenced R&B to a harder-edged and more dynamic funk sound.

April 5, 1968

After Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is assassinated in Memphis, James Brown appears on WGBH-TV in Boston to appeal for calm in the streets and headlines that night at Boston Garden.

September 14, 1968

"Say It Loud – I'm Black and I'm Proud (Pt. 1)" enters the *Billboard* R&B Singles chart. It becomes Brown's seventh number one R&B hit and reaches number ten on the Hot 100.

July 23, 1969

The City of Los Angeles declares James Brown Day in honor of his sold-out show at the Great Western Forum in Inglewood. When Mayor Sam Yorty arrives late to the ceremony, Brown walks out.

July 1, 1971

James Brown's King Records contract and back catalog of master recordings are sold to Polydor Records. He continues to record for Polydor for the next decade.

August 12, 1972

"Get On the Good Foot" enters the R&B chart and soon reaches number one (for four weeks) and number eighteen Pop. It is Brown's first single to be certified gold for sales of more than one million copies by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA).

January 5, 1974

The Payback debuts on the *Billboard* album chart. The most successful of James Brown's 1970s LPs, it becomes the only album of his career to be RIAA-certified gold for sales of more than 500,000 copies.

September 1, 1974

Brown performs at a music festival in Kinshasa, Zaire, staged in tandem with the Muhammad Ali/George Foreman heavyweight championship fight.

June 1, 1980

James Brown appears with stars John Belushi and Dan Aykroyd in the John Landis film *The Blues Brothers*.

January 11, 1986

"Living in America," the theme song from the movie *Rocky IV* reaches number four on the *Billboard* Hot 100 and number ten R&B. The song becomes James Brown's highest-charting Pop hit and wins the Grammy Award for Best Rhythm & Blues Recording.

January 23, 1986

James Brown is inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame during the organization's first induction ceremony, held at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York City.

July 23, 1988

“Static” enters the *Billboard* R&B Singles chart. Peaking at number five, it becomes James Brown’s final Top Ten R&B hit.

December 15, 1988

In South Carolina, James Brown is sentenced to a six-year prison term on charges of assaulting a police officer, drug possession, and carrying an unlicensed handgun.

February 27, 1991

Brown leaves prison on parole after serving fifteen months and spends the next ten months in a work-release program.

May 7, 1991

Star Time, a four-CD box set surveying the singer’s career, is released on Polydor/Universal.

February 25, 1992

The National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (NARAS) presents James Brown with a Lifetime Achievement Award during the thirty-fourth annual Grammy Awards.

February 25, 1993

MC Hammer presents James Brown with a Lifetime Achievement Award at the fourth annual Rhythm & Blues Foundation Pioneer Awards.

December 1, 2003

Brown is honored at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC.

November 14, 2006

In London, James Brown performs “I Got You (I Feel Good)” on the telecast of the U.K. Music Hall of Fame Awards—his final live performance.

December 25, 2006

After being admitted with a diagnosis of pneumonia, James Brown dies of congestive heart failure at Emory Crawford Long Hospital in Atlanta.

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Star Time (four-CD box set spanning James Brown’s career)

Roots of a Revolution (two CDs; covers 1956–64)

Foundations of Funk: A Brand New Bag, 1964–1969 (two CDs)

Funk Power 1970: A Brand New Thang

Make It Funky—The Big Payback: 1971–1975 (two CDs)

Dead on the Heavy Funk, 1975–1983 (two CDs)

Messin’ with the Blues (two CDs)

Live at the Apollo

Say It Live and Loud: Live in Dallas 08.26.68

Soul Pride: The Instrumentals (1960–69) (two CDs)

Funky Good Time: The Anthology (two CDs; covers 1970–76)

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Courtesy of Photofest.

The Beatles

Scott Schinder

THE FOUR AND ONLY

It's nearly impossible to overstate the magnitude of the Beatles' influence—not just on music, but upon virtually every aspect of popular culture in the years since the band's worldwide breakthrough in 1964. In their initial incarnation as cheerful, wisecracking mop-tops, the Fab Four revolutionized the sound, style, and attitude of popular music and opened rock and roll's doors to a tidal wave of British rock acts.

Their initial impact would have been enough to establish the Beatles as one of their era's most influential cultural forces, but they didn't stop there. Although their initial style was a highly original, irresistibly catchy synthesis of early American rock and roll and R&B, the Beatles spent the rest of the

1960s expanding rock's stylistic frontiers, consistently staking out new musical territory on each release. The band's increasingly sophisticated experimentation encompassed a variety of genres, including folk-rock, country, psychedelia, and baroque pop, without sacrificing the effortless mass appeal of their early work. Although they scored their initial success with an unprecedented run of classic hit singles, the Beatles were instrumental in establishing the long-playing album as rock's chief creative medium.

The Searchers: Needles and Pins

In the spring of 1964, the Searchers brought folk-rock to the American Top Twenty with their first hit, "Needles and Pins." But three years later, the group had vanished from the charts. Today, the Searchers—first-rate musicians who never developed as songwriters—are perhaps the most underrated band of the British Invasion.

Three years after guitarist/vocalists John McNally and Mike Pender founded the Searchers in 1959, their lineup stabilized with the addition of Tony Jackson (bass, vocals) and Chris Curtis (drums, vocals). Signed to Pye Records by producer Tony Hatch, the Searchers had their first U.K. number one in the spring of 1963 with a cover of the Drifters' "Sweets for My Sweet."

The next single, "Needles and Pins," released in early 1964, was the group's real breakthrough. The Searchers' ringing electric twelve-string guitar lines and ethereal harmonies propelled the song to number one in the United Kingdom and number thirteen in the United States—and invented the folk-rock sound later advanced and popularized by the Byrds.

Jackie DeShannon's original version of "Needles and Pins" had only reached number eighty-four on the Hot 100 and never charted in the United Kingdom at all. But the Searchers had a persistent knack for reinventing obscure songs, many by female artists: "Don't Throw Your Love Away" (the Shirelles), "Some Day We're Gonna Love Again" (Barbara Lewis), "Bumble Bee" (Lavern Baker), and the beautiful anti-nuclear testing ballad "What Have They Done to the Rain" (Malvina Reynolds). The Searchers' clean-cut look and seasoned professional attitude were also crucial to their early success. As time went on, however, these same qualities made them appear stolid and un-hip.

Tony Jackson, who'd sung lead on "Sweets for My Sweet," didn't take kindly to sharing this key role with Mike Pender (the voice of "Needles and Pins"). He left the group in August 1964 and was replaced by Frank Allen. From behind the drum kit, Chris Curtis became the Searchers' dominant personality until he too left in March 1966. It's difficult to say just what effect these departures had on the Searchers' musical creativity and career momentum. In the end, they proved unable to adapt to rock's post-1967 evolution.

Andy Schwartz

In 1964, the Beatles captured the world's imagination, and carried their public along on a six-year adventure whose artistic developments paralleled the social and cultural changes of those tumultuous years. The group managed to simultaneously be their era's preeminent musical innovators as well as the most popular recording act of their time, and their status remains unchallenged to this day.

Their adventurous experimentalism established the Beatles as pied pipers of the Aquarian age, shepherding rock's maturation from blues-based forms to a more eclectic and self-consciously serious approach. The band members' interest in political and spiritual consciousness influenced many of their listeners to explore those areas, cementing the Beatles' status at the center of the social revolutions of the 1960s. As their music grew more adventurous and experimental, the Beatles' humor and charisma made it easy for mainstream audiences to embrace even their most eccentric experiments.

Although each Beatle was a notable talent in his own right, the band was more than the sum of its parts. Although the bandmates' differences would fuel tension later on, for most of the group's history, the four diverse characters complemented one another brilliantly. As a songwriting team, John Lennon and Paul McCartney maintained levels of craftsmanship and melodic invention that were unprecedented in rock, and their vocal harmonies were equally distinctive.

Upon their arrival in America in February 1964, the Beatles' sound and spirit seemed to hint at a brighter, more enlightened future—a welcome source of positivity for a country still reeling from the assassination of President John F. Kennedy just two months earlier.

The Beatles' initial success attracted outrage and derision from various representatives of public morality, as well as the old-guard pop mainstream that these outsiders would soon make obsolete. Such resistance quickly proved futile; the appeal of the Beatles' music and personalities was too strong to deny. Even adults who typically scorned and dismissed teenage music had to acknowledge the Beatles' substance and spirit, and couldn't help but be charmed by the musicians' effervescent energy and cheeky humor.

Beyond their musical achievements and their influence in such areas as hair length and fashion sense, the Beatles' runaway commercial success played a pivotal role in the music business's growth into a multimillion-dollar industry. By many estimates, the band remains the best-selling recording act of all time, and the Beatles catalog continues to spin massive sales, captivating new generations of listeners.

BIRTH OF THE FAB

The basic facts of the Beatles' history have been retold so many times that they have attained mythic status. But the story remains a profoundly compelling

one, and the band's achievements are no less powerful for their familiarity. By the time the world at large had heard of the Beatles, the core of the band had already been a performing unit for several years, honing its musical chemistry and songwriting craft far from the mainstream spotlight.

John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison, and Ringo Starr, like the rest of the generation of British rock musicians who would rise to prominence in the 1960s, grew up in an England still recovering from the devastating social and economic effects of World War II. England in the 1950s was still largely a socially and culturally conservative society; that description certainly applied to Liverpool, the Merseyside port town where the future Beatles grew up in largely working-class surroundings. During the war, the area had been hit by Nazi air raids, killing 2,500 people and damaging nearly half of the area's homes.

So it's not surprising that the early stirrings of American rock and roll captured the imagination of British kids, to whom the music represented a vibrant alternative to the grey everyday reality of British life. While Elvis Presley, Buddy Holly, Bill Haley, Eddie Cochran, Little Richard, Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, and Gene Vincent became major stars in Britain in the late 1950s, the United Kingdom failed to produce much credible homegrown rock and roll during those years. Most British rockers in those years were pale approximations of their Stateside counterparts, with only a handful—for example, dreamy but edgy Billy Fury, pirate-garbed Johnny Kidd, and Cliff Richard, whose backup band the Shadows was England's first notable English instrumental rock and roll combo—making remotely credible music.

Liverpool teens John Lennon and Paul McCartney were both committed rock and roll fans, but they first came together to play skiffle, the homemade folk-blues hybrid that had taken the youth of Britain by storm in the late 1950s. Since it was played on such instruments as acoustic guitar, washboard, and homemade tea-chest bass, skiffle was easily accessible to working-class kids who had no access to electric instruments, and the music's simplicity and energy offered an entry point for numerous young musicians who would graduate to rock and roll.

In March 1957, Lennon formed a skiffle group called the Quarrymen, named after Quarry Bank Grammar School, where he was a student. That July, he met Paul McCartney at the Woolton Garden Fête, where the Quarrymen were performing. Although Paul was two years his junior, Lennon was impressed with McCartney's superior guitar abilities, and invited him to join the Quarrymen. The following March, George Harrison—a year younger than McCartney and even more adept on guitar—was invited to join, overcoming Lennon's initial reservations over the fifteen-year-old axman's youth.

Although the Quarrymen's shifting membership included various Lennon pals who drifted in and out of the lineup, the group eventually solidified around the core of Lennon, McCartney, and Harrison and moved toward electric instruments and rock and roll. As their sound evolved, the band went

through a succession of new names—including Johnny and the Moondogs and the Silver Beatles—before settling on the Beatles, the name being a subtle nod to Buddy Holly’s Crickets.

In January 1960, Lennon’s art-college classmate Stuart Sutcliffe—a prodigiously talented painter but a rudimentary musician—joined on bass. The band played with a series of drummers before Pete Best joined that summer. In addition to brooding good looks that would endear Best to local female fans, his mother Mona owned the Casbah Club, a small basement club in Liverpool where the Beatles had often played.

In May 1960, the Beatles (with short-term drummer Tommy Moore) had gotten their first touring experience, playing a series of gigs in Scotland as backup band for British teen-idol singer Johnny Gentle. Later that year, the band traveled to Hamburg, Germany, where manager Allan Williams had gotten them work playing at the Indra, Kaiserkeller, and Top Ten clubs, located on that city’s notorious red-light district, the Reeperbahn.

The extended Hamburg engagement was a punishing one, requiring the Beatles to perform seven nights a week, for six or seven hours per night, entertaining rough-and-tumble crowds that were demanding and often abusive. But the grueling experience proved invaluable in turning the Beatles into a tight, exciting performing unit, and forcing them to expand their repertoire of American rock and roll, R&B, and pop covers. The experience also introduced the musicians to drugs, specifically the amphetamines that they would take to maintain their energy during their endless hours on stage.

The band’s first Hamburg visit was cut short after the underage Harrison was deported for lying about his age to German authorities, and McCartney and Best were sent home after being arrested for starting a small fire in their squalid living quarters.

Despite their scrapes with the law, the five Beatles returned to Hamburg in April 1961. While performing at the Top Ten club, they were hired by Tony Sheridan, an English singer/guitarist who’d achieved popularity in Germany, to back him on a set of recordings for the German Polydor label. During the sessions, producer Bert Kaempfert allowed the Beatles to cut two tracks without Sheridan: a rocked-up take on the 1920s novelty tune “Ain’t She Sweet” and the instrumental “Cry for a Shadow,” which would be the only Beatles tune to credit Harrison and Lennon as co-writers. Although those two tracks were not released at the time, they would be pulled out of mothballs in the wake of the band’s subsequent success.

At the end of the second Hamburg engagement, Stu Sutcliffe chose to quit the band and remain in Hamburg with his new German fiancée, Astrid Kirchherr, intending to pursue his budding career as an artist. Beyond her relationship with Sutcliffe, photographer Kirchherr—one of a group of young local Bohemians who’d become Beatles admirers—is notable for taking some iconic photos of the leather-clad, dangerous-looking early Beatles, and suggesting that the band members trade their slicked-back quiffs for soon-to-be-famous

moptop hairstyles that were adopted by all of the band members except Pete Best.

Sharpened and toughened by their experiences in Hamburg, the Beatles—with McCartney taking over on bass—returned home a changed band. Where they had previously been just another combo on Liverpool’s booming beat scene, they were now one of the hottest acts in town. Their increased local popularity was reflected in the large crowds that turned out for the band’s local performances, including a lunchtime residency at Liverpool’s Cavern Club—a club located in a dank cellar—that quickly became a local institution.

The Beatles returned to Hamburg one more time, for a six-week engagement during the spring of 1962. Upon their arrival, they were informed of Stu Sutcliffe’s death from a brain hemorrhage.

Meanwhile, a rock and roll reworking of the Scottish folk song “My Bonnie,” from the Beatles’ Tony Sheridan sessions, had become a hit in Germany. Although the primitive disc was hardly an appropriate showcase for the Beatles’ rapidly developing talents, it was instrumental in bringing the band to the attention of Brian Epstein. Epstein was manager of the record department at NEMS (North End Music Store), a subsidiary of his family’s furniture store. When a young Beatles fan came into NEMS seeking the “My Bonnie” single, which had not been released in Britain, Epstein was intrigued enough to attend one of the band’s Cavern Club gigs. Shortly thereafter, Epstein signed on as the Beatles’ manager.

Epstein set about fine-tuning his new clients’ image, getting them to trade their leather jackets for stylish tailored suits. Epstein also took advantage of his contacts in the music business, using his status as a prominent retailer to gain access to various record-company executives, most of whom turned him down flat.

Decca Records was interested enough to have the band record an audition session in January 1962. With Decca staffer Mike Smith, the band cut fifteen songs in a one-hour session—a trio of Lennon/McCartney originals, plus a dozen covers drawn from their live set, including material by Chuck Berry, Buddy Holly, Carl Perkins, and the Coasters. Although Decca ultimately passed on the Beatles, the audition tracks, which have circulated on bootleg releases for decades, offer a fascinating glimpse of the band at a transitional stage.

The Hollies: Look Through Any Window

The Hollies proved highly adaptable to the rapidly changing sounds and styles of rock and roll in the 1960s. Graham Nash (vocals, guitar) and Allen Clarke (vocals) were grade-school friends in Manchester who began performing together in the mid-1950s, much influenced by the Everly Brothers. In 1962, they formed the Hollies with bassist Eric Haydock, and later recruited guitarist Tony Hicks—the “bottom third,” with Nash and Clarke, of the group’s trademark vocal harmony—and drummer Bobby Elliot.

The Hollies made an immediate and lasting impact in Britain: After "Stay" reached number eight in January 1964, all but two of the group's singles from 1964–69 reached the U.K. Top Ten. They were less successful in the United States but still scored seven Top Forty hits in the same time period. Significantly, two of their Top Ten songs—"Stop Stop Stop" (1966) and "Carrie-Anne" (1967)—were composed by Graham Nash, Allen Clarke, and Tony Hicks, a team sometimes credited as "L. Ransford." The Hollies' sound progressed rapidly from jumpy beat-group covers of American R&B songs ("Stay," "Just One Look") to a more mature and confident style that blended pure pop with touches of folk-rock and early psychedelia ("I'm Alive," "Look Through Any Window," "Bus Stop," "Pay You Back with Interest").

When Bernie Calvert replaced Eric Haydock in 1966, the Hollies could boast one of the best, most flexible rhythm sections in British pop. But they were typecast as a "singles band" at a time when rock was moving in a more exploratory, album-oriented direction. In 1968, Graham Nash left the Hollies in a dispute over their decision to release an ill-conceived album of Bob Dylan songs. Replaced by Terry Sylvester, he later formed the hugely successful Crosby, Stills and Nash with Stephen Stills and David Crosby.

In 1969 the Hollies released "He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother," a rather ponderous orchestrated ballad (with an uncredited Elton John on piano) that became their first U.S. Top Ten hit in two years. In 1972, the group suddenly came on like Manchester's answer to Creedence Clearwater Revival with the bluesy guitar rocker "Long Cool Woman (In a Black Dress)." The Hollies' highest-charting American hit, it peaked at number two.

In 1974, another romantic ballad "The Air That I Breathe" breached the Top Ten—the group's last hurrah as contemporary hit makers. But the Hollies' back catalog continues to exert a timeless appeal: "Their longevity is assured," declared the *Guinness Encyclopedia of Popular Music*, "as their expertly crafted, harmonic songs represent some of the greatest music of all mid-1960s pop."

A. S.

Despite multiple rejections, Epstein persisted, and his perseverance paid off when George Martin, producer/A&R for the EMI subsidiary Parlophone, signed the Beatles (after three other EMI execs passed) in mid-1962. Although Martin had little experience with rock and roll, his seasoned studio skills would prove crucial in the Beatles' development as a recording act. His expertise as an arranger, keyboardist, and sonic manipulator would enable the band to execute their most ambitious ideas on record, and Martin would remain a key factor in the Beatles' artistic progression for the remainder of their career.

Martin was adamant in his lack of regard for Pete Best's percussive abilities, and insisted that a session drummer replace him in the studio. Apparently, this was all that was needed for Lennon, McCartney, and Harrison to fire Best

from the band, leaving Epstein to deliver the news. It has been speculated that Best's dismissal was hastened by his bandmates' resentment over his popularity with female fans, or his refusal to adopt the distinctive hairstyle, although a more likely explanation seems to be simple personal incompatibility.

Best's replacement was Ringo Starr, then a member of the popular Liverpool outfit Rory Storm and the Hurricanes, and a longtime friend who'd sat in with the Beatles on several occasions in Hamburg. Beyond Starr's superior drumming, his addition gave the band a fourth strong personality.

By then, Lennon and McCartney had become prolific songwriters, but it was still rare at the time for recording artists to write their own material. Martin initially wanted the Beatles' debut single to be "How Do You Do It?," a lightweight ditty by English tunesmith Mitch Murray. But Martin relented after the Beatles cut a lackluster version of the song, and allowed the band to record the Lennon/McCartney original "Love Me Do" as their debut A-side ("How Do You Do It?" subsequently became a hit for Liverpool's Gerry and the Pacemakers, who were also managed by Epstein and produced by Martin).

Starr had only been a Beatle for a few weeks when the group recorded "Love Me Do" and its B-side, Lennon and McCartney's "P.S. I Love You," in September 1962. Martin was still skeptical about Starr's abilities, so he brought in session drummer Andy White to play on "Love Me Do," with Ringo relegated to tambourine; an alternate take with Ringo on drums would become a U.S. hit eighteen months later. Lennon and McCartney would continue to provide most of the Beatles' material for the rest of its existence, and would continue to share composing credits even after they began writing individually.

The energetic but relatively primitive "Love Me Do" became a minor British hit, peaking at number seventeen in October 1962. The Beatles fared far better with their superior second single "Please Please Me," which reached the number two spot on the British charts early in 1963.

The infectious, insistent "Please Please Me" set off a massive wave of Fan hysteria in Britain. The phenomenon was soon dubbed Beatlemania, with the band regularly performing in front of crowds of screaming, hysterical female fans. The commercial momentum continued through 1963, with four consecutive chart-topping singles: "From Me to You," "She Loves You," "I Want to Hold Your Hand," and "Can't Buy Me Love," all Lennon/McCartney originals.

The Beatles first British LP *Please Please Me*—most of which was recorded in a single day—was released in March 1963. It topped the U.K. album charts for thirty weeks, a feat that confirmed the band's status, not just as England's biggest rock act but as a singular phenomenon with no precedent in the annals of the British entertainment industry. A second album, *With the Beatles*, was released in November, and made it clear that the Beatles' songwriting and musical abilities were progressing at an accelerated pace.

While the Beatles were becoming teen idols in Britain during 1963, they remained largely unknown in America. EMI's U.S. arm, Capitol Records, had first refusal on the Beatles' recordings, but declined to pick up the band's initial output. Instead, the Beatles' early singles were licensed variously to the small independent labels Vee-Jay, Swan, and Tollie. Vee-Jay also released *Introducing the Beatles*, a slightly reworked version of the *Please Please Me* album.

In retrospect, it's hard to think of such classic Beatles singles as "Please Please Me," "From Me to You," and "She Loves You" as flops. But despite some airplay on such influential Top Forty stations as New York's WINS and Chicago's WLS, the Beatles' early non-Capitol U.S. releases received little attention.

The Beatles' Stateside fortunes reversed decisively in late 1963, when Brian Epstein managed to get Ed Sullivan—a savvy talent-spotter who'd seen Beatlemania in action during an overseas visit—to book the band for three appearances on his hugely popular Sunday night TV variety show the following February. Epstein parlayed the promise of this high-profile exposure into a commitment from Capitol to release the band's next single, "I Want to Hold Your Hand," with a massive promotion campaign to prime American audiences for the Beatles' arrival.

On December 7, 1963—two weeks after President John F. Kennedy's assassination—a clip of a Beatles performance was shown on the *CBS Evening News*. The clip inspired a teenager in Washington, D.C., to request a Beatles song from a local radio station. After obtaining an import copy of "I Want to Hold Your Hand," the station began playing the song to overwhelming listener response, prompting Capitol to rush-release the single on December 26. The song took off in New York and quickly spread to other markets, selling a million copies in its first ten days of release. By the end of the month, it was the number one song on the U.S. pop charts.

Beatlemania was a transatlantic phenomenon by February 7, 1964, when a crowd of 4,000 fans turned up at Heathrow Airport to see the Beatles off on their first trip to America. Also on the flight were various photographers, reporters, and seminal American record producer Phil Spector, who'd made a point of booking himself on the same flight. Upon their arrival at the recently renamed Kennedy International Airport, the band was met by 3,000 screaming fans. At an airport press conference, the four musicians' spirited banter disarmed many of the reporters who'd previously dismissed the Beatles as a flash-in-the-pan fad. Later, the band's hotel was overrun by fans and media.

The Beatles' first performance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, broadcast live on February 9, was a landmark event, giving kids across the country their first exposure to the sound that would soon change popular culture forever. Two days later, the band began its first American concert tour at the Washington Coliseum in Washington, D.C.

Capitol Records moved swiftly to capitalize on the buzz by releasing *Meet the Beatles*, an LP comprising recent British singles and tracks from *With the*

Beatles, in early February. *Meet the Beatles* began Capitol's long-standing practice of reworking—and, to many ears, mangling—the band's albums for U.S. release. While their British LPs generally included fourteen songs, Capitol's American editions usually held twelve. Capitol reshuffled and remixed album tracks and added others from British singles and EPs, often with little regard for cohesive sequencing or appropriate packaging. In so doing, the company managed to spin the Beatles' first seven British albums into ten American ones. As a result, the band's American discography often gave a muddled and inaccurate portrayal of their actual artistic progress. (In the CD era, Capitol would reconfigure the Beatles' album catalog to correspond with the original British versions.)

With teenage America now firmly in the grip of Beatlemania, the U.S. labels that had previously released unsuccessful early Beatles singles found themselves with late-blooming hits. The extent of the Beatles' dominance of the American marketplace was demonstrated in the first week of April 1964, when the top five slots of the *Billboard* singles chart were completely occupied by Beatles singles, with "Can't Buy Me Love" at number one, followed by "Twist and Shout," "She Loves You," "I Want to Hold Your Hand," and "Please Please Me." The following week, the Beatles held fourteen positions in *Billboard*'s Top 100.

The market was soon flooded with all manner of products designed to cash in on the Fab Four phenomenon. Other record companies sought to get in on the act by releasing all manner of Beatles-related discs, recycling the band's press interviews and their Tony Sheridan sessions, along with countless Beatles-inspired novelty discs and blatantly deceptive releases hinting falsely at some Beatles connection. Discarded drummer Pete Best found himself with a solo recording deal, and even John's long-estranged father Freddie Lennon got to release his own single.

Meanwhile, the shelves were flooded with all manner of officially sanctioned and unauthorized Beatles-related merchandise, with the band's name and likeness attached to an array of products, from lunchboxes to candy to Beatle wigs.

A more productive result of the Beatles' U.S. breakthrough was rock's British Invasion, as record labels scrambled to sign anything with an accent. Soon the American charts were dominated by English acts, with domestic artists finding it increasingly difficult to gain airplay. Arriving in the Beatles' wake were the Liverpool combos Gerry and the Pacemakers, the Searchers, and Epstein protégés Billy J. Kramer and the Dakotas, whose access to unreleased Lennon/McCartney songs gave them a shortcut to chart success, along with the Rolling Stones, the Dave Clark Five, the Kinks, the Animals, the Hollies, Herman's Hermits, Chad and Jeremy, the Yardbirds, the Zombies, the Who, Donovan, Freddie and the Dreamers, Wayne Fontana and the Mindbenders, Manfred Mann, the Spencer Davis Group, and Peter and Gordon, who scored their biggest hit with the Lennon/McCartney composition "A World Without Love."

The Dave Clark Five: Catch Us If You Can

During a two-year period beginning in February 1964, no British group could top the Beatles for American chart dominance—but the Dave Clark Five (DC5) came close. Drummer Dave Clark formed the London-based group in 1962 with Mike Smith (lead vocals, keyboards), Denny Payton (saxophone, harmonica, vocals), Rick Huxley (bass, vocals), and Lenny Davidson (guitar, vocals).

Clark was a good drummer but an even better businessman. He produced the DC5's records, published their original songs, owned the rights to their master recordings, and managed the band as well. In January 1964, "Glad All Over" by the Dave Clark Five reached number one in the United Kingdom—supplanting the Beatles' "I Want to Hold Your Hand" at the top of the chart—and became the first of the group's *seventeen* American Top Forty hits. In contrast to the melodic, guitar-based sound of most early British rock, "Glad All Over" was a crude but infectious blare with Payton's honking sax, Smith's hoarse lead vocals, and Clark's loudly thumping drums all prominent in the reverb-laden mix.

Throughout 1964-1965, the group dutifully returned to this formula on "Bits and Pieces," "Catch Us If You Can," "Any Way You Want It," and a cover of the Contours' "Do You Love Me" (although the appealing ballad "Because" is among their most-heard songs today). The DC5 made several hugely successful U.S. tours, a surprisingly good dramatic feature film (*Catch Us If You Can* aka *Having a Wild Weekend*), and a record-setting eighteen appearances on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. Musically, however, Clark couldn't keep pace with his former rivals the Beatles (or even the Hollies), and he disbanded the group in the summer of 1970.

A. S.

THEY'RE GONNA PUT ME IN THE MOVIES

Those who continued to dismiss the Beatles as an insubstantial flash in the pan were handily refuted by the band's first feature film, *A Hard Day's Night*, released in the summer of 1964. Based around a fictionalized day in the band's life, the faux cinema vérité comedy cemented the Fab Four's cheeky, breezy image as well as the four Beatles' individual personae, that is, sardonic iconoclast Lennon; sunny diplomat McCartney; thoughtful, dry-witted Harrison; and happy-go-lucky yet melancholy Starr.

A Hard Day's Night had been designed as a low-budget quickie prior to the Beatles' U.S. breakthrough, with the intention of reaching theaters before the band's popularity faded. But its gritty black-and-white immediacy worked in its favor, thanks in large part to the talents of director Richard Lester, who gave the film a kinetic pace that was well suited to the band's energy, and Liverpoolian screenwriter Alun Owen, whose script brilliantly captured the

band's humor and attitude. Owen made excellent use of the Beatles' individual personalities, giving each musician memorable solo scenes that showcased their impressive comic skills. The result was an instant hit with critics and audiences alike.

Beyond its cinematic qualities, *A Hard Day's Night* also featured an album's worth of impressive new songs, including "Can't Buy Me Love," "And I Love Her," "If I Fell," and the film's insistent title song. Many of the tunes featured strong twelve-string guitar leads by Harrison that would soon prove influential on such American folk-rock acts as the Byrds, the Turtles, the Lovin' Spoonful, and the Beau Brummels.

The Beatles returned to the big screen with 1965's *Help!* Again directed by Lester, *Help!* traded its predecessor's documentary-style grit for a globe-trotting comic-book romp that pitted the Fab Four against a fanatical religious cult.

In mid-1964, the Beatles launched their first tour of Australia without Ringo Starr, who'd been sidelined by tonsillitis and was replaced on stage by session drummer Jimmy Nicol. Ringo rejoined in time for the band's subsequent dates in New Zealand. On August 15, the Beatles performed rock's first major stadium concert at New York's Shea Stadium, playing to a crowd of 55,600 fans.

Nineteen sixty-four also saw the publication of Lennon's book *In His Own Write*, a collection of his surreal short stories and line drawings. Lennon's prose reflected his love for absurd puns, nonsensical wordplay, and free association. It would be followed in 1965 by a second volume of Lennon prose, *A Spaniard in the Works*.

The Beatles' growing respectability was further demonstrated in October 1965, when England's Queen Elizabeth II awarded the prestigious Order of the British Empire, popularly known as the MBE, to John, Paul, George, and Ringo. The honor, which was usually bestowed upon military officers and civic leaders, sparked protest among several conservative MBE recipients, who returned their awards in protest.

The Beatles' productivity between 1964 and 1967 was uncanny. Between a series of hectic international tours, the band released a remarkable stream of classic singles and albums. *Beatles for Sale*, *Help!*, *Rubber Soul*, and *Revolver* (and their American counterparts) showed the band consistently raising the musical stakes, exploring new sounds and lyrical subject matter. "I Feel Fine" featured some revolutionary guitar feedback, while the muscular folk-rock tunes "Ticket to Ride" and "Paperback Writer" demonstrated how forceful and creative a guitarist Harrison had become, and "Rain" and "Tomorrow Never Knows" exemplified the band's excursions into studio-manipulated psychedelia.

Lennon, McCartney, and Harrison (who had begun to contribute his own compositions to the band's albums) quickly moved beyond the simple romantic concerns of the band's early songs to explore more complex emotional territory. McCartney's "Yesterday" and "Eleanor Rigby" invoked remorse

and regret, and diverged from the band's musical format to employ melancholy string quartets. Lennon, meanwhile, had begun to write introspective, Dylan-influenced lyrics on such numbers as "Help!," "I'm a Loser," and "You've Got to Hide Your Love Away." By this point, the Beatles' commercial supremacy—and their bond with their audience—was such that their fans enthusiastically went along with the band's experiments, ensuring that each adventurous new release would be a sales smash.

Despite their worldwide popularity, the Beatles still managed to stumble into controversy. When the band toured the Philippines in July 1966, they unintentionally snubbed Imelda Marcos, wife of the country's despotic president Ferdinand Marcos, when Epstein politely declined an invitation to a breakfast reception at the Presidential Palace. The incident resulted in the band being denounced on Philippine television and radio, and losing its police protection. Upon their arrival at the airport to leave the country, the band was attacked by a hostile crowd, and Epstein and road manager Mal Evans were forced by authorities to return the tour's cash receipts before the band and its entourage could leave.

Almost immediately upon the band's return from the Philippines, a comment that Lennon had made in a British interview a few months earlier launched a noisy anti-Beatles backlash in the United States. Lennon had opined that mainstream religion was losing influence, and casually mentioned that the Beatles were "more popular than Jesus now." When news of Lennon's comment reached America's Bible belt, conservative church groups organized mass burnings of Beatles records. The resulting media furor resulted in Lennon apologizing for his remark in a Chicago press conference on the eve of what would be the Beatles' final tour.

Another controversy arose during the summer of 1966 over the cover photograph for the band's U.S.-only album *Yesterday . . . and Today*. The shot depicted the band surrounded by raw meat and dismembered dolls. Capitol manufactured thousands of copies of the original sleeve, but destroyed most of them before releasing the album with a more conventional cover photo. A handful of original copies reached the public nonetheless, making the "butcher cover" (whose imagery has often been interpreted as the band's comment on Capitol's butchery of their albums) one of the most sought-after Beatles collector's items.

Such petty controversies may have contributed to the Beatles' decision to quit touring at the end of their 1966 tour. The choice was borne largely of their frustration at trying to be heard over the screams of their female fans over the primitive public-address systems of the time, as well as their inability to reproduce their increasingly complex and sophisticated studio recordings as a four-piece live band.

At the time, there was widespread speculation that the Beatles were disbanding. The rumors were fueled by the fact that the four musicians spent a post-tour hiatus engaging in separate pursuits, with McCartney writing and

recording (in collaboration with George Martin) the musical score for the English film *The Family Way*, and Lennon making a well-received solo acting debut in Richard Lester's anti-militarist satire *How I Won the War*.

The rumors ended with the February 1967 release of the "Penny Lane"/"Strawberry Fields Forever" single. The disc featured some of the band's most ambitious work yet, venturing into moody Lennon psychedelia on the latter track, and McCartney's bright orchestral pop on the former. The single helped to set the stage for *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, a musical watershed that revolutionized the rock album's status as a creative vehicle. One of the first rock albums to be constructed as a cohesive listening experience from start to finish—as well as the first Beatles LP to be released in its original form in America—*Sgt. Pepper* was a giddy bundle of styles and sounds, self-consciously arty but still full of energy, emotion, and humor.

Loosely built around an imaginary concert by the fictional title ensemble, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* ranged from the candy-colored psychedelia of "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" to the cheery sing-along pop "With a Little Help from My Friends" to the multi-tracked cacophony of "Good Morning Good Morning" to the sentimental balladry of "She's Leaving Home," to the operatic grandiosity of the album-closing "A Day in the Life." The album's cutting-edge recording approach was complemented by some modern takes on antiquarian styles, like McCartney's bucolic music-hall excursion "When I'm Sixty-Four" and Lennon's loopy circus tale "Being for the Benefit of Mr. Kite!," while Harrison's recent fascination with Eastern spirituality and Indian sitar music was reflected on "Within You Without You."

Sgt. Pepper's audacious production was all the more impressive in light of the fact that the band and George Martin were working with four tracks, making the album's adventurous use of overdubbing all the more of a technical milestone.

For many, *Sgt. Pepper* served as an unofficial soundtrack to the Summer of Love, and the Beatles' status as spiritual avatars of the hippie movement was confirmed when they premiered their flower-power anthem "All You Need Is Love" on June 25, 1967, via worldwide TV satellite hook-up as part of the TV special *Our World*. Broadcasting from EMI's Abbey Road Studios, where the band had recorded all of its EMI releases, the Beatles were joined by a chorus of friends including Mick Jagger, Marianne Faithfull, Eric Clapton, and Keith Moon.

The creative highs of 1967 were tainted by Brian Epstein's death of a prescription drug overdose in August at the age of thirty-two. The loss of Epstein's stabilizing influence helped to set the band on a less focused course that would gradually lead to the Beatles' unraveling.

In the wake of Epstein's death, the Beatles' lengthy streak of commercial and artistic successes was broken by their next attempt at filmmaking, *Magical Mystery Tour*. Shot with no script and no director, the hour-long film was a self-indulgent mishmash that received a single BBC broadcast in December

1967, before scathing U.K. reviews caused ABC to cancel a planned U.S. telecast; it would not reach America for nearly a decade. Not surprisingly, *Magical Mystery Tour* was partially redeemed by the new songs that the band recorded for it.

Another Beatles-inspired film, the animated feature *Yellow Submarine*, was far better received in 1968, although the Beatles themselves had little involvement with the project apart from contributing a handful of new songs.

FOUR BITES OF THE APPLE

In the wake of *Sgt. Pepper*, the four Beatles began to splinter somewhat, moving in directions that reflected their individual interests and tastes. But the group spent the early part of 1968 together in Rishikesh, India, studying transcendental meditation with the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, although each of the four would depart the course prior to its completion. The experience led a disillusioned Lennon to write the vitriolic “Sexy Sadie”—originally titled “Maharishi,” until the more reverent Harrison prevailed upon Lennon to rename it.

Upon their return from their Indian retreat, Lennon and McCartney flew to New York to announce the formation of Apple Corps, an idealistic but disastrously impractical attempt to launch an egalitarian entertainment empire. The Beatles’ attempt to build a utopian commercial enterprise and take control of their economic destiny would soon become a financial and logistical nightmare.

One positive result of the band’s trip to India was that they used the time to write a wealth of new material. The songs formed the basis of the two-LP, thirty-song *The Beatles*, commonly known as the White Album for its unadorned cover. In contrast to *Sgt. Pepper*’s densely overdubbed tracks, the White Album was largely a return to spare, guitar-based rock.

The White Album—on which the band graduated to eight-track recording—featured some of the Beatles’ most mature and accomplished songwriting and performances yet, but it sounded less like the work of a cohesive band than of four talented individuals with divergent interests and temperaments.

Lennon’s compositions, including the fatalistic “Yer Blues,” the harrowing “Happiness Is a Warm Gun,” and the psychedelic spoof “Glass Onion,” were noticeably more edgy and personal than his previous work, previewing the direction that he would pursue in his solo career. Lennon’s “Julia” was particularly affecting, evoking his feelings over the his childhood loss of his mother, while the sound collage “Revolution 9” reflected the influence of his new girlfriend, avant-garde artist Yoko Ono (whom he would marry in March 1969). McCartney’s songs on the album alternately showcased him as a romantic balladeer (“I Will”), pop craftsman (“Blackbird”), heavy rocker (“Helter Skelter”), retro revivalist (“Back in the U.S.S.R.”), and campy faux

vaudevillian (“Honey Pie”). Harrison made his presence felt with the epic “While My Guitar Gently Weeps” (with guest Eric Clapton on lead guitar), the languid ballad “Long, Long, Long,” and the withering social commentary “Piggies.” Even Starr, who’d previously stepped forward for the occasional lead vocal, received his first solo songwriting credit with the country-rocker “Don’t Pass Me By.”

Although they yielded much enduring music, the White Album sessions—which also produced the classic non-LP single “Hey Jude”/“Revolution”—saw deep divisions arise within the Beatles. One source of tension was a general feeling that McCartney had been taking too dominant a role in the band’s affairs in Brian Epstein’s absence. Another was the presence of Yoko Ono at most of the sessions. The increasingly prolific Harrison, meanwhile, had grown frustrated with his difficulty in getting the band to record his songs. The situation grew so uncomfortable that the dependable, unassuming Starr walked out at one point, leaving McCartney to handle the drumming on some tracks; the band talked him into returning two weeks later. George Martin and longtime engineer Geoff Emerick also quit the sessions at other points.

Meanwhile, the four Beatles continued to clash over business issues, particularly their choice of a new manager. McCartney wanted to turn the band’s affairs over to Lee Eastman, father of his wife Linda. That suggestion didn’t sit well with the other Beatles, who wanted to hire fearsome New York music-biz vet Allen Klein. After Klein was hired, he initially impressed the band by renegotiating their contract with EMI, winning them the highest royalty rate paid to artists at that time. But Klein’s abrasive style alienated many in the band’s inner circle, as did his severe cost-cutting measures at Apple Corps. Klein’s stewardship of the band’s career would remain controversial, particularly with subsequent allegations of financial irregularities.

In early 1969 the Beatles began working on a new recording project, initially titled *Get Back*. An outgrowth of McCartney’s unsuccessful attempts to push the band to return to live performing, *Get Back* was an effort to recapture the Beatles’ earthy roots and shake the group out of its recent malaise. Accompanied by American keyboardist Billy Preston, the band recorded in an informal live-in-the-studio setting, running through new material as well as classic cover tunes from the band’s early days. The sessions were recorded for a proposed album and filmed for a prospective TV special.

The recording climaxed with the band playing an impromptu set on the roof of Apple’s London headquarters, before being shut down by the police. But the sessions were otherwise marred by unfocused performances and inter-band squabbles, with Harrison quitting for a few days at one point. Not surprisingly, the band was unhappy with the recordings and the project was temporarily shelved.

Despite the negative feelings that surrounded the *Get Back* project, the Beatles managed to rally and wrap their recording career on a high note with their studio swan song *Abbey Road*, recorded in the summer of 1969 and

released that September. Remarkably enough, the album—named after the EMI studio where the band had done most of its recording—was one of their most unified and sophisticated efforts, boasting some of the most arresting melodies and ambitious arrangements in the band’s catalog. *Abbey Road* also continued George Harrison’s emergence as a significant songwriter; his songs “Something” and “Here Comes the Sun” were among the album’s most popular. The former became the first Harrison composition to occupy the A-side of a Beatles single.

But *Abbey Road*’s musical unity didn’t reflect the mood within the band. After finishing the album, Lennon released some singles with various friends as the Plastic Ono Band, Harrison toured with American country-rock duo Delaney and Bonnie, Starr teamed with Peter Sellers to star in the film comedy *The Magic Christian*, and McCartney began working on a solo album. Lennon had announced his intention to quit the Beatles in September 1969, but was persuaded not to make the news public.

So the public was largely shocked in April 1970, when McCartney, on the occasion of the release of his debut solo LP *McCartney*, announced that he was no longer a Beatle. At the end of 1970, McCartney sued his bandmates to dissolve their partnership; the issue would drag through the courts for years, sowing long-term ill will between various members and negating any chance of a reunion.

One factor that pushed McCartney toward the announcement was his refusal to delay *McCartney*’s release date to avoid conflicting with *Let It Be*, an album drawn from the *Get Back* recordings, and a same-titled feature film documentary drawn from the footage originally shot for the unfinished TV special.

The *Let It Be* album was assembled by American producer Phil Spector, who had produced Lennon’s solo single “Instant Karma!” and who’d long coveted an opportunity to work with the Beatles. Spector did substantial overdubbing, adding various vocals and instrumentation to several of the band’s unadorned live tracks. McCartney was incensed by Spector’s post-production tinkering, particularly his addition of a choir and orchestra to his “The Long and Winding Road.” But the *Let It Be* film, complete with scenes documenting the band’s strained relations and the triumphant Apple rooftop performance, was recognized as a compelling document of the Beatles’ dissolution.

SOLO IN THE 1970s

Although fans would spend much of the 1970s waiting in vain for a Beatles reunion, the four ex-Beatles wasted no time in establishing productive solo careers. Perhaps the Beatle who immediately benefited the most from his new solo status was George Harrison, whose subordinate position within the band had allowed him to accumulate a large body of unreleased songs.

Harrison's backlog of quality material was sufficient to fill a double album, *All Things Must Pass*, which was augmented by a third LP of informal studio jams. The album boasted rich, layered production by Phil Spector, and revealed a distinctive sound spotlighting Harrison's eloquent guitar work and lyrics showcasing his abiding sense of spirituality and whimsical sense of humor. The album produced a major hit in the prayerful "My Sweet Lord," which had the distinction of being the first recording by an ex-Beatle to top the American singles charts.

Harrison followed *All Things Must Pass* by spearheading rock's first major charity event, the Concert for Bangladesh, a pair of all-star concerts at New York's Madison Square Garden to raise money to aid that famine-ravaged nation. The shows, which also featured Ringo Starr, Eric Clapton, and Bob Dylan, produced a movie and a live triple album. Harrison continued to record steadily through the 1970s, before settling into a more leisurely pace in subsequent decades, keeping a relatively low public profile and making a surprise return to the top of the charts with 1987's *Cloud Nine*. In 1988, he scored more sales success as a member of the tongue-in-cheek supergroup the Traveling Wilburys, alongside Dylan, Jeff Lynne, Roy Orbison, and Tom Petty. Harrison also appeared frequently as a guest musician, contributing his distinctive guitar work to albums by such friends as Eric Clapton, Leon Russell, and Harry Nilsson, as well as projects by his early rock and roll idols Carl Perkins and Duane Eddy. Harrison also successfully branched out into film production via his company Handmade Films.

John Lennon took advantage of his new freedom as a solo artist to establish a standard of uncompromising personal and political forthrightness that he would maintain for the rest of his career. Lennon was the first Beatle to record outside the group, releasing the singles "Cold Turkey" (a brutally frank account of his battle with heroin addiction) and "Power to the People," the raw album *Live Peace in Toronto*, and a trio of avant-garde collaborations with Yoko Ono (including *Two Virgins*, whose nude cover photo predictably raised a media outcry). In 1970, he released his first solo studio album, *John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band*, whose unflinching, often harrowing introspection instantly established Lennon as a major solo voice. He continued to produce compelling, highly personal work on such subsequent releases as *Imagine*, *Mind Games*, and *Walls and Bridges*.

Lennon, who settled in New York in the early 1970s, became active in anti-war activism and dabbled in radical politics, using his visibility to speak out about various social and political issues. His activism earned Lennon the enmity of President Richard Nixon. As files released under the Freedom of Information Act would later reveal, Nixon feared that Lennon would continue to use his influence with America's youth to turn them against the Vietnam War, and attempted to have Lennon deported or arrested on drug charges. After releasing 1975's *Rock 'n' Roll*, an album of oldies covers paying tribute

to his early musical roots, Lennon took an extended hiatus from recording, embracing domestic family life in New York.

If Lennon used his solo work to exorcise his personal and political demons, Paul McCartney's post-Beatles output often seemed designed to establish him as a crowd-pleasing all-around entertainer, indulging the mainstream showbiz impulses that had been held in check during his Beatles years. McCartney's melodic skills and commercial instincts allowed him to maintain the most consistently successful career of any ex-Beatle, scoring nine number one singles and seven number one albums in the United States during the first dozen years of his solo career.

After releasing the charmingly rustic solo efforts *McCartney* and *Ram*, McCartney formed the new group Wings with his wife Linda and ex-Moody Blues frontman Denny Laine. Wings scored massive commercial success (and general dismissal from critics) through the 1970s, before McCartney reverted to solo status at the end of the decade. In the years since, he's continued to record steadily, sporadically earning renewed critical respect with such albums as 1982's *Tug of War*, 1989's *Flowers in the Dirt*, 1997's *Flaming Pie*, and 2007's *Memory Almost Full*. McCartney's periodic tours since then have invariably been greeted as major events, but his 1984 attempt at directing and starring in the feature film *Give My Regards to Broad Street* was roundly dismissed as an ill-conceived vanity project and was a resounding commercial flop.

At the time of the Beatles' breakup, few would have expected Ringo Starr, neither a prolific songwriter nor a conventionally gifted vocalist, to carve out a durable solo career. Yet the beloved drummer's self-effacing charm, and his knack for getting by with a little help from his famous friends, have consistently carried him through.

Starr launched his solo recording career in 1970 with a pair of esoteric projects, the lushly arranged collection of 1930s and 1940s pop standards *Sentimental Journey* and the Nashville-recorded country effort *Beaucoups of Blues*. He subsequently hit Top Ten pay dirt with a pair of self-written 1971 singles "It Don't Come Easy" (whose B-side "Early 1970" offered Ringo's good-natured perspective on the Beatles' breakup) and "Back Off Boogaloo." Those were followed by 1973's *Ringo*, which featured songwriting and instrumental contributions from his three former bandmates and spawned three more Top Ten hits, including the Harrison/Starr-penned "Photograph."

While he has continued to release new albums, Ringo's amiability and comic skills also allowed him to carve out a productive acting career. In the 1990s, he reinvented himself as a frontman and touring artist, fronting various editions of his All-Starr Band, in which he's shared the spotlight with a shifting cast of fellow classic-rock veterans.

John Lennon emerged from his extended hiatus in 1980, releasing *Double Fantasy*, a collaboration with Yoko Ono. Despite their slick pop production, there was no doubting the sincerity of Lennon's heartfelt new odes to love

and fatherhood. While the John Lennon of *Double Fantasy* was a far cry from the boundary-pushing rabble-rouser that fans had come to know, the new material showed him to be passionate and reenergized, having found fulfillment in the stable family life that he'd been deprived of in his own youth.

The Kinks: Well-Respected Men

The Kinks' thirty-three-year career was marked by intense internal conflict (sometimes expressed physically), periods of commercial decline, and a live show that often bordered on chaos. Through it all, they remained a "real-time" rock and roll band, never degenerating into a cabaret act or a greatest-hits machine.

Ray Davies (vocals, guitar), his younger brother Dave Davies (guitar, vocals), and Peter Quaife (bass) formed the Kinks in 1963; Mick Avory (drums) joined the group just prior to their signing with Pye Records. In 1964, the group shot to number one in the United Kingdom and into the United States Top Ten with "You Really Got Me," a raw, dynamic rocker (written by Ray Davies) with an overdriven two-guitar sound that verged on heavy metal.

The Kinks' third Top Ten hit, "Tired of Waiting for You" (1965), was slower-paced, almost wistful, and revealed Ray Davies as a songwriter of unusual insight and compassion. "Well-Respected Man" was a sharply observed piece of class-conscious social commentary; "Dead End Street," a moving but unsentimental depiction of English working-class poverty. The Kinks' 1966 LP, *Face to Face*, was hailed by some critics as rock's first concept album.

In 1968–69 The Kinks hit a peak of creativity that produced *Something Else by the Kinks* (featuring "Waterloo Sunset," one of Ray Davies's most poignant and evocative songs) and the superb concept albums, *The Kinks Are the Village Green Preservation Society* and *Arthur, Or the Decline and Fall of the British Empire*. Despite laudatory reviews, none of these albums reached the American Top 100. In 1969, John Dalton replaced Peter Quaife and the Kinks resumed U.S. touring after a four-year hiatus.

The Kinks' comeback began in 1970 with "Lola," a song about a transvestite that became their first U.S. Top Ten hit in five years. In 1973, Ray Davies began creating a sequence of ambitious "story-song" albums including *Preservation: Act One*, *Preservation: Act Two*, and *The Kinks Present a Soap Opera*. The band's live show turned into an extravagant evening of musical theater with horn players, female vocalists, and spoken dialogue.

With *Sleepwalker* in 1977, the Kinks shed their excess baggage and returned to straightforward rock and roll, seeming to draw renewed energy and inspiration from the nascent punk rock movement. The 1981 single "Come Dancing" was the group's first U.S. Top Ten hit since "Lola," and 1983's *State of Confusion* reached number twelve among *Billboard* Pop Albums.

But relations within the group now were badly frayed. Mick Avory quit in 1984 and was replaced by Bob Henrit; album sales and concert attendance gradually declined. A 1993 call-and-response duet between the Davies brothers

evoked the emotion of its title: "Hatred." Three years later, in Oslo, Norway, the Kinks played their last concert. But the masterful songs of Ray Davies and a half-dozen great albums make this band one of the greatest to emerge from the original British Invasion, along with the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and the Who. In 1990, the Kinks were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

A. S.

The fact that Lennon had achieved personal contentment intensified the crushing sense of tragedy of his death. On December 8, as *Double Fantasy* and its first single "(Just Like) Starting Over" were climbing the charts, Lennon was assassinated by deranged Beatles fan Mark David Chapman, as he and Ono were returning home from a recording session.

The event inspired a worldwide outpouring of shock, grief, and mourning. Of the countless tributes that followed in the wake of Lennon's death, one of the most poignant came from George Harrison, who sang the praises of his fallen ex-bandmate on the song "All Those Years Ago." The song, which appeared on Harrison's album *Somewhere in England*, featured guest appearances by Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr.

More than two decades after Lennon's death, it was revealed that George Harrison was suffering from an inoperable form of brain cancer. He passed away on November 29, 2001, leaving the material world with the same low-key dignity that he'd maintained even amid the madness of Beatlemania.

AND IN THE END . . .

The former Beatles' long-standing legal disputes prevented any unreleased Beatles studio recordings from being released to the public for nearly two decades following the band's breakup, although a massive amount of rare Beatles tracks emerged on bootleg releases. The situation changed with the 1994 release of *Live at the BBC*, which collected the best of the band's vintage radio sessions, and the subsequent release of the epic multi-part documentary *The Beatles Anthology*, broadcast on network TV in early 1995 and subsequently released in expanded form on DVD. Assembled with the surviving band members' active participation, the mini-series spawned a trio of double-CD soundtrack compilations containing a wealth of rare and previously unissued material (including the first official release of some of the band's early Decca demos, resulting in Pete Best receiving his first royalties for Beatles recordings).

But the most newsworthy aspect of the *Anthology* discs was the presence of two songs; "Free as a Bird" and "Real Love," on which McCartney, Harrison, and Starr recorded new studio tracks to accompany a pair of 1970s-era Lennon demos. The hybrid tracks sharply divided the opinions of fans and critics, but both became hits, with radio programmers jumping at the chance to play the first "new" Beatles songs in a quarter-century.

While each of the former Beatles experienced commercial ups and downs in their respective solo careers, the Beatles as a group entity has never lost its appeal, continuing to be discovered and embraced by new generations of fans. Ironically, the band's premature breakup spared it from experiencing an artistic decline, leaving the mystique of their body of work intact. The Beatles' vintage work maintains an ageless, timeless appeal, and the band's impact on music and popular culture remains as strong as ever.

TIMELINE

July 6, 1957

John Lennon meets Paul McCartney at the Woolton Garden Fête at St. Peter's Church in Liverpool, during a performance by Lennon's group the Quarrymen. Impressed by Paul's ability to tune a guitar and by his knowledge of song lyrics, John asks him to join the group.

February 1, 1958

Paul McCartney introduces George Harrison to the Quarrymen at the basement teen club the Morgue. He will be invited to join the group the following month.

August 1, 1960

The Beatles make their debut in Hamburg, West Germany, with Stu Sutcliffe on bass and Pete Best on drums.

January 1, 1961

The Beatles make their first appearance at the Cavern Club in Liverpool.

November 1, 1961

Local record store manager Brian Epstein attends a Beatles performance at the Cavern Club.

January 1, 1962

The Beatles record fifteen songs in a one-hour studio audition session for Decca Records, which will eventually pass on the band.

March 7, 1962

The Beatles make their radio debut performing three songs on the BBC.

April 10, 1962

Stu Sutcliffe dies of a brain hemorrhage.

June 1, 1962

The Beatles audition successfully for George Martin at Parlophone/EMI Records. He agrees to sign the band, but insists that Pete Best be replaced on recording sessions.

August 16, 1962

At the behest of Lennon, McCartney, and Harrison, Brian Epstein informs Best that he has been fired from the band.

September 4, 1962

The Beatles record their first single, "Love Me Do" and its B-side, "P.S. I Love You," at EMI's Abbey Road studios in London.

December 1, 1963

“I Want to Hold Your Hand,” the Beatles’ first American single, is released by Capitol Records.

February 7, 1964

The Beatles arrive in America.

February 9, 1964

The Beatles make their first appearance on the *Ed Sullivan Show*.

February 11, 1964

The Beatles begin their first U.S. tour at the Coliseum in Washington, D.C.

April 4, 1964

The Beatles hold the top five slots on the *Billboard* pop chart.

July 6, 1964

The Beatles’ first feature film, *A Hard Day’s Night*, has its world premiere in London.

July 29, 1965

The Beatles’ second film, *Help!*, is released.

August 15, 1965

The Beatles play in front of almost 60,000 fans at Shea Stadium in New York City.

August 27, 1965:

The Beatles visit Elvis Presley at his home in Bel Air, California.

October 26, 1965

The Beatles are awarded England’s prestigious MBE (Members of the Order of the British Empire).

March 1, 1966

London’s *Evening Standard* publishes an interview with John Lennon in which he comments that the Beatles are “more popular than Jesus now.” Months later, the quote will inspire protests in America, including the burning of Beatles records.

August 11, 1966

Lennon apologizes for his “Jesus” remarks at a press conference in Chicago, on the eve of what will be the Beatles’ final tour.

August 29, 1966

The Beatles play their final concert in front of a paying audience at San Francisco’s Candlestick Park.

June 1, 1967

Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band is released in Britain.

June 25, 1967

The Beatles become the first band to stage a global satellite broadcast, performing their new song “All You Need Is Love” at Abbey Road studio as part of a TV titled *Our World*.

August 1, 1967

George Harrison and his wife Patti stroll through the streets of Haight-Ashbury, bringing international media attention to the budding hippie scene.

August 27, 1967

Manager Brian Epstein dies of an accidental prescription drug overdose.

September 1, 1967

John Lennon writes “I Am the Walrus” while under the influence of LSD.

February 15, 1968

The Beatles depart for Rishikesh, India, for an advanced course in transcendental meditation with the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi.

May 1, 1968

Apple Corps opens its doors in London.

January 30, 1969

The Beatles’ final public performance as a band takes place on the roof of the Apple building during the filming of the documentary film *Let It Be*.

August 20, 1969

The Beatles finish recording “I Want You (She’s So Heavy)” for their *Abbey Road* album, marking the last time that all four Beatles would be together in the same studio.

September 20, 1969

John Lennon announces his resignation to the rest of the group, but agrees not to make his departure public.

April 10, 1970

Paul McCartney becomes the first Beatle to publicly acknowledge the band’s breakup, via a self-written interview included with pre-release promotional copies of his first solo album *McCartney*.

May 8, 1970

Let It Be, recorded live in the studio prior to *Abbey Road*, with additional overdubs by producer Phil Spector, is released, followed by the documentary film of the same name.

December 8, 1980

In New York, John Lennon is shot dead by Mark David Chapman as he and Yoko Ono return from a recording session.

November 19, 1995

“Free as a Bird,” the first new Beatles single in twenty-five years, premieres as part of the television broadcast, *The Beatles Anthology*. The song, a 1977 John Lennon demo with new vocal and instrumental tracks by the three surviving Beatles, will reach number six on the U.S. singles chart in early 1996.

March 23, 1996

“Real Love,” a 1979 John Lennon demo completed in 1995 by the other Beatles, reaches the charts, where it will peak at number eleven.

November 29, 2001

George Harrison dies at the age of fifty-eight after a long battle with cancer.

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Magical Mystery Tour, 1967
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Yellow Submarine, 1969
Abbey Road, 1969
Let It Be, 1970
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1967–1970, 1973
Past Masters, Vol. 1, 1988
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Anthology 2, 1996
Anthology 3, 1996

John Lennon

John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band, 1970
Imagine, 1971
Mind Games, 1973
Walls and Bridges, 1974

Paul McCartney

McCartney, 1970
Ram, 1971
Red Rose Speedway (with Wings), 1973
Band on the Run (with Wings), 1973

George Harrison

All Things Must Pass, 1970
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Dark Horse, 1974
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Courtesy of Photofest.

Bob Dylan

Jesse Jarnow

ROCK AND ROLL POET

It is impossible to conceive of rock and roll's maturation from teenage recreation into intellectually expressive music without Bob Dylan. Comparable only to the Beatles in influence, Dylan brought poetry to rock. More impressive, though, is the massive body of music Dylan has written, performed, and recorded over his unparalleled half-century career.

Often called “the voice of his generation,” Dylan’s actual voice was instantly identifiable for its nasal qualities. With it, he created and shed a half-dozen musical identities, each a phase in a relentless artistic development. Dylan was a hard-core folkie who imitated Woody Guthrie and learned songs from ancient records, a protest singer who sang against injustice, a confessional songwriter who poured his heart out onstage, a confrontational rock icon in dark sunglasses who played stinging blues, a country crooner, a mysterious figure in white makeup, a born-again Christian who testified for Jesus, and an old-time bandleader in a suit and cowboy hat. In nearly every capacity, Dylan broke new ground. Rock and roll, in a sense, transformed around him, and Dylan’s sometimes confounding actions gained praise and acceptance years later.

Idiosyncratic and unpredictable, Dylan changed directions in an effort to escape the labels placed on him by fame. At nearly every turn, Dylan’s moves were designed to provoke, as when he plugged in an electric guitar at the Newport Folk Festival, directed a four-hour movie with no discernible plot, released an all-country album sung and written in an unrecognizable voice, or allowed one of his songs to be used in a lingerie advertisement. In his autobiography, Dylan even admitted to recording several intentionally inferior albums in order to lessen the burdens of his popularity.

One obsessive fan who combed through Dylan’s trash claimed that his science of “Dylanology” would reveal the true meaning of the artist’s cryptic lyrics. Since the 1960s, the songwriter has led an extremely private life. After a very public divorce in the late 1970s, Dylan secretly remarried, only acknowledging it in passing references to “my wife” in his autobiography.

At the center, however, has always been Bob Dylan’s songwriting. Throughout every stage of his career, he has employed a musical language drawn from his encyclopedic knowledge of traditional folk, country, and early rock. This strength has enabled Dylan to tap into the deep wellspring of American music and invested his creative endeavors with a sense of timelessness. It has also served as a bedrock for the songwriter, helping him to rebound after a motorcycle accident in the 1960s, as well as rejuvenating his career in the early 1990s.

Dylan combined this vocabulary with poetry that could be surreal, tender, hilarious, biting, oblique, and perfectly obvious—sometimes simultaneously. Though many of his early followers complained that Dylan stopped writing political songs when he “went electric” in 1965, Dylan’s lyrics frequently included elements of social commentary, whether direct or hidden. Writers and professors have made a cottage industry of Dylanology, from examinations of Dylan’s views on religion to multi-volume studies of Dylan’s live performances to an historical treatise on how Dylan relates to “the old, weird America.”

“Songs, to me, were more important than just light entertainment,” Dylan wrote in 2004. “They were my preceptor and guide into some altered consciousness of reality, some different republic, some liberated republic. . . . Whatever the case, it wasn’t that I was anti-popular culture or anything and I had no ambitions to stir things up. I just thought of mainstream culture as lame as hell and a big trick.”¹

Despite writing an autobiography and being interviewed for a major documentary, Dylan remains elusive, the result of a lifetime of self-mythologizing. “I was with the carnival off and on for six years,” he told radio host Cynthia Gooding in 1962, at the start of his career. “I was clean-up boy. I was mainliner on the Ferris wheel. Do the shoreline thing. Use to do all kinds of stuff like that. . . . I didn’t go to school for a bunch of years, skipped this, skipped that.”²

None of what Dylan told her was true. His name wasn’t even Bob Dylan. It was Robert Zimmerman, and he was from Minnesota.

FROM HIBBING TO HIGHWAY 61

Robert Allen Zimmerman was born in Duluth, Minnesota, on May 24, 1941, to Abraham Zimmerman and Beatrice Stone. Abe was the son of Russian immigrants and worked for the Standard Oil Company. At the end of World War II, as the work force swelled, Abe lost his job. After the birth of Bobby’s brother David, in 1945, their father was stricken with polio. As Abe recovered, the family moved seventy-five miles east to Beatrice’s hometown, Hibbing. Duluth was several hours north of Minneapolis, a port city on the shore of Lake Superior. Hibbing was smaller, an Iron Range town once known for its mineral deposits. Abe joined his brothers at their furniture and appliance business.

Bobby sang from an early age. He was four when he performed “Some Sunday Morning” and “Accentuate the Positive” at a Mother’s Day gathering. Far from the childhood circus career he later invented for himself, Bobby’s childhood was quite normal. He and his friends stole crabapples from neighbors’ yards, played on Pill Hill (the site of an ore dump), and built clubhouses. When Bobby was in kindergarten, Abe bought a house on Seventh Avenue. In the house, Dylan claimed to have found something of great significance. “[It] has kind of mystical overtones,” he recalled many years later.

The people who had lived in the house previous to that time, they had left some of their furniture, and among that furniture was a great big mahogany radio, like a jukebox. It had a 78 turntable when you opened up the top. And I opened it up one day and there was a record on there, a country record. It was a song called “Drifting Too Far from the Shore.” I think it was the Stanley Brothers, if not Bill Monroe. I played the record and it brought me into a different world.³

Thus began a lifelong romance with music.

Though boxers, wrestlers, circuses, and stock car races came to Hibbing, it was the movies and the radio that gave young Bobby glimpses of the world outside the Iron Range. His great uncle owned the Lybba Theater, a ten-minute walk from the Zimmerman house, and Bobby was a regular. The radio was different. Late at night, after the serials ended, Bobby could pick up powerful AM signals that traveled north up the Mississippi River from as far

away as Louisiana and Mexico. Through this music, Dylan began to yearn for the world outside Hibbing.

Bobby discovered early rock musicians Bill Haley, Buddy Holly, Little Richard, and Elvis Presley, as well as country legends like Hank Williams. He began to collect records. Now proficient on piano, Bobby formed his first band, the Golden Chords. At their appearance at Hibbing High's Jacket Jamboree Talent Festival, the Golden Chords were cut off mid-set as Bobby pounded the piano and emulated the raucous vocals of Little Richard. Under the influence of bluesmen like Muddy Waters and Jimmy Reed, Bobby switched to an electric guitar and formed several other bands. None lasted very long.

On January 31, 1959, he and his friends traveled to the Duluth Armory, where he saw Buddy Holly perform. Standing in the front row, Dylan made eye contact with his hero, an event he remembered vividly forty years later. Three days later, Holly died in a plane crash, along with fellow musicians Ritchie Valens and the Big Bopper. It became known as "the Day the Music Died," but for Bobby Zimmerman, music was busy being born.

That same spring, Bobby discovered folk music, via a high school graduation gift: a set of records by Leadbelly, the great country blues singer and guitarist who'd served time in prison for murder. By the fall, Bobby Zimmerman escaped Hibbing. When he arrived in Minneapolis, he was Bobby Zimmerman no longer.

The Folk Revival

The emergence of Bob Dylan marked a turning point in a large-scale revival of interest in "folk music." In the years 1955–65, this term would encompass everything from protest numbers by youthful singer-songwriters to the classic blues and mountain music of rediscovered performers from the 1920s and 1930s.

In 1950, an urban folk group called the Weavers—Pete Seeger, Ronnie Gilbert, Lee Hayes, and Fred Hellerman—scored two massive left-field hits with "Tzena Tzena Tzena" (number two) and "Goodnight Irene" (number one). But in less than two years' time, the group was blacklisted when its members were accused of having been either Communist Party members or so-called fellow travelers. Their music disappeared from the airwaves and the group disbanded. In September 1955, a Weavers reunion sold out Carnegie Hall and led Vanguard Records to release a best-selling live album from the concert. These events helped to "rehabilitate" folk music in the eyes of a once-wary music industry and, by extension, the general public.

Folk song collectors Harry Smith and Alan Lomax played a crucial role in documenting the music's past. In 1952, Smith compiled the multi-volume *Anthology of American Folk Music*—a hugely influential collection of hillbilly, blues, and sacred songs commercially recorded between 1927 and 1932, all long out of print. Alan Lomax released such albums as *Negro Prison Songs* (1958), which was recorded in a notorious Mississippi penitentiary. Moses Asch

released Smith's *Anthology* and many of Lomax's recordings on his scrappy Folkways label; he also kept in print the music of Woody Guthrie and Lead-belly, two founding fathers of American folk music.

Impromptu gatherings of singers and musicians called "hootenannies" were held on weekends in New York City's Washington Square Park; soon, the concept spread to summer camps and college campuses. Non-alcoholic "basket houses" in Greenwich Village offered the promise of exposure to untried performers who played for tips. In 1957, Izzy Young opened the Folklore Center in Greenwich Village. The small storefront sold folk albums, sheet music, and used instruments, and hosted many informal performances over the next decade (including the New York debuts of Tim Buckley and Emmylou Harris).

In 1959, the first Newport Folk Festival was held in Newport, Rhode Island. It became an important annual gathering that brought together young folk fans and musicians with rediscovered traditional performers like the Mississippi bluesman Skip James, born 1902; and the Tennessee mountain singer Clarence Ashley, born 1895. Folk music magazines like *Sing Out* and *Broadside* gained in circulation and advertising.

Elektra and Vanguard were two of the most active labels in the folk field. Elektra Records was launched by founder Jac Holzman on the sales of folk albums by Theo Bikel, Josh White, and Oscar Brand. These 1950s artists were succeeded by new Elektra signings: the gifted singer Judy Collins, topical songwriters Patrick Sky and Tom Paxton, and the seminal white blues group (John) Koerner, (Dave) Ray, and (Tony) Glover. Maynard Solomon founded Vanguard Records as a classical label, but he successfully pursued folk veterans Odetta and Ramblin' Jack Elliot, new voices Joan Baez, Eric Andersen, Ian and Sylvia, and Buffy Sainte-Marie, and the aging but still vital country blues singers Reverend Gary Davis and Mississippi John Hurt.

Andy Schwartz

"The first time I was asked my name in the Twin Cities, I instinctively and automatically without thinking simply said, 'Bob Dylan,'"⁴ Dylan wrote in his autobiography. Initially, he'd meant to call himself Robert Allyn, a variation on his middle name. "Unexpectedly, I'd seen some poems by Dylan Thomas. Dylan and Allyn sounded similar."⁵ For many years, Dylan denied taking his name from the Irish poet. He told some that it was his uncle's name, his mother's maiden name, or a town in Oklahoma. It was the first of many myths Dylan would create for himself.

In Minneapolis, he worked hard to become Bob Dylan. First, he traded his electric guitar for an acoustic. Then, he learned as much as he could about folk music. Though Bob barely attended classes, he studied for hours in the Bohemian neighborhood Dinkytown. He exchanged songs with local musicians like John Koerner and expanded his repertoire. Quickly, Dylan developed the skill to memorize a song after only one listen, either from a fellow

performer or a recording. He listened to Blind Lemon Jefferson, John Jacob Niles, the New Lost City Ramblers, and countless others. Stories abound of Dylan's outright thefts of friends' record collections.

He also discovered Woody Guthrie, the author of "This Land Is Your Land," "Pretty Boy Floyd," "Pastures of Plenty," "Hard Travelin'," and literally hundreds of other songs. "They had the infinite sweep of humanity in them," Dylan later declared. He became obsessed with the itinerant Oklahoma-born folksinger and read Guthrie's autobiography, *Bound for Glory*. "I went through it cover to cover like a hurricane," Dylan wrote, "totally focused on every word, and the book sang out to me like a radio."⁶ He now predominantly performed Guthrie songs, dressed like Guthrie in a cowboy hat, and even began to talk like his hero, with a thick Okie accent.

Guthrie's records were rare, so Dylan could only learn songs from other musicians.

I'd always be checking the repertoires of every out of town performer who came through to see what Guthrie songs they knew that I didn't, and I was beginning to feel the phenomenal scope of Woody's songs—the Sacco and Vanzetti ballads, Dust Bowl and children songs, Grand Coulee Dam songs, venereal disease songs, union and workingman ballads, even his rugged heartbreak love ballads. Each one seemed like a towering tall building with a variety of scenarios all appropriate for different situations.⁷

Informed that a musician named Ramblin' Jack Elliott had already made a career of being a second Woody, Dylan varied his act slightly. He learned harmonica from Tony Glover. Though there was a left-wing political scene around the Dinkytown folk circles, Dylan was uninterested. He only cared about music. In 1960, he decided he'd outgrown Minneapolis. He spent the summer in Denver, where he met guitarist Jesse Fuller, and spent time in Chicago and Madison before he caught a ride to New York with a friend of a friend.

Dylan arrived in Manhattan on January 24, 1961, a bitter night. "Coldest winter in 17 years," he would sing on "Hard Times in New York Town." According to the *New York Times*, it was actually twenty-eight years. Within days, Dylan had left Manhattan and crossed the Hudson River to meet his hero, Woody Guthrie, in an unlikely place: Greystone Hospital in north central New Jersey.

Guthrie was the victim of a rare degenerative disease, Huntington's chorea. By 1961, he lived permanently at Greystone, his body crippled. Dylan became a regular visitor. With his guitar he played Woody's requests, usually for Guthrie's own songs. Though the older folksinger was fatally ill, he immediately liked the scrawny kid with the chubby cheeks and the black corduroy hat. Through Guthrie, Dylan met Sidsel and Bob Gleason of East Orange, one of many couples who took Dylan in after he arrived in New York. Dylan relied on these older patrons, as well as a series of girlfriends, for places to sleep.

Empowered by Guthrie's approval, Dylan took to the famed folk clubs of Greenwich Village. He immediately secured a residency at Cafe Wha?, where he played harmonica alongside Fred Neil. The folk scene in New York was large and had an established hierarchy of clubs, performers, and labels. With a boyish charm that many compared to Huckleberry Finn, Dylan won friends and rose through the ranks. He passed time at Izzy Young's Folklore Center near Washington Square Park, an archive of recordings, instruments, and folk music literature that was a hub for musicians.

Another Bohemian couple Bob stayed with, boasted a massive library. "You couldn't help but lose your passion for dumbness," Dylan remembered. "I usually opened up some book to the middle, read a few pages and if I liked it went back to the beginning."⁸ Dylan read political philosophy like Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince*, gothic horror writers like Edgar Allen Poe, populist autobiographies of American heroes like Davy Crockett, Romantic poets such as Byron and Shelley, psychotherapist Sigmund Freud, Russian revolutionary Alexander Pushkin, and hundreds of others. He also spent time in the New York Public Library, poring over microfilm of Civil War-era newspapers.

Dylan wrote his first songs, including "Talkin' Hava Negila" and "Talkin' Bear Mountain Picnic Massacre Blues," in a style derivative of Woody Guthrie. He gigged wherever he could, at the Commons, the Gaslight, Gerde's Folk City, and elsewhere. He jammed with Village musicians, and served as an opening act for several artists, including blues legend John Lee Hooker. He was also hard at work inventing his persona, such as when he told Woody Guthrie's wife, Marjorie, that he was from New Mexico, or when he introduced a song by saying he'd learned it on the Brazos River in Texas. Onstage, Dylan perfected a wry presence that recalled Charlie Chaplin. He slipped between stories and songs in a style he learned from hipster monologist Lord Buckley.

On September 29, 1961, the *New York Times* published Robert Shelton's review of one of Dylan's performances at Folk City, titled "Bob Dylan: A Distinctive Stylist." That same month, Dylan participated in his first recording session, where he accompanied Carolyn Hester on harmonica. At a rehearsal, Dylan met John Hammond, the legendary producer who signed jazz great Billie Holiday in 1933. Hammond signed Dylan to Columbia Records.

In November, Dylan joined Hammond in Columbia's Studio A to record his first album. On *Bob Dylan*, released in March 1962, Dylan performed almost all traditional folk songs, including "Man of Constant Sorrow," "Pretty Peggy-O," and "House of the Rising Sun." Also included was Dylan's first completely original composition, "Song to Woody." The album sold poorly. Dylan was referred to within Columbia as "Hammond's folly," but the producer defended his protégé.

In early 1962, Dylan got his own apartment, and started to date Suze Rotolo. A vivacious intellectual, Suze (pronounced "Suzy") turned Bob on to art and awakened his political consciousness. Dylan contributed topical songs

to *Broadside*, a new magazine dedicated to spreading new songs, including the satirical “Talkin’ John Birch Society Blues,” about the right-wing political organization. Suze worked behind the scenes at Theatre de Lys when it presented a program of songs by German musician/playwright Bertolt Brecht.

One song in particular, “Pirate Jenny,” took hold of Dylan. “Woody had never written a song like that,” he remembered.

It wasn’t a protest or topical song and there was no love for people in it . . . I took the song apart and unzipped it—it was the form, the free verse association, the structure and known disregard for the known certainty of melodic patterns to make it seriously matter, give it its cutting edge. . . . I wanted to figure out how to manipulate and control this particular structure and form which I knew was the key that gave “Pirate Jenny” its resilience and outrageous power.⁹

The songs began to pour from him, many based on traditional tunes but with a new strength in them. “The Ballad of Emmitt Till” was dedicated to a black adolescent killed in Mississippi in 1955.

In April, Dylan wrote “Blowin’ in the Wind,” based on the slave spiritual “No More Auction Block.” Comprising a series of rhetorical questions, the song framed the civil rights struggle in nearly biblical terms, but was general enough to be applicable to any strife. “How many roads must a man walk down before you call him a man?” Dylan asked in the first line.

In September, he penned “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall,” which dealt with the Cuban missile crisis and the imminent threat of nuclear war, with much the same strategy as “Blowin’ in the Wind.” “I saw a highway of diamonds with nobody on it,” he sang, describing his vision of a post-nuclear America, “I saw a black branch with blood that kept drippin’.” Determined not to be known merely as a protest singer, he also wrote love songs, both tender, like “Girl of the North Country,” and bitter, like “Don’t Think Twice, It’s Alright,” the first of Dylan’s many so-called put-downs. Anchored by these songs, *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan* was released in May 1963, reaching number twenty-two on the *Billboard* albums chart. The cover depicted Bob and Suze walking arm-in-arm down a snow-lined 4th Street.

The Protest Song

During the period leading up to the Revolutionary War, many protest songs were written in defiance of British policies in the American colonies. Composers set new words to familiar British/Celtic tunes to create “The Liberty Song” (from 1768, decrying new import taxes imposed by the Crown) and “Free America” (1774). Slaves brought from West Africa contributed to the development of protest songs when they transformed the church hymns of their white masters into work songs and emancipation anthems.

In the twentieth century, the songs of the civil rights movement encouraged its supporters through hazardous, sometimes deadly marches and demonstrations. The most popular anthem of the era, "We Shall Overcome," was crafted from Charles Tindley's circa 1900 gospel song, "I'll Overcome Some Day." Another movement standard, "No More Auction Block for Me," was derived from "Many Thousands Gone"—a post-Civil War song popularized by Negroes who had fled to Canada, where slavery was abolished in 1833.

Folksinger/activist Joan Baez credits Bob Dylan for expanding the lyrical scope of the protest song. Dylan's "North Country Blues" (1963), for example, was one of the first works by a singer-songwriter to decry the negative effects of globalization, with "words which would move me out of the ethereal but archaic ballads of yore and into the contemporary music scene of the 1960s."¹ Singing an international repertoire in several languages, Baez went on to amass a devoted international following that persists to this day.

When Dylan's song "Blowin' in the Wind" became a number two Pop hit for Peter, Paul, and Mary in 1963, the former gospel singer turned R&B idol Sam Cooke felt personally challenged by "a white boy writing a song like that."² Cooke quickly wrote and recorded "A Change Is Gonna Come," a hymn-like soul ballad that touched on the hardships of African American life and the struggle for racial justice in the era of segregation. He sang the song on national television during an appearance on *The Tonight Show* in February 1964 and it became a Top Ten R&B hit after his death in December.

Phil Ochs (1940–76) was among the foremost writers of folk protest songs of the 1960s: The title of his 1964 debut album was *All the News That's Fit to Sing*. The assassination of President Kennedy ("That Was the President"), the U.S. Marines' invasion of the Dominican Republic ("Santo Domingo"), the plight of immigrant farm workers ("Bracero")—all were grist for his compositional mill. Ochs's public profile far exceeded his modest record sales, and he struggled with this contradiction throughout a career in which he helped to organize protests and support left-wing political causes both in the United States and abroad. The singer struggled with alcoholism, depression, and disillusionment brought on by the decline of the New Left; during a trip to Africa, a brutal mugging damaged his vocal chords. Phil Ochs committed suicide on April 9, 1976.

Diverse voices and political orientations entered into the protest music of the Vietnam War era: rowdy folk-rooted satire (the Fugs' "Kill for Peace"), apocalyptic electrified rock songs ("Machine Gun" by Jimi Hendrix), and funky R&B hits (Edwin Starr's "Stop the War Now"). The protest current in pop music reached a chilling dénouement of sorts in 1970 when "Ohio" by Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young commemorated the killing of four Kent State University students by the Ohio National Guard on May 4, 1970. In subsequent decades, a new style of topical song—from Jackson Browne's anti-mass media "Information Wars" to Steve Earle's pro-democracy call to arms, "The Revolution

Starts Now"—would attempt to speak inclusively and globally to a new popular consciousness.

A. S.

1. Joan Baez, *And a Voice to Sing With* (New York: Summit Books, 1987), p. 92.
 2. Daniel Wolff, *You Send Me: The Life and Times of Sam Cooke* (New York: William Morrow, 1995), p. 291.
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In August 1962, Dylan signed with a new manager, Albert Grossman. The owner of the Gate of Horn, a folk club in Chicago, and a savvy businessman, Grossman transformed Dylan from a folk sensation into an international superstar. In July 1963, Peter, Paul, and Mary—a group masterminded by Grossman—released their single of “Blowin’ in the Wind.” It sold over a million copies and charted at number two.

Another new friend was Joan Baez, the most famous folk singer in the country. Introduced in early 1963, as Dylan’s relationship with Suze crumbled, Baez and Dylan began a romance. Dylan would join her onstage frequently over the next two years, starting in July at the Newport Folk Festival in Rhode Island, as well as on an August tour. On August 28, Dylan and Baez played in front of the Lincoln Memorial as part of the March on Washington, singing “When the Ship Comes In” in front of some 150,000 people from the same podium where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. would deliver his famous speech. It had been barely three years since Bobby left Hibbing.

Dylan remained busy in Manhattan, penning dozens of songs for *Broadside*, contributing columns to *Hootenanny*, and writing freeform poetry. Much of the latter was published in concert programs and liner notes for himself and others, including Baez. He wrote “The Times They Are A-Changin’,” another biblically influenced anthem, which became the title of his third album. Released to wide acclaim in February 1964, *The Times They Are A-Changin’* announced Dylan to the world, charting at number twenty. It featured a similar mix of socially aware ballads, such as “With God on Our Side” and more personal numbers, like “Boots of Spanish Leather.”

But Dylan did not want to be hemmed in by the demands of his followers. On one side were associates from Dinkytown, such as Paul Nelson, who told Bob that topical songs did not make good art. On the other were politically engaged folksingers and their fans, who wanted Dylan to be their new poster boy. In December, Dylan accepted the Tom Paine Award from the Emergency Civil Liberties Union, an organization of New York’s wealthy, old-guard liberals. Dylan was uncomfortable. Slightly drunk, he berated them obscurely. “There’s no black and white, left and right to me anymore; there’s only up and down,”¹⁰ he told them.

In spring 1964, Dylan and three friends drove coast to coast in a station wagon. Dylan played several shows along the way, but mostly he went to see the country. When he returned, he declared he was going to only write songs

for himself. At the Newport Folk Festival that summer, where he played to 15,000 fans, he debuted “Mr. Tambourine Man,” a powerful, surreal epic. Under the influence of marijuana, Dylan’s phrases and rhymes swelled, giving the lyrics a magical feel.

In the fall, he invited a group of friends into the studio. With a bottle of red wine at his side, Dylan recorded a dozen new songs live for *Another Side of Bob Dylan*. Some, such as “Chimes of Freedom,” were politically aware as well as poetic. Others, like “Motorpsycho Nitemare” and “I Don’t Believe You (She Acts Like We Never Have Met)” were more social comedy than social consciousness, filled with biting one-liners. Though the album didn’t sell as well as his two previous releases, only reaching number forty-three, Dylan continued to expand his following, and grew further apart from the Greenwich Village scene. Bob spent more and more time staying with Albert Grossman in Woodstock, an idyllic town 100 miles north of Manhattan. By 1965, he’d moved there full-time.

Dylan’s music continued to evolve at a rapid rate. Though he had recorded two songs with a backing band in December 1962, Bob had not played rock and roll since he left Hibbing. In spring 1965, he recorded *Bringing It All Back Home*. The first side featured Dylan backed by a blues band put together by producer Tom Wilson. Though many folk purists decried the harder sound, defiant songs like “Maggie’s Farm” were no less protests than “Blowin’ in the Wind.” “I thought I’d get more power out of it with a small group in back of me,” Dylan said simply of his decision to employ the combo.¹¹

The second side featured four long acoustic ballads, including “Mr. Tambourine Man” and “Gates of Eden,” as well as the pointed “It’s Alright Ma (I’m Only Bleeding)” which spawned such aphorisms as “money doesn’t talk, it swears” and “even sometimes the president of the United States has to stand naked.” It was the first Dylan album to break the Top Ten, reaching number six.

In April 1965, the Byrds’ rock adaptation of “Mr. Tambourine Man” hit number six on the *Billboard* chart. It brought Dylan’s name to further millions, and began a national folk-rock craze. Bob traveled to England for a ten-show tour, during which he broke up with Joan Baez. Documented by filmmaker D.A. Pennebaker in *Don’t Look Back*, the film opened with an early video for “Subterranean Homesick Blues,” the first song on *Bringing It All Back Home*, which Dylan delivered in a near-rap over a Chuck Berry beat. Dylan performed well on the tour, though he grew bored playing the same songs over and over. He told others he was on the verge of quitting.

THIN WILD MERCURY MUSIC

The week after he returned to the United States, Dylan wrote what he described as “a long piece of vomit.” “It wasn’t called anything, just a rhythm thing on paper all about my steady hatred directed at some point that was honest.”¹² Affixed with a chorus, the song became “Like a Rolling Stone.” A few weeks

later, producer Tom Wilson convened a new band for Dylan. Relying on serendipity, Bob barely gave the musicians any instructions. Despite the fact that it was over six minutes in length, Columbia released “Like a Rolling Stone” as a single on July 20. It instantly went to number two on the Hot 100, Dylan’s first appearance there. Almost forty years later, the editors of *Rolling Stone*—a magazine named in part for the song—ranked it the greatest song of all time.

On July 25, 1965, Dylan made his third and final appearance at the Newport Folk Festival. Though “Like a Rolling Stone” blasted from radios around the country, Bob had never performed live with an electric guitar. With members of his studio band, including guitarist Mike Bloomfield and guitarist Al Kooper, Dylan’s brief set was greeted with both boos and cheers. He left the stage after only three songs. When he returned, he performed “It’s All Over Now, Baby Blue,” the final song from *Bringing It All Back Home*, alone on acoustic guitar. He enunciated the lyrics clearly, saying goodbye to the folk scene that had made him famous.

With a new producer, Bob Johnston, Dylan recorded eight more songs to complete *Highway 61 Revisited*, named for the road that—like the Mississippi River—connected the singer’s North Country home to the Deep South. It was, in Dylan’s words, “the main thoroughfare of the country blues.” Even in 1965, “it was the same road, full of the same contradictions, the same one-horse times, the same spiritual ancestors.”¹³ Dylan used his poetry to update the swinging blues he’d heard years before on the radio. Driven by the guitar lines of Mike Bloomfield and the rich organ of Al Kooper, the album was an instant hit that reached number three.

Backed by a rhythm and blues bar band known as the Hawks, Dylan toured across the country. In the first half of the show, Bob played by himself to rapturous silence from the audience. In the second half, joined by the Hawks, he was met nearly every night with jeers. Interviews and press conferences were theaters of the absurd, in which Dylan often made fun of the journalists. In San Francisco, a reporter requested that Bob “define folk music,” to which Dylan responded, “a constitutional replay of mass production.”¹⁴

Dylan was a cult hero. Because listeners found so much meaning in his lyrics, they expected Dylan to have the answers to the world’s problems. Dylan continued to tour, though his physical state worsened as he grew dependent on amphetamines. “It takes a lot of medicine to keep up this pace,” he admitted to journalist Robert Shelton.¹⁵ In the same interview, he all but admitted to using heroin.

Besides touring, Dylan also wrote a “novel.” Published six years later as *Tarantula*, it was actually a sprawling jumble of fragments. In spring 1966, he traveled to Nashville with Al Kooper and Hawks’ guitarist Robbie Robertson, and recorded a new album—his third in under a year. With country session musicians at his call, Dylan wrote much of the double-LP *Blonde on Blonde* in the studio.

“The closest I ever got to the sound I hear in my mind was on individual bands in the *Blonde on Blonde* album,” Dylan said in 1978. “It’s that thin, that wild mercury sound. It’s metallic and bright gold, with whatever that conjures up.”¹⁶ Dylan continued to draw inspiration from folk music, fashioning lyrics from Bascom Lamar Lunsford’s “I Wish I Was a Mole in the Ground” into a verse of “(Stuck Inside of Mobile with the) Memphis Blues Again.” Dylan’s songs grew even longer, including the seven-and-a-half-minute urban drama of “Visions of Johanna,” and “Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands,” which took up the entirety of the album’s fourth side.

The “Sad-Eyed Lady” was Sara Lowndes. A friend of manager Albert Grossman’s wife, Bob had met Sara in Woodstock. She was an actress and occasional hostess at the Playboy Club. The two were married on November 22, 1965, in a private ceremony. On January 3, 1966, Sara gave birth to their first child, Jesse Dylan. Bob went to great lengths to protect his wife and child from the press, and until February it was not known that he’d even married. Dylan spent the first months of his son’s life touring, with no end in sight: Albert Grossman had booked several years worth of engagements.

In April, Dylan traveled to Australia, France, and England with the Hawks. Drummer Levon Helm had quit in frustration, sick of being booed, and was replaced by Mickey Jones. Dylan had grown musically tight with the quintet, especially guitarist Robbie Robertson. Still, the jeers continued. On the second to last night of the tour, May 25, they played the Royal Festival Hall in Manchester, England. The day before, Bob had celebrated his twenty-fifth birthday.

Before the encore, a fan stood up and shouted at Dylan: “Judas!”

“I don’t believe you,” Dylan sneered back. “You’re a *liar*.” He turned to the Hawks. “Play fucking *loud*,” he told them. The band blasted into “Like a Rolling Stone.”¹⁷

Two months later, back in Woodstock on July 29, the brakes of Dylan’s Triumph 650 locked up, throwing Bob over the bike’s handlebars. He would perform in public only a half-dozen times over the following eight years.

IN THE BASEMENT AND BEYOND

Rumors circulated that Bob Dylan was seriously crippled, and that he had retired from music. Other gossip suggested that Dylan had a severe drug problem. Dylan did nothing to clarify the situation. He suffered a mild concussion and cracked vertebrae. He canceled all of his tour dates and future plans. He was only twenty-five. With Sara at his side, he recovered. The *Tarantula* manuscript, overdue to his publisher, gathered dust. He relaxed and took up painting. The following summer, when he started to make music again, it wasn’t on a stage, or even in a studio, but in a basement.

Big Pink was a house in nearby West Saugerties rented by members of the Hawks. In Woodstock, rejoined by drummer Levon Helm, they became known simply as The Band. In the spring of 1967, Dylan and The Band fell into a routine: smoke a joint and jam in the basement. At first, they just played old folk, blues, and R&B songs, but Dylan quickly began writing again, composing lyrics on a typewriter at the kitchen table. He was just as prolific as ever, recording up to fifteen songs a day, some of them improvised over traditional chord changes. Organist Garth Hudson captured the proceedings on Robbie Robertson's Uher multi-track tape recorder.

Over the course of several months, Bob Dylan and The Band recorded over thirty new originals, as well as literally hundreds of tossed-off covers. When they were done, the songs spanned a phenomenal range, the covers alone comprising a thorough tour of American music. Dylan's new originals ranged from novel jokes such as "See You Later, Allen Ginsberg" to major statements like "I Shall Be Released" and "I'm Not Here (1956)."

Some were recorded as demos for other artists to cover. Manfred Mann scored a number ten single with "The Mighty Quinn" in January 1968. As the acetates circulated, bootleggers got hold of them. A steady stream of illicit Dylan records could now be found at record shops around the country, containing many songs from the basement sessions, as well as private tapes Bob had made for friends over the years.

In October 1967, Dylan returned to Nashville and cut *John Wesley Harding* with a stripped-down band of session musicians. With a sparse, stark backing and a muted gray LP cover, the lyrics were filled with oblique morality tales. A hungry public sent the album to number two. Jimi Hendrix covered "All Along the Watchtower" within the year. Dylan has often announced his preference for the guitarist's rendition.

Though Dylan stayed out of the public eye, his following was undiminished. People started arriving at his Woodstock sanctuary. Where he had once sought to mythologize himself, Dylan now wished to make himself plain. Besides a tribute concert to Woody Guthrie, who died in October 1967, Bob did not perform. He wanted a normal life. In 1969, he recorded a country album, *Nashville Skyline*. The lyrics were as simple as possible, and Dylan sang in a voice all but unrecognizable to longtime listeners. Johnny Cash, a Dylan fan and one of Bob's heroes, guested on a remake of "Girl of the North Country," and wrote the liner notes.

The album charted at number three and the harassment from fanatics did not stop. "I was sick of the way my lyrics had been extrapolated, their meanings subverted into polemics," Dylan wrote.¹⁸ Indeed, the Weathermen, one of the most renowned and violent radical groups of the 1960s, took their name from a lyric in "Subterranean Homesick Blues," from *Bringing It All Back Home*.

The Dylans, with new baby Jakob, moved back to Manhattan, where self-proclaimed "garbologist" A.J. Weberman rifled through the family's trash,

looking for “clues” as to Dylan’s state of mind. Convinced Dylan was a junkie, Webberman staged protests outside his front door, and demanded that Bob make a statement. When A. J. harassed Sara, it was too much. Bob found Webberman on Elizabeth Street and beat him up.

Though Dylan still enjoyed playing and recording, he put less of himself into his music. In 1970, he issued another double album, boldly titled *Self Portrait*. It was filled with stray covers, live recordings from a disastrous set with The Band at the Isle of Wight festival in the summer of 1970, and other odds and ends. Greil Marcus began his *Rolling Stone* review by asking: “What is this shit?” Simply by virtue of being new Bob Dylan product, *Self Portrait* made it all the way to number four. Though 1970’s *New Morning* (*Billboard*, number seven) reunited Bob with organist Al Kooper, and featured a bright accessible sound that expressed Dylan’s own personal happiness, the songwriter soon all but stopped recording. He was content to rest.

In 1973, Dylan freed himself from both Albert Grossman and Columbia Records. He signed with David Geffen’s fledgling Asylum imprint, and the Dylans relocated to Malibu, California, north of Los Angeles. With his new record contract, Dylan called on The Band, who’d achieved a remarkably successful career on their own. After a preliminary session at Robertson’s Malibu studio, Dylan and the group decided they could record and tour. In November 1973, they recorded *Planet Waves*, which became Dylan’s first number one album.

On January 3, 1974, at Chicago Stadium, in front of an audience of 18,500, Bob Dylan and The Band began a forty-show cross-country tour. Though Dylan had played big shows before, most of his tours had concentrated on theaters. Now, he was in an arena every night. The shows were rapturously received and Asylum issued a double live album, *Before the Flood* (*Billboard*, number three). Dylan, however, was far from satisfied. “When [Elvis] did ‘That’s All Right, Mama’ in 1955, it was sensitivity and power,” he explained later. “In 1969, it was just full-out power. There was nothing other than just force behind that. I’ve fallen into that trap, too.”¹⁹

After the tour, Dylan returned to Manhattan. Since returning to the road, Bob had recommitted himself to his music. His marriage felt the strain. Temporarily separated from Sara in New York, he once again became a regular on the Village folk scene, sitting in with old friends at old haunts. He also studied with painter Norman Raeben, who—according to Dylan—taught the songwriter a new way to look at the world. Inspired, Dylan began a new batch of songs, many of them character-driven narratives.

The first of the new songs was titled “Tangled Up in Blue.” In it, Bob was

trying to tell a story and be a present character in it without it being some kind of fake, sappy attempted tearjerker. I was trying to be somebody in the present tense, while conjuring up a lot of past images. . . . I wanted to defy time, so that the story took place in the present and the past at the same time. When you look

at a painting, you can see any part of it, or see all of it together. I wanted that song to be like a painting.²⁰

Back on Columbia, Dylan recorded *Blood on the Tracks* at Studio A in the fall of 1974. On many of the tracks, at first, he recorded only with bassist Tony Brown. Bob deemed the album complete, and had vinyl pressings made. Over the holidays in Minnesota, he played a test copy for his brother David, who pronounced it too glum. The two rounded up a band of local folk musicians, who re-recorded a number of the tracks, including “Tangled Up in Blue” and “Simple Twist of Fate.”

Released in January 1975, *Blood on the Tracks* reached number one and began Dylan’s busiest year in nearly a decade. He spent the spring and summer in New York, where he reestablished old creative relationships and forged new ones. Introduced to theater director Jacques Levy, the two bonded. Several times, they retreated to Levy’s house in South Hampton, on the east end of Long Island, to write songs that ventured further into Dylan’s new interest in narrative. Dylan tried new genres, from cowboy tales (“Romance in Durango”) to gypsy fantasies (“One More Cup of Coffee [Valley Below]”) to gangster biographies (“Joey”). They also penned a song dedicated to Rubin “Hurricane” Carter, a boxer serving time in jail for what many believed to be a racially motivated murder frame-up. After rewriting several lyrics to avoid legal liability, Dylan rush-released it as a single. “Hurricane” only reached number thirty-three, though it helped Carter secure a mistrial. That summer, Columbia also released a cleaned up version of *The Basement Tapes* (*Billboard*, number seven).

In a whirlwind, Bob assembled musicians for his next album. They included everybody from legendary rock guitarist Eric Clapton to harmonica player Sugar Blue, who ordinarily played on a Village street corner. They also featured Scarlett Rivera, a mysterious-looking violinist Dylan had spotted on the street and immediately recruited. The sessions maintained a spontaneous feel, and *Desire* reached number one.

The spontaneity carried over into the organization of the tour, the Rolling Thunder Revue. Wary of the giant operation the tour with The Band had been the previous year, Bob sought to keep it looser. Shows were booked in small theaters under assumed names, and not announced until a week previous. Bobby Neuwirth, a painter and folk musician who served as Dylan’s right-hand man and road manager in 1965 and 1966, rounded up a troupe. When the buses rolled into Plymouth, Massachusetts, in October 1975, the assembled included Dylan, Neuwirth, Scarlett Rivera, poet Allen Ginsberg (a friend since the 1960s), Ramblin’ Jack Elliott, and Joan Baez. Along with another dozen musicians and hangers-on, they criss-crossed New England.

During the tour, Dylan decided to film a movie, improvising scenes with the musicians. When Sara Dylan joined her sometimes-wayward husband on tour, and acted opposite Baez on screen, the results were sometimes uncomfortable. Wearing whiteface make-up, both onstage and on camera, Bob Dylan

became a character named Renaldo. Playwright Sam Shepard was brought in to help write dialogue, though he did not compose much. Between the chaos of the film, which Dylan called *Renaldo and Clara*, the shows were an incredible success. They also staged two shows billed as “Night of the Hurricane,” at Boston Garden in Massachusetts and Madison Square Garden in New York City, to draw attention to Rubin Carter’s case.

The tour resumed in 1976, though the shows did not have the same spark. Dylan’s marriage finally ended when Bob and Sara were divorced on June 28, 1977. Over many hours in the studio, Dylan and producer Howard Alk edited *Renaldo and Clara*. When they were done, the film was four hours long. Bob tried to explain the movie in several interviews. “It’s about the essence of man being alienated from himself and how, in order to free himself, to be reborn, he has to go outside himself.”²¹ He did not try to explain the plot. The film bombed, and was never released on video.

Embittered, Dylan recorded a new album, *Street-Legal* (*Billboard*, number eleven), and formed a new band for what many critics dubbed “the alimony tour.” Where the Rolling Thunder Revue was loose, the new group was as rehearsed as a Las Vegas stage show. With an eleven-piece band behind him, including three back-up vocalists, Bob recast 1965’s acoustic love song “Love Minus Zero/No Limit” as calypso and turned the plaintive blues of “Don’t Think Twice, It’s Alright” into reggae. Like *Renaldo and Clara*, both the 115-show tour and the album were panned by critics. Dylan had reached another breaking point. On tour in late November, in an Arizona hotel room, Bob Dylan saw Jesus and was reborn.

SLOW TRAIN COMING

“There was a presence in the room that couldn’t have been anybody but Jesus,” Dylan said two years later. “Jesus put his hand on me. It was a physical thing. I felt it. I felt it all over me. I felt my whole body tremble. The glory of the Lord knocked me down and picked me up.”²² “I truly had a born-again experience. If you want to call it that. It’s an over-used term, but it’s something that people can relate to.”²³

After the tour, Dylan attended classes four days a week at the Vineyard School of Discipleship in Tarzana, California, near Malibu. The church included several members of the Rolling Thunder Revue, including guitarist T-Bone Burnett and mandolinist David Mansfield. In April, Dylan contacted veteran Atlantic Records producer Jerry Wexler. He told Wexler he wanted a more modern sound. It would be the first Dylan album to feature extensive use of overdubbing, a technique he’d largely eschewed in the ten years since it had become commonplace. Wexler assembled a band that included Dire Straits guitarist Mark Knopfler.

Despite its evangelical overtones, “Gotta Serve Somebody,” *Slow Train Coming*’s first single, was as packed with put-downs as “Like a Rolling Stone.”

Released in August 1979, the album peaked at number three. “Gotta Serve Somebody” earned Dylan his first Grammy Award, for Best Vocal Performance. In November, a year after his conversion, Dylan began to perform again. He started with a fourteen-night run at San Francisco’s Warfield Theater. Setting the pattern for the next year, Bob played only his Christian material. He preached from the stage. “If you want rock and roll, you go down and rock and roll,” he told a restless audience in Tempe, Arizona. “You can go and see Kiss and you can rock and roll all the way down to the pit!”²⁴

Shortly after the Warfield shows, longtime fan Paul Williams published a book titled *Dylan—What Happened?*, articulating possible reasons for the singer’s conversion. Dylan bought over 100 copies to give to his friends to explain his newfound beliefs. “We talk about him, we listen to his music, and all our friends want to talk about him too,” Williams theorized. “So much attention directed at one man! Maybe he turned to Christ so he’d have somewhere to refer all this energy that gets thrown at him. If you don’t want to be the messiah, and people keep treating you like one anyway, it makes sense to hook up with somebody who’s willing to accept that karma.”²⁵

In 1980, Dylan released *Saved* and returned to the Warfield. At the urging of promoter Bill Graham, Dylan added secular songs back into his set list. *Saved* (*Billboard*, number twenty-two) was the first Bob Dylan album since *Another Side of Bob Dylan* not to make the Top Twenty. In 1981, he released his final religious album, *Shot of Love* (*Billboard*, number thirty-three). It concluded with “Every Grain of Sand,” in which Dylan questioned his faith. By the fall of 1981, Bob was back to playing much of his pre-religious material. Keyboardist Al Kooper even joined Dylan for the first time in over a decade. He’d reached another end.

“Too many distractions had turned my musical path into a jungle of vines,” Dylan wrote of his experience during the 1980s. “I’d been following established customs and they weren’t working . . . Many times I’d come near the stage before a show and would catch myself thinking that I wasn’t keeping my word with myself. What that word was, I couldn’t exactly remember, but I knew it was back there somewhere.”²⁶

Dylan released four albums of new songs, though what was left off was often better than what was issued. Like many of his contemporaries, Dylan’s 1980s albums were mired in excessive use of synthesizers, which buried his distinct guitar playing deep in the mix. He never publicly announced the end of his Christian period, though his songs were no longer evangelical. In 1989, he participated in a telethon raising funds for Chabad Lubavitch, a Hasidic Jewish group, playing recorder and flute alongside actor Harry Dean Stanton.

In 1987, Dylan toured with the Grateful Dead. Longtime fans, the Dead wanted to play *their* favorite Dylan songs. Bob observed that the Dead were more familiar with his songs than he was. In long rehearsal sessions they played a broad array of material, but the actual concerts stuck mostly to the

classics and were less than satisfactory. Still, during the rehearsals, Dylan had a musical revelation.

During a break, Dylan entered a nearby jazz club, where he suddenly remembered a style of singing taught to him by blues guitarist Lonnie Johnson in the 1960s. It was a mathematical technique. “It’s a highly controlled system of playing and relates to the notes of a scale, how they combine numerically, how they form melodies out of triplets and are axiomatic to the rhythm and the chord changes,”²⁷ Dylan described later. It allowed Dylan to improvise his vocals in the way a jazz musician might solo over a set of chord changes. Though the song might be unrecognizable to the audience, Bob was enthralled.

Inspired by the Grateful Dead, Dylan encouraged his manager to book him on extensive tours that would return him to the same towns year after year. He wanted to build a new following, separate from those who knew him only for his 1960s persona. Dylan established a semi-permanent road band. Though the members rotated, they did so over a long period of time. As of 2007, bassist Tony Garnier had served with Dylan for nineteen years, the longest musical partnership of Dylan’s career. Other long-standing accompanists included *Saturday Night Live* bandleader G.E. Smith, roots-rock guitarists Larry Campbell and Charlie Sexton, as well as former Jerry Garcia Band drummer David Kemper. The Never-Ending Tour—as it was semi-officially known—began June 7, 1988, at the Greek Theater in Berkeley, California.

Dylan recorded a new album with producer Daniel Lanois in New Orleans. Bolstered by Lanois’s textured arrangements, and accompanied by local musicians, 1989’s *Oh Mercy* (*Billboard*, number thirty) was Bob’s strongest effort in years. On stage, Dylan dipped into a seemingly endless well of songs by other artists. He played folk songs like “House of the Rising Sun” and “Pretty Peggy-O” that he’d not performed since his Greenwich Village days. He also covered material by contemporaries like the Grateful Dead, the Beatles, Van Morrison, Bruce Springsteen, and others. He performed country by Johnny Cash and Hank Williams, as well as early rock and roll by Chuck Berry and Buddy Holly.

In the early 1990s, the now fifty-year-old Dylan released two solo acoustic albums of folk songs. The first time he’d recorded alone since 1964, 1992’s *Good As I Been to You* (*Billboard*, number fifty-one) and 1993’s *World Gone Wrong* (*Billboard*, number seventy) featured songs from the age “before the Children of the Sun—before the celestial grunge, before the insane world of entertainment exploded in our faces,” Dylan wrote in his cryptic liner notes to the latter.

Snowed in at his Minnesota farm in 1996, Dylan wrote a new batch of songs, soon recorded with Daniel Lanois, this time in Miami. The album *Time Out of Mind*, concluded with “Highlands,” a sixteen-minute half-spoken blues narrative. On May 29, however, before the album could be released, Bob was admitted to the hospital with histoplasmosis, a heart infection. He was back on the road by August 3.

Time Out of Mind was released in September 1997 to critical acclaim and impressive sales. Charting at number ten, it was Dylan's first Top Ten entry in almost twenty years and won three Grammy Awards including Album of the Year. Dylan's touring continued unabated. He had evolved into an old-time country bandleader, wearing a suit, tie, and cowboy hat on stage. On September 11, 2001, he released "*Love and Theft*," another album of Americana-informed rock. Its title referenced *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, a 1995 book by historian Eric Lott about minstrelsy, and some lyrics were adapted from Japanese author Dr. Junichi Saga's *Confessions of a Yakuza*.

Bob Dylan also became involved in a number of extra-musical projects. In 2003, he starred in *Masked & Anonymous*, a movie he co-wrote with director Larry Charles under the pseudonyms Sergei Petrov and Rene Fontaine. Dylan played Jack Fate, a washed-up caricature of himself in a dystopian United States, sprung from jail to play a dubious benefit concert. With co-stars John Goodman, Jeff Bridges, Luke Wilson, and Jessica Lange, the film was a modest cult success. Two years later, Dylan published *Chronicles, Volume One*, the first part of a proposed three-volume autobiography. Non-linear in structure and divulging little with regard to divorce, marriage, and the lives (or even the names) of his children, *Chronicles* reads like a road trip of Dylan's psyche. Vivid recollections of the sights, sounds, and scene-makers of 1960s New York mark the path of his artistic development; poets and songwriters, both past and present, serve as guides to the singer's creative process, with evocative side trips to New Orleans, Woodstock, and Hibbing. Whether or not Dylan told the whole truth was, as always, a matter for debate but *Chronicles* was the most successful non-musical endeavor of his career. The book reached number two on the *New York Times* best-seller list and was nominated for a National Book Award.

Bob also sat for extensive interviews with manager Jeff Rosen for Martin Scorsese's *No Direction Home*, a 2005 documentary for PBS's *American Masters* series. In 2006, he launched a weekly radio show on XM Satellite Radio, *Theme Time Radio Hour*. He devoted each episode to playing songs about a specific subject, such as baseball, spring cleaning, friends and neighbors, and others.

During shows on the Never-Ending Tour, an announcer introduced Dylan nightly with a summary of his career:

"Ladies and gentleman, please welcome the poet laureate of rock 'n' roll. The voice of promise of the sixties counterculture. The guy who forced folk into bed with rock, who donned makeup in the seventies and disappeared into a haze of substance abuse, who emerged to find Jesus, was written off as a has-been, and who suddenly shifted gears, releasing some of the strongest music of his career beginning in the late nineties. Ladies and gentlemen, Columbia Recording artist Bob Dylan!"

In 2006, Bob Dylan released *Modern Times*, his thirty-second studio album, and his first number one album since 1976's *Desire*. The Never Ending Tour rolled on down the highway.

Inducting Bob Dylan into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1988, Bruce Springsteen recalled the initial impact of “Like a Rolling Stone”:

“The first time I heard Bob Dylan, I was in the car with my mother listening to WMCA, and on came that snare shot that sounded like somebody’d kicked open the door to your mind . . . ”

“Bob freed your mind the way Elvis freed your body. He showed us that just because music was innately physical did not mean that it was anti-intellectual. He had the vision and the talent to make a pop record that contained the whole world.”²⁸

TIMELINE

September 1959

Robert Zimmerman enrolls in the University of Minnesota and begins to call himself Bob Dylan.

January 24, 1961

Bob Dylan arrives in New York City.

March 1962

Columbia Records releases *Bob Dylan*.

July 1963

Peter, Paul, and Mary’s version of “Blowin’ in the Wind” charts at number two Pop.

July 20, 1965

Bob Dylan’s “Like a Rolling Stone” charts at number two.

July 25, 1965

Bob Dylan “goes electric” at the Newport Folk Festival in Newport, Rhode Island.

July 29, 1966

Dylan is hurt in a motorcycle accident in Woodstock, New York, and temporarily retires from live performance.

May 17, 1967

Don’t Look Back, D.A. Pennebaker’s documentary of Dylan’s 1965 tour of England, premieres in San Francisco.

April 1967

With The Band, Bob Dylan begins to record music in the basement of a house in Saugerties, New York.

November 1971

Macmillan publishes *Tarantula*, Dylan’s experimental novel, written in 1965 and 1966.

January 3, 1974

With The Band, Dylan begins his first concert tour in eight years.

December 8, 1975

As part of the Rolling Thunder Revue, Bob Dylan stages “Night of the Hurricane” at New York’s Madison Square Garden, a benefit for jailed boxer Rubin “Hurricane” Carter.

January 25, 1978

Renaldo and Clara, Bob Dylan's directorial debut, is released theatrically.

November 1978

Bob Dylan experiences a religious revelation in Arizona and becomes a born-again Christian.

July 1987

Dylan tours with the Grateful Dead as his backing band.

June 1988

Bob Dylan begins the Never-Ending Tour.

May 29, 1997

Dylan is admitted to a hospital with a heart infection.

February 25, 1998

Bob Dylan wins three Grammy Awards for *Time Out of Mind*.

October 5, 2004

Simon & Schuster publishes *Chronicles, Volume One*, the first part of a proposed three-book autobiography.

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The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan, 1962

The Times They Are A-Changin', 1963

Another Side of Bob Dylan, 1964

Bringing It All Back Home, 1965

Highway 61 Revisited, 1965

Blonde on Blonde, 1966

John Wesley Harding, 1968

Blood on the Tracks, 1975

The Bootleg Series, volumes 1–3: Rare & Unreleased, 1961–1991, 1991

World Gone Wrong, 1994

Time Out of Mind, 1997

The Bootleg Series, volume 4: Live 1966, 1998

The Bootleg Series, volume 5: Live 1975, 2002

The Bootleg Series, volume 6: Live 1964, 2003

NOTES

1. Bob Dylan, *Chronicles, Volume One* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), pp. 34–35.
2. Jonathan Cott, ed., *Bob Dylan: The Essential Interviews* (New York: Wenner Books, 2006), pp. 4–5.

3. Robert Santelli, *The Bob Dylan Scrapbook* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005).
4. Dylan, *Chronicles*, p. 79.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 244–45.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 247.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 35–36.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 275–76.
10. Clinton Heylin, *Bob Dylan: Behind the Shades Revisited* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), p. 137.
11. Santelli.
12. Paul Williams *Performing Artist, 1960–1973: The Early Years* (London: Omnibus Press, 1994), p. 148, 151.
13. Dylan, *Chronicles*, p. 241.
14. Cott, p. 65.
15. Robert Shelton, *No Direction Home: The Life and Music of Bob Dylan* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1986), p. 395.
16. Cott, p. 208.
17. Bob Dylan, *Live 1966* (Columbia Records, 1988).
18. Dylan, *Chronicles*, p. 120.
19. Heylin, p. 363.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 370.
21. Cott, p. 217.
22. Heylin, p. 491.
23. Cott, p. 281.
24. Heylin, p. 517.
25. Paul Williams, *Watching the River Flow: Observations on His Art-in-Progress, 1966–1995* (London: Omnibus Press, 1996), p. 131.
26. Dylan, *Chronicles*, pp. 146–47.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 157.
28. Elizabeth Thomson and David Gutman (editors), *The Dylan Companion* (New York: Delta, 1990), pp. 286–287.

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The Rolling Stones

Scott Schinder

ALL BOW TO THEIR SATANIC MAJESTIES

The Rolling Stones may have demonstrated a certain lack of modesty when they anointed themselves the World's Greatest Rock and Roll Band in the late 1960s. But the title was no idle boast. In their early days as the British Invasion's foremost exponents of bad attitude, the scruffy quintet embodied all that was dangerous and transgressive about rock and roll. In the decades that

followed, they managed to maintain their defiant aura, even after they became a stadium-filling, profit-spinning institution.

Adults who were initially resistant to the Beatles couldn't help but surrender to the Fab Four's cheeky charms. But there was never anything cuddly about the Rolling Stones. While the relatively clean-cut Beatles and their Merseybeat contemporaries were souping up the country/rockabilly-derived sounds of Buddy Holly, the Everly Brothers, and Carl Perkins, the Stones took a darker approach, launching their career with unruly variations on black American blues and R&B. Even after they began writing their own songs and downplaying the cover material that had comprised their early repertoire, the band maintained its rebellious stance, while indulging an abiding fascination with darkness and sleaze, along with an air of world-weary decadence that suited their status as jet-setting libertine superstars.

Like the Animals, the Yardbirds, Them, and the Pretty Things, the Rolling Stones embodied the rougher, rootsier end of the British Invasion. But the Stones' commercial appeal and musical influence quickly put them in a class of their own. Mick Jagger is probably rock's most imitated frontman, embodying a singular mix of macho swagger and campy flamboyance that's been emulated by multiple generations of rock singers. Beyond his stage presence, Jagger quickly emerged as an original, inventive songwriter as well as a canny packager of his band's mystique.

Jagger's long-standing bandmate, writing partner, and onstage alter ego Keith Richards is an equally seminal figure. In addition to being one of rock's most influential rhythm guitarists, Richards is an ageless, seemingly indestructible icon whose unflappable rock and roll cool has remained intact through all manner of personal, chemical, and legal problems. Richards is also unusual among rock guitar heroes in that he's always been more concerned with riffs and grooves than flashy solos, while maintaining a deep connection to his blues roots.

Richards and fellow founding member Brian Jones were an extraordinarily in-sync guitar duo, setting a remarkable standard for interlocking ax interplay that was extended by Jones's successors Mick Taylor and Ron Wood. The band's stellar guitarists were complemented by the rock-solid, subtly inventive rhythm section of bassist Bill Wyman and jazz-loving drummer Charlie Watts, who gave the music a propulsive punch as well as a subtle sense of swing.

The Rolling Stones were initially the product of a groundswell of interest in vintage American blues among a generation of young British men in the early 1960s. That movement would spawn many of the musicians who would become leading lights in the U.K. rock scene in the coming decade. The Stones rose from a small but thriving London-based electric blues revival, and began their career playing music that merged the raw sound of Chess Records' urban blues artists with the propulsive rock and roll style of Chuck Berry's classic

Chess sides. But the Stones' derivative early efforts quickly gave way to a distinctive musical persona.

By the late 1960s, the Rolling Stones were the Beatles' only serious competitor, in terms of popularity, prestige, and musical influence. By then, the Stones had already built a body of work as original and accomplished as anything to emerge from the decade's fertile rock scene, integrating country blues, baroque folk, and psychedelia into their sound. After Brian Jones's death in 1969, the band downplayed its more experimental elements to re-embrace rock and roll basics. They largely stuck to that stylistic template, with brief detours into reggae and disco, for the next four decades. If the music they made didn't always live up to the act's legendary status, it rarely detracted from their legendary aura.

LITTLE RED ROOSTERS

Precocious blues and jazz enthusiast Brian Jones was the Rolling Stones' founder and, in its early days, main motivating force. But the team of Mick Jagger and Keith Richards (aka the Glimmer Twins) quickly emerged as the Rolling Stones' musical and conceptual focal point. The pair first met as childhood schoolmates, and became reacquainted again in 1960. Depending upon which source one believes, they either reconnected while both were waiting on a train platform and Richards noticed that Jagger was carrying some American blues LPs, or they were reintroduced by mutual friend Dick Taylor. Taylor, also a budding musician and blues convert, was then attending Sidcup Art School with Richards. At the time, Jagger was a student at the London School of Economics, and playing the blues with Taylor in a combo known as Little Boy Blue and the Blue Boys. Richards joined soon after.

By the time he met Jagger and Richards, Brian Jones had already led an eventful life. He'd quit school and run away to Scandinavia when he was sixteen, by which time he'd already mastered several instruments and fathered two illegitimate children. After returning, he played in some local bands before moving to London, where he became a member of Blues Incorporated, an outfit led by blues revival godfather Alexis Korner.

Deciding to form his own group, Jones advertised for musicians; among those he recruited was pianist Ian Stewart. Jones also performed solo, playing Elmore James-style blues under the pseudonym Elmo Jones. While playing at the Ealing Blues Club, he shared a bill with Blues Incorporated, which by now included Charlie Watts on drums as well as auxiliary members Jagger and Richards.

The Rolling Stones—with a lineup consisting of Jagger, Richards, Jones, Ian Stewart, Dick Taylor on bass, and drummer Mick Avory—made their public debut at London's Marquee Club on July 12, 1962. Taylor left a few weeks later to attend the Royal College of Art; he would soon form the Pretty Things,

in which he would play lead guitar for much of the next four and a half decades. Avory exited as well; he would soon join the Kinks, with whom he would spend more than thirty years.

Taylor's eventual replacement, joining in December 1962, was Bill Wyman. At twenty-five, Wyman was a few years older than the rest of the Stones, but the fact that he owned his own amplifier helped him to clinch the gig. The following month, the band convinced Charlie Watts, who had quit Blues Incorporated and taken a job at an advertising agency, to join on drums.

In February 1963, the Rolling Stones began a now-legendary eight-month residency at London's Crawdaddy Club, located at the Station Hotel, across from the Richmond railway station. The band's high-energy performances became so popular that the club was forced to move to a larger venue, the Richmond Athletic Ground. By April, the Stones were playing two nights a week at the Crawdaddy as well as doing a weekly gig at Eel Pie Island, two miles away in Twickenham.

The Yardbirds: Beyond the Blues

When the popularity of the Rolling Stones exceeded the cramped confines of the Crawdaddy Club, Crawdaddy impresario Giorgio Gomelsky found another blues-based London quintet, the Yardbirds, to take their place. Keith Relf led the group on vocals and harmonica, backed by Chris Dreja (rhythm guitar), Paul Samwell-Smith (bass), and Jim McCarty (drums). But it was their fast, fiery lead guitarist Eric Clapton who—although not yet the awe-inspiring virtuoso he would soon become—won the immediate attention of fans and critics.

Five Live Yardbirds, their 1964 U.K. debut album, captured the spontaneous excitement of a typical live set, this one at the fabled Marquee Club in London. It went unreleased in the United States, but the group made an immediate impact in 1965 with its first American LP, *For Your Love*, and the title hit single. This minor-key song by an outside composer (Graham Gouldman), with its prominent harpsichord and bongos, took the group in a pop direction that blues purist Clapton declined to follow. He left the Yardbirds in March 1965, a few months before "For Your Love" reached number six on the U.S. Hot 100—the first of the band's five consecutive U.S. Top Twenty singles.

Clapton's replacement was Jeff Beck, an equally gifted blues guitarist with a penchant for sonic experimentation. Cranking the volume and pushing the tempos, Beck galvanized listeners with fuzztone, feedback, and slide (bottleneck) guitar. In the studio, the Yardbirds incorporated Indian and Arabic strains, Gregorian chants, and European folk music on such influential hit singles as "Heart Full of Soul" (another Graham Gouldman song), "Shapes of Things," and "Over Under Sideways Down."

By mid-1966, the touring grind had begun to take a psychological toll on Jeff Beck, and Paul Samwell-Smith had left the band to pursue record production. Chris Dreja switched to bass and an experienced session musician, Jimmy Page,

was brought in to play second lead guitar with Beck. This potentially devastating lineup lasted less than six months, long enough to make a memorable appearance in the film *Blow Up* (performing "Stroll On" aka "The Train Kept A-Rollin'") and release one brilliant single, the apocalyptic "Happenings Ten Years Time Ago," which stalled at number thirty in the United States and number forty-three in the United Kingdom.

By the end of the year, Jeff Beck was gone for good and the Yardbirds were reduced to a quartet. But Jimmy Page's prodigious technique and on-stage flair were nearly enough to carry the whole band. Page sometimes played electric guitar with a violin bow, and his instrumental showcase "White Summer" popularized the acoustic folk-raga style of Bert Jansch and Davy Graham. A live set album in March 1968 at New York's Anderson Theater would have positioned the Yardbirds squarely on the U.S. rock ballroom circuit, but the band rejected the performances as below par. (They were later issued as the quasi-bootleg *Live Yardbirds! Featuring Jimmy Page.*) Meanwhile, managers and producers repeatedly directed the Yardbirds toward the pop charts, resulting in such feeble efforts as "Ten Little Indians."

The Yardbirds played their last gig in Luton, England in July 1968. Contractually committed to a Scandinavian tour, Jimmy Page recruited Robert Plant (vocals), John Paul Jones (bass), and John Bonham (drums). Initially billed as the New Yardbirds, the group would soon adopt a new name: Led Zeppelin.

Andy Schwartz

A key component in the Stones' early sound was the bracing guitar interaction of Richards and Jones, which blurred the traditional distinctions between the guitarists' lead and rhythm parts. It was Keith Richards who was responsible for introducing Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley songs to their initial repertoire of blues and R&B material, facilitating the band's eventual embrace of rock and roll.

After briefly being handled by Crawdaddy founder Giorgio Gomelsky, the Rolling Stones gained a new manager in Andrew Loog Oldham, a flamboyant hustler who'd worked as a press agent for Beatles manager Brian Epstein, among others. The promotion-savvy Oldham consciously played up the Stones' bad-boy mystique, packaging the quintet as the unsavory, rebellious answer to the Beatles, who by then were drastically altering the face of the British pop scene.

One of Oldham's first moves in establishing the Stones' image was forcing the talented but unglamorous Ian Stewart out of the band. The unpretentious Stewart would nonetheless remain a beloved fixture of the group's organization until his death in 1985, serving as road manager as well as sideman in the studio and on stage.

After George Harrison recommended the Stones to Decca Records' A&R head Dick Rowe (who had famously turned down the Beatles not long

before), Oldham secured a recording deal for the band with Decca Records. June 1963 saw the release of the Rolling Stones' debut single, a cover of Chuck Berry's "Come On," backed by the Willie Dixon–penned "I Want to Be Loved." The disc became a minor hit, reaching number twenty-one on the U.K. charts, and the group promoted it by performing on a series of British package tours.

In November, the Stones released a second single, a cover of the Lennon/McCartney composition "I Wanna Be Your Man. The song was perhaps a curious choice, given the band's supposed rivalry with the Beatles, but it reached number twelve on the British pop chart. Its B-side was the instrumental "Stoned," written by Jagger and Richards but credited to the fictitious "Nanker/Phelge." The second half of the pseudonym referred to James Phelge, a friend with whom Jagger, Richards, and Jones shared a squalid Chelsea flat for most of 1963.

In February 1964, the Rolling Stones achieved a commercial breakthrough with their third single, a Bo Diddley–inflected reading of Buddy Holly's "Not Fade Away." The song reached number three in Britain. Its U.K. success was enough to win the band its first release in the United States, where "Not Fade Away" squeaked into the Top Fifty.

Although it would take a while longer for the Stones to make a substantial impression in America, they quickly became a sensation in Britain. The group's surly, dangerous vibe was enhanced by a series of minor scandals, like the band members being busted in March for public urination (they were fined £5 each).

April 1964 saw the release of the band's self-titled U.K. debut album, released in the United States in slightly altered form as *England's Newest Hit-makers*. The LP's American edition combined three Jagger/Richards compositions with covers of tunes by Chuck Berry, Muddy Waters, Slim Harpo, Rufus Thomas, and Marvin Gaye.

In June 1964, the Rolling Stones undertook their first U.S. tour. While the eight-city visit included a pair of sold-out shows at New York's Carnegie Hall in front of screaming, enraptured crowds, the band encountered less enthusiastic reactions in other cities. Haphazard promotion, combined with the fact that the band had yet to score a major U.S. hit, resulted in lukewarm crowds and cancellations.

The tour allowed the band members to visit several landmarks of the American music that had influenced them, including Chicago's legendary Chess Records—home of such seminal performers as Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, Muddy Waters, and Howlin' Wolf, all of whose material the Stones had covered. At Chess's studio, they recorded the British EP *Five by Five*, which spawned another British number one with an appropriately raw reading of Howlin' Wolf's "Little Red Rooster."

The tour preceded the American release of the band's reading of Bobby Womack's "It's All Over Now," which was the Stones' first number one single in the United Kingdom and reached number twenty-six in the United States.

The Stones had already achieved substantial commercial success by covering outside material, playing to crowds of screaming teenagers in the United Kingdom and Europe. But Andrew Oldham recognized the value of songwriting royalties and publishing copyrights, and pushed Jagger and Richards to pursue their budding writing partnership. At one point, he reportedly locked them in a room until they came up with a usable song.

In August 1964, “Tell Me (You’re Coming Back)” became the first Jagger/Richards composition to see release as an A-side. It was a Top Thirty hit in the United States, but it took another cover—a rugged reading of New Orleans soul queen Irma Thomas’s “Time Is on My Side”—to get the Stones into the American Top Ten. It was followed by a pair of memorable Jagger/Richards-penned hits, the Top Twenty “Heart of Stone” and the Top Ten “The Last Time.”

It was “(I Can’t Get No) Satisfaction,” released as a U.S. single in May 1965, that established the Rolling Stones as both commercial superstars and an important musical force. The song—driven by Richards’s commanding fuzz-guitar riff and Jagger’s wry social commentary—offered bracing evidence that Jagger and Richards had developed into distinctive songwriters.

“Satisfaction” (which appeared on the U.S. version of the album *Out of Our Heads*) spent four weeks at number one in the United States. The song began a remarkable two-year string of Top Ten Stones singles that established the band as one of the British Invasion’s most popular acts, while maintaining a steady creative growth. The streak encompassed the swaggering rockers “Get Off of My Cloud” and “Have You Seen Your Mother, Baby, Standing in the Shadow?,” the bittersweet ballads “As Tears Go By” and “Ruby Tuesday,” the menacing, exotic “Paint It, Black,” and the social-commentary “19th Nervous Breakdown” and “Mother’s Little Helper.”

One Stones single that didn’t fare as well on the U.S. charts during this period was the early 1967 release “Let’s Spend the Night Together,” whose title was judged to be a bit too risqué for U.S. sensibilities by radio programmers—as well as Ed Sullivan, who had Jagger sing the title phrase as “Let’s spend some time together” when the band appeared on Sullivan’s influential Sunday night variety TV show.

Aftermath, 1966, was the first Rolling Stones LP comprising entirely original compositions. The material showcased the Jagger/Richards writing team’s increasing sophistication, even if the misogynistic lyrical sentiments of “Under My Thumb” and “Stupid Girl” demonstrated that they hadn’t exactly grown up. The album also reflected Brian Jones’s stylistic sense of adventure: it was Jones who played sitar on the psychedelic “Paint It, Black,” marimba on the jazzy “Under My Thumb,” and dulcimer on the medieval-flavored ballad “Lady Jane.” Jones’s influence was also prominent on the droning eleven-minute blues jam “Going Home,” whose length was a daring move at the time.

The move toward more exotic sounds continued with 1967’s *Between the Buttons*, which matched the Stones’ budding penchant for experimentation

with an ironic pop sensibility. While some fans complained that the stylistic departures diluted the band's original appeal, such tunes as "My Obsession," "Connection," and "Yesterday's Papers" found the Stones rocking with wit and style.

While their music may have been moving in a more cerebral direction, the Stones' decadent image remained as strong as ever, making the band members inviting targets for British law enforcement officials. In February 1967, a month after the release of *Between the Buttons*, Jagger and Richards were busted when police raided a party at Redlands, Richards's estate in Sussex, and found four amphetamine pills in Jagger's possession. The pair was convicted of the charge in June, when Jagger and Richards, respectively, were sentenced to three months and a year in prison. But public outcry over the blatantly trumped-up charges and the excessive sentences—including a now-famous *London Times* editorial headlined "Who Breaks a Butterfly Upon a Wheel?"—prompted their sentences to be reversed.

Meanwhile, Brian Jones was arrested in May for possession of cannabis, cocaine, and methamphetamine. He escaped with a fine, probation, and an admonition to seek professional help.

Their legal travails informed the next Rolling Stones single, "We Love You." In addition to being the band's strongest stab at psychedelia yet, the song was both a thank-you to fans for their loyalty through their legal difficulties, and a pointed jab at the Metropolitan Police and the British tabloid press, which had relentlessly sensationalized their coverage of the drug busts. "We Love You" also featured guest vocals by John Lennon and Paul McCartney and opened with the sound of a cell door banging shut. It was accompanied by a promotional film that paralleled the Stones' trials and the legal persecution of Oscar Wilde seventy years earlier, with Jagger portraying Wilde. Despite (or because of) its topical nature, "We Love You" proved a bit too heady for U.S. radio; its gentler flip side "Dandelion" became a hit in the United States.

"Dandelion" and "We Love You" set the stage for the Rolling Stones' full-on embrace of psychedelia on their next LP *Their Satanic Majesties Request*, released in December 1967. Ostensibly the Stones' darker answer to the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, the album (complete with 3-D cover depicting the Stones dressed as wizards amidst a mystical landscape) was vilified by many fans and savaged by many critics. But it's far better than its reputation suggests, with tunes such as "She's a Rainbow," "Citadel," and "2000 Light Years from Home" carrying an earthy, menacing undercurrent that balanced their spacier pretensions. The songs' exotic arrangements gave Jones a chance to try out a variety of offbeat instruments, and Jones's interest in Moroccan music is manifested in the album's prominent Eastern rhythms.

The legal threats hanging over the band members' heads were such a distraction during the making of *Their Satanic Majesties Request* that Bill Wyman finally managed to get one of his own compositions, the playfully woozy

“In Another Land,” onto the album. The song, on which Wyman sang lead, even saw release as a single and slipped into the lower reaches of the U.S. Top 100.

The Stones’ psychedelic flirtation was a short one. The band soon returned to basics with the anthemic May 1968 single “Jumpin’ Jack Flash,” whose intimations of rebellion were well suited to the era’s turbulent political mood. It was followed in August by “Street Fighting Man,” whose rabble-rousing stance expanded its predecessor’s air of provocation.

Early in 1968, the band had parted ways with Andrew Oldham and turned their business affairs over to tenacious American music-industry hustler Allen Klein. Klein had earned a fearsome reputation within the American music industry for his ability to extract payment from record companies. He also controlled the U.S. rights to albums by such artists as Sam Cooke, Herman’s Hermits, and the Animals, and would eventually gain control of the Rolling Stones’ London LPs.

“Street Fighting Man,” released in August 1968, previewed the Stones’ next LP *Beggars’ Banquet*, which wouldn’t be released until December. The delay was largely due to disputes over the album’s original cover art, which pictured a graffiti-covered men’s room wall. When finally released, it bore a simple white cover. *Beggars’ Banquet* was quickly recognized as a creative rebirth for the band, mixing raucous rock (“Sympathy for the Devil”) with rootsy departures into Delta blues (“No Expectations”) and British folk (“Factory Girl”). It also spotlighted Richards’s distinctive use of open guitar tunings, which would soon emerge as one of the band’s most recognizable musical elements.

DARK CIRCUS

Although it reestablished the Rolling Stones as a vital creative force, *Beggars’ Banquet* also marked the end of Brian Jones’s participation in the group that he originally founded and led. While the band had never recorded any of his compositions, Jones’s iconoclastic spirit and charismatic presence had been key elements in the Stones’ unruly public persona, and his musical knowledge and multi-instrumental abilities had been crucial to their artistic progress. But Jagger and Richards’s dominance of the band restricted Jones to an increasingly marginal role.

Jones had put some of his creative urges to use on a pair of extracurricular projects: his musical score for the 1967 German film *A Degree of Murder*, which starred his then-girlfriend Anita Pallenberg, and his 1968 recordings of traditional Moroccan musicians, which would be released in 1971 as *Brian Jones Presents the Pipes of Pan at Joujouka*. He also contributed a jazzy saxophone solo to the Beatles’ “You Know My Name (Look Up the Number),” recorded in 1967 but not released until 1970, when it became the B-side of their “Let It Be” single.

As Jones grew alienated from his bandmates, he retreated into drug use and became increasingly unreliable. His participation in *Beggar's Banquet* had been minimal, and in June 1969, Jagger, Richards, and Watts paid a late-night visit to inform Jones that he was no longer a member of the band he'd founded.

Jones's final public appearance with the band was in *The Rolling Stones Rock and Roll Circus*, a star-studded variety extravaganza shot in December 1968 but never broadcast. The show was conceived by Jagger and director Michael Lindsay-Hogg (who had previously shot conceptual promo clips for two Stones songs), and used a circus setting as a backdrop for performances by the Stones, John Lennon and Yoko Ono, the Who, Eric Clapton, Marianne Faithfull, Taj Mahal, and Jethro Tull. But Jagger was dissatisfied with the results—according to some accounts, he felt that the Who's powerful performance had stolen the Stones' thunder—and the show was shelved. It would finally be released on CD and DVD in 1996.

Following his dismissal, Jones retreated to his rural home—Cotchford Farm, formerly owned by *Winnie the Pooh* author A.A. Milne—and planned to launch a new, blues-based band. But on July 3, less than a month after his dismissal and two days before the Stones were scheduled to play a free outdoor concert in London's Hyde Park, Jones was found dead in his swimming pool. While his demise was officially ruled “death by misadventure,” its cause has been the subject of various rumors and theories, many of them involving foul play.

The Stones, meanwhile, went ahead with their Hyde Park concert as a tribute to Jones. Performing in front of a crowd of 200,000, Jagger read from Shelley's *Adonais* and released hundreds of butterflies (most of which were dead by the time he turned them loose) in Jones's memory. The band's under-rehearsed set—later broadcast on British TV as *Stones in the Park*—marked the debut of Jones's replacement, Mick Taylor.

Fleetwood Mac: Green's Blues

Few fans of the group responsible for such multi-platinum pop-rock albums as *Rumours* (1977) will recall that Fleetwood Mac was founded with a very different musical mission: to play classic Chicago blues regardless of the commercial consequences. In July 1967, inspired by B.B. King, Otis Rush, and Elmore James, ex-Bluesbreakers guitarist/vocalist Peter Green joined forces with Jeremy Spencer (slide guitar, vocals), John McVie (bass), and Mick Fleetwood (drums) to form Fleetwood Mac. In March 1968, the band's debut album reached the British Top Five—the commercial apex of the British blues boom. The band's second U.S. album *English Rose* included “Black Magic Woman,” a haunting minor-key blues written by Peter Green that became a massive hit for Santana in 1970.

Fleetwood Mac's restless creativity inevitably led them beyond the twelve-bar blues form into progressive rock, especially after the addition of Danny

Kirwan on guitar and vocals. In December 1968, Peter Green's moody instrumental "Albatross" shot to the top of the U.K. singles chart and eventually sold over one million copies. "Man of the World," his pained meditation on the emptiness of stardom, made it to number two. Meanwhile, on tour in the United States, Fleetwood Mac were hailed not as Top Forty hit makers but as an FM rock radio favorite whose powerful three-guitar jams rivaled in exploratory intensity those of the Grateful Dead and the Allman Brothers Band.

Then Play On (1969) captured Fleetwood Mac at its creative peak. But two further Top Ten U.K. hits, the two-part "Oh Well" and "The Green Manalishi (With the Two-Pronged Crown)," offered lyrical evidence of Green's increasing spiritual turmoil. Disenchanted with the music business, disoriented by his experiments with LSD, he left Fleetwood Mac in May 1970. The following year, the guitarist briefly filled in for Jeremy Spencer when the latter suddenly defected to a religious cult, the Children of God, in the midst of an American tour. Peter Green did not appear with the group again until 1998, when he played "Black Magic Woman" on stage in New York during the ceremony marking Fleetwood Mac's induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

A. S.

Taylor was a prodigiously talented player who'd made a name for himself as teenage guitar wunderkind in British kingpin John Mayall's Bluesbreakers. The Bluesbreakers' guitar slot had previously been occupied by two U.K. guitar legends—Eric Clapton and Fleetwood Mac founder Peter Green—but Taylor nonetheless established himself as one of Britain's finest young axmen. Taylor's addition to the lineup introduced a somewhat more conventional separation of lead and rhythm guitar parts.

John Mayall: Godfather of British Blues

The opening of Alexis Korner's London Blues & Barrelhouse Club in 1954 and Muddy Waters's first U.K. tour in 1958 had been seminal events for a small but dedicated number of English musicians committed to playing and popularizing the blues. Among those who followed the trail blazed by Alexis Korner and his band, Blues Incorporated, was John Mayall. Born in 1933 near Manchester, Mayall was an independent thinker with a strong do-it-yourself ethic. In addition to playing harmonica, guitar, piano, and organ, the former commercial graphic artist designed his own album covers, produced most of his own sessions, and lugged his own equipment on tour (as did his band members, a condition of their employment).

In January 1963, John Mayall moved to London and formed the Bluesbreakers, with seventeen-year-old bassist John McVie among his first recruits. The new group struggled for two years until Eric Clapton joined in April 1965, bringing with him a reputation from his former group, the Yardbirds, as the finest blues

guitarist in Britain. Faster, louder, and more aggressive than any of his predecessors, he stayed long enough to record *Blues Breakers: John Mayall with Eric Clapton* (1966)—a landmark album in British blues and the leader's first disc to reach an American audience. On the 1967 album *Crusade*, featuring new guitarist Mick Taylor, Mayall paid musical homage to his African American blues heroes including Sonny Boy Williamson II, Freddy King, and J.B. Lenoir.

John Mayall's five-decade career has been characterized by an unwavering dedication to his own muse and an ever-changing lineup of musicians. A seven-piece band with horns recorded the jazz-influenced *Bare Wires* in 1968; the next year, a drum-less acoustic group recorded *The Turning Point*, Mayall's first gold disc. The highest-charting U.S. album of Mayall's career—*USA Union*, from 1970—featured an all-American lineup with guitarist Harvey Mandel and R&B veteran Don "Sugarcane" Harris on electric violin.

The Bluesbreakers "school" has offered rigorous on-the-job training to scores of musicians who went on to greater glory including Mick Taylor with the Rolling Stones, John McVie and guitarist Peter Green with Fleetwood Mac, and drummers Keef Hartley and Jon Hiseman as leaders of their own bands. In July 2003, the "Godfather of British blues" celebrated his seventieth birthday with a gala concert in Liverpool where John Mayall and Eric Clapton performed together for the first time in thirty-eight years.

A. S.

The Stones' next single "Honky Tonk Women"—released on the day of Jones's death—was a tough, raunchy evocation of the Stones' new rock sound, and went to number one on both sides of the Atlantic.

The next Rolling Stones album *Let It Bleed* had been started prior to Jones's departure; Jones and Taylor appear on two tracks each. It also continued in its predecessor's rootsy vein, while indulging a lyrical fascination with sex and sleaze. The band's interest in the dark side was manifested on such tunes as "Midnight Rambler," "Monkey Man," and the apocalyptic "Gimme Shelter." The title track embodied the elegantly wasted ambience that the Stones would maintain for much of the 1970s, while "You Got the Silver" marked Keith Richards's first recorded lead vocal. Elsewhere, "You Can't Always Get What You Want" employed lush orchestrations and a surging vocal choir, while an edgy invocation of the Robert Johnson classic "Love in Vain" invokes their American blues influences.

In late 1969, the Rolling Stones mounted their first U.S. tour in three years. In the time since the band's last visit, the American rock scene had changed drastically. The emergence of such popular live acts as Cream and Led Zeppelin had raised the stakes of the concert business, putting the Stones in the position of having to once again prove their mettle as a live act. Furthermore, this time they'd be playing to attentive audiences who were actually listening to the music, rather than the screaming teens they'd played for on previous American visits.

As it turned out, the Stones tour (which would yield the 1970 concert LP *Get Yer Ya-Yas Out!*) was a massive success, breaking attendance records across the country. Rather than playing in front of crowds of screaming teenagers, the band performed for young adults who actually listened—and thus were able to appreciate the strength of the new lineup, and the richness of the guitar interplay between Richards and Taylor.

But the triumphant return took a tragic turn when the tour climaxed with a free concert on December 6 at Altamont Speedway, near San Francisco, with a bill that also included Jefferson Airplane; Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young; Santana; and the Flying Burrito Brothers. Unlike the Stones' peaceful Hyde Park show, the poorly organized Altamont event was chaotic and fraught with violence from the start.

At the suggestion of the Grateful Dead, the Stones had hired the local chapter of the Oakland chapter of the Hell's Angels motorcycle gang as security, but that move backfired tragically. At one point, Jefferson Airplane singer Marty Balin was knocked unconscious during his band's set, when he attempted to stop some Hell's Angels from beating up an audience member. Later, during the Stones' headlining set, eighteen-year-old Meredith Hunter was fatally stabbed by an Angel as the Stones performed "Under My Thumb."

Filmmakers Albert and David Maysles, who'd been documenting the tour, caught the murder on film, and it became the disturbing centerpiece of their documentary *Gimme Shelter*. Upon its release in 1970, the film, and the Altamont show, were widely cited as marking the end of the 1960s, indicating that the innocence and idealism of the Woodstock era was now a thing of the past.

Gimme Shelter wasn't the first Stones-related project to hit the big screen. In 1969, Jagger had launched an acting career by starring in the Australian film *Ned Kelly*, portraying the nineteenth-century outlaw of the title. He then co-starred in the 1970 cult classic *Performance*, co-directed by Donald Cammell and Nicolas Roeg and featuring Anita Pallenberg in a key role.

Richards, meanwhile, spent time hanging out with country-rock pioneer Gram Parsons, whose band the Flying Burrito Brothers had performed at Altamont. In the process, he absorbed many of Parsons's country influences, which would be reflected in some of the Stones' subsequent output.

Get Yer Ya-Ya's Out! marked the expiration of the Rolling Stones' contract with Decca/London. Contractually obligated to provide Decca with one more single, the band delivered its parting shot with "Cocksucker Blues," a profane ballad whose bawdy lyrical content made it unreleasable.

In the years since they first signed to Decca, the Rolling Stones had gone from little-known local heroes to world-class superstars. Their commercial status gave the Stones—largely motivated by the business-minded Jagger—the clout to launch their own label. Their new venture, Rolling Stones Records, was initially distributed by Atlantic Records, and allowed the band ownership and control of its own master recordings, and thus a greater share of the profits. To set up and run the new company, they appointed old friend Marshall Chess,

son of Chess Records co-founder Leonard Chess, who'd spent most of his adult life helping to run the label that was a key influence in the Stones' early days.

Unlike such artist-run labels as the Beatles' Apple and Led Zeppelin's Swan Song, Rolling Stones Records stuck mainly to releasing Stones albums and Stones-related side projects, making little effort to sign outside acts. There was some talk of the company releasing a Richards-produced solo LP by Richards's pal Gram Parsons, who'd left the Flying Burrito Brothers, but that collaboration never materialized. In 1973, Jagger would sign ex-Mamas and the Papas leader John Phillips to a solo deal, and Jagger and Richards produced several Phillips sessions. But runaway expenses—partially related to excessive drug use by Phillips and Richards—caused that album to be shelved by Jagger and Atlantic Records head Ahmet Ertegun. One of the few non-Stones successes on Rolling Stones Records was reggae star Peter Tosh's 1978 album *Bush Doctor*, which featured a popular Tosh/Jagger duet on a version of the Temptations' "Don't Look Back."

The Rolling Stones' first release on their own label was *Sticky Fingers*, released in March 1971. The album—whose cover design incorporated an actual metal zipper, inconveniencing record store clerks for years to come—continued where *Let It Bleed* had left off. The songs' drug subtext was hard to miss—more than half of them contained explicit drug references—and the resulting mix of malevolent decadence and folk-blues roots set the pattern that the Stones would follow for years to come.

Sticky Fingers featured a trio of memorable rockers, "Bitch," "Can't You Hear Me Knocking," and the number one U.S. hit "Brown Sugar"—whose upbeat chorus and surging guitar riffs assured that its lyrical themes of racism and slavery were lost on most listeners. The material otherwise struck a bluesy, world-weary tone, exemplified by the heartbreaking ballad "Wild Horses," the yearning, orchestrated album-closer "Moonlight Mile," and the emotionally naked "Sister Morphine," whose harrowing autobiographical lyrics were written by Marianne Faithfull.

On May 12, 1971, Jagger married Nicaraguan model Bianca Perez Morena de Macias, who was pregnant with their daughter Jade at the time, in St. Tropez. The couple's jet-set lifestyle would soon make them a gossip column staple.

Following the release of *Sticky Fingers*, the Stones went into tax exile and retreated to France. There, Richards rented a gothic chateau, Villa Nellecote, which had been used as the headquarters of the local Nazi SS during World War II. The band, along with an assortment of technical crew and various hangers-on, moved into Villa Nellecote to record their next album in the house's basement, with the band's own mobile studio park outside.

The result was the two-LP, eighteen-song *Exile on Main St.*, released in the spring of 1972. The sprawling but inspired epic was loose and organic, seamlessly integrating the country, soul, and gospel influences that the band had begun to explore on *Beggar's Banquet*, *Let It Bleed*, and *Sticky Fingers*, while

amplifying those albums' dark, druggy lyrical undercurrent. Jagger's vocals were noticeably lower in the mix, which emphasized the band's dense, soulful ensemble playing and the riveting chemistry between Richards's eloquently basic, Chuck Berry-inspired rhythm work and Taylor's incisive, intricate solos.

While it contained several Stones classics—including “Tumbling Dice,” “Rocks Off,” “Shine a Light,” “Torn and Frayed,” “Rip This Joint,” and the Richards-sung “Happy”—*Exile on Main St.* is less about individual songs than a sustained ambience, and its relatively muddy, cluttered sound rewards multiple listens with a wealth of sonic riches. Although it's now acknowledged as one of the Rolling Stones' greatest works, *Exile on Main St.* was initially dismissed by many critics as spotty and self-indulgent.

The Stones supported *Exile on Main St.* with a highly anticipated, highly publicized North American tour—their first Stateside performances since the Altamont debacle. The tour's rampant drug use and debauchery was captured in Robert Frank's cinema vérité documentary *Cocksucker Blues*. Frank's candid footage proved so incendiary that the band, which had originally commissioned the film, worked to have Frank's work suppressed, resulting in an unusual court order that barred it from being shown unless the director is physically present. Like the song with which it shares its name, the film was never officially released, but bootleg copies have circulated widely among fans and collectors.

Nineteen seventy-two also saw the release of *Jamming with Edward!*, a bluesy jam session cut during the *Let It Bleed* sessions by Jagger, Richards, Watts, American guitarist Ry Cooder, and veteran session pianist Nicky Hopkins. The impromptu recording reportedly occurred one day when Richards failed to show up at the studio.

ONLY ROCK AND ROLL

The Rolling Stones had made some of their best, most original music in the late 1960s and early 1970s. But following the ragged tour de force of *Exile on Main St.*, the Stones quickly lost focus, resulting in a series of competent but uninspired releases that maintained the band's crowd-pleasing sound, while adding little of substance to their recorded legacy. Many of their post-*Exile* albums would be recorded in bits and pieces rather than as concerted creative efforts, with various band members working in various combinations when schedules permitted.

It probably wasn't a coincidence that the Stones' descent into the musical doldrums coincided with a growing rift between the band's principal members, as Richards's drug dependency deepened and Jagger continued to pursue the high-society lifestyle that, in the eyes of many, distanced him from his musical roots and alienated him from his longtime musical partner.

The Rolling Stones nonetheless remained as popular as ever through the 1970s, and became bigger than ever, as the record and concert industries

expanded during the decade. But while fans continued to embrace their albums and turn out in huge numbers for their tours, it was hard to ignore the general air of excess and indifference that pervaded such LPs as 1973's *Goats Head Soup* and 1974's *It's Only Rock 'N Roll*, whose spotty contents supported the widely held belief that the band members' various indulgences had adversely affected the quality of their musical output.

Goats Head Soup was memorable mainly for the heartrending hit ballad "Angie," which many fans interpreted as a paean to David Bowie's new wife Angela. The song was actually Richards's ode to Anita Pallenberg, who'd left Jones for Richards in 1967, and with whom the guitarist had a lengthy relationship that would last for a decade and produce three children (one of whom died in infancy). Another standout was the menacing urban nightmare "Doo Doo Doo Doo (Heartbreaker)" and the compellingly nasty "Star Star" (originally known as "Starfucker" but retitled for mass consumption). But most of the album suffered from indifferent songwriting, as evidenced by such tunes as "Dancing with Mr. D," on which Jagger's satanic posturing was more feeble than frightening.

It's Only Rock 'N Roll spawned a catchy, if somewhat obvious, anthem in its title track, as well as the catchy "If You Can't Rock Me," the paranoid "Fingerprint File," and a respectable reading of the Temptations' 1960s hit "Ain't Too Proud to Beg." But, like its predecessor, it was weighed down by a surfeit of obvious filler—an issue that would be a recurring problem for the band in years to come.

One factor in the Stones' uninspired output during this period was Richards's heroin addiction, which may have enhanced his outlaw image but did little for his musical consistency. Richards's French villa had been the subject of a drug raid in 1972, and his British home had been raided the following year. The guitarist's drug use took on such a mythic aura that it gave rise to all manner of urban legends, including the memorable (but untrue) rumor that he'd had all of his blood replaced during one effort to clean up.

Richards wasn't the only one in the Stones camp whose chemical dependency affected the quality of his work. Producer Jimmy Miller, who'd been a key member of the band's creative team since "Jumpin' Jack Flash" and *Beggar's Banquet*, was fired from *It's Only Rock 'N Roll* due to his own drug use.

Richards's unreliability reportedly led Jagger to co-write several songs with Mick Taylor during this period. But those compositions nonetheless bore the familiar Jagger/Richards credit when they were released. Taylor's frustration over the situation—and his impatience over the band's failure to tour in 1974—contributed to his surprise decision to quit the band.

Nineteen seventy-four also saw the release of Bill Wyman's first solo LP *Monkey Grip*, which he would follow two years later with *Stone Alone*.

With Taylor gone, the Rolling Stones used the Munich recording sessions for their next album, *Black and Blue*, as an opportunity to audition for his replacement. The candidates included a pair of Americans, ex-Canned

Heat/Bluesbreakers member Harvey Mandel and Muscle Shoals session man Wayne Perkins, who ended up appearing on the album, as well as ex-Yardbird Jeff Beck and former Humble Pie member Peter Frampton, who didn't.

The winner was Ron Wood, a former member of the Faces and the Jeff Beck Group who'd also guested on *It's Only Rock 'N Roll*. Wood, coincidentally, had first been introduced to the Stones by his longtime friend Mick Taylor. While Wood may not have possessed his predecessor's technical chops, his spiky, rhythmic style perfectly complemented Richards's playing, and the pair's sympathetic instrumental rapport would quickly become a crucial element in the Stones' sound.

Prior to *Black and Blue*'s release, Wood made his public debut with the Stones on the band's 1975 North American tour. In addition to introducing the new lineup, those shows also marked the first time that the Rolling Stones had augmented their live act with an elaborate theatrical presentation, including such unsubtle visual props as an inflatable giant phallus and a cherry picker that would hoist Jagger over the audience.

The retooled stage show was Jagger's effort to stay competitive with the overblown extravaganzas that had become standard for touring rock superstars at the time. But it also created another source of tension in his increasingly fractious relationship with Keith Richards, who considered the onstage frills to be an unnecessary distraction.

Black and Blue, released in April 1976, was a marginal improvement over *Goats Head Soup* and *It's Only Rock 'N Roll*. The album's emphasis on loose, funky grooves—like those of the disco-leaning “Hot Stuff” and the reggae-ified “Cherry Oh Baby”—rather than concise songs wasn't surprising, in light of the fact that most of the material was derived via casual studio jams. But *Black and Blue*'s standout tracks were a pair of moody ballads, “Fool to Cry” and “Memory Motel.”

Black and Blue did little to reverse critics' assertions that the Stones had grown stagnant. But Keith Richards had bigger problems than musical direction. Although he'd gone through a series of therapies attempting to cure his heroin addiction, in February 1977 he and Anita Pallenberg were arrested for heroin and cocaine possession in a room at Toronto's Harbour Castle Hotel. Richards was charged with importing narcotics, an offense that carried a minimum prison sentence of seven years.

Jagger, meanwhile, continued to play the role of glamorous globe-hopping celebrity to the hilt. The singer, whose marriage to Bianca would end in 1977, was a regular at the notorious New York disco Studio 54, often in the company of his new girlfriend, model Jerry Hall. Jagger would marry Hall in 1990; the couple would have four children before divorcing in 1999.

By now, the punk rock movement had emerged as a significant force, rebelling against entrenched millionaire rock stars who'd lost touch with their original inspiration. That description certainly applied to the Rolling Stones at the time, and was confirmed when the Clash's Joe Strummer sang “No

Elvis, Beatles or Rolling Stones” in the song “1977.” The rote performances on the Stones’ 1977 double concert set *Love You Live* supported the band’s growing reputation as a spent force coasting on past glories.

But the Stones made an unexpected return to form with 1978’s *Some Girls*. That album recaptured the raw, rude spirit of the band’s best work, channeling its recent internal turmoil into raucous, spirited music, and drawing energy from punk as well as the then-ubiquitous disco explosion. The result was their most focused and consistent music in years, music that instantly made the Rolling Stones seem current once again.

Along with the disco-inflected number one single “Miss You,” the punchy mid-tempo “Beast of Burden,” and the droll country parody “Far Away Eyes,” *Some Girls* was loaded with tough, witty rockers that showcased Jagger’s reenergized presence and the solid guitar rapport of Richards and Wood, for example, “Shattered,” “Respectable,” “When the Whip Comes Down,” and the Richards-sung outlaw anthem “Before They Make Me Run.”

The latter track was a liberating shout of defiance in the face of Richards’s recent problems with drugs and the law. The song held particular resonance, since the guitarist was still under the threat of imprisonment when it was recorded and released. Richards ultimately escaped serving time, and instead was sentenced to play two benefit concerts in Toronto for the Canadian National Institute for the Blind.

For that purpose, Richards put together the New Barbarians, a short-lived supergroup that also included Ron Wood, ex-Faces keyboardist Ian McLagan (who’d been working with the Stones as a studio and stage sideman), jazz-fusion bassist Stanley Clarke, drummer Zigaboo Modeliste of fabled New Orleans funk combo the Meters, and frequent Stones saxophonist Bobby Keys. Following the court-mandated Toronto shows on April 22, the ensemble did a month-long U.S. tour, ostensibly to promote Wood’s then-current solo album *Gimme Some Neck*, to which Richards, McLagan, and Keys all contributed.

His legal problems apparently motivated Richards to successfully overcome his heroin addiction, after multiple attempts. At around the same time, he ended his relationship with Anita Pallenberg. 1979 also saw the first official Richards solo release, a Christmas single combining covers of Chuck Berry’s seasonal tune “Run Rudolph Run” and Jimmy Cliff’s reggae classic “The Harder They Come.”

In addition to making the Rolling Stones artistically relevant again, *Some Girls* restored their commercial status. It became their best-selling album in years, topping the American charts and reaching number two in punk-gripped Britain.

But the band was unable to maintain that level of quality with 1980’s *Emotional Rescue*. That disc, partially comprising *Some Girls* outtakes, had an unmistakable throwaway feel, with such numbers as “She’s So Cold,” “Send It

to Me,” and the reggae-flavored title track sounding like pale reworkings of older, better Stones songs.

Emotional Rescue's lackluster quality betrayed the Stones' unstable internal state. With Richards having curbed some of his drug excesses, he began to become a more active and assertive participant in the studio, leading to personal tensions and creative power struggles with Jagger.

The Stones' 1981 release *Tattoo You* was also largely assembled from left-over tracks from prior recording projects, some of them nearly a decade old, but was a substantial improvement over *Emotional Rescue*. Divided into separate sides of rockers and ballads, its rock half featured such highlights as the insistent “Start Me Up,” the self-mocking “Hang Fire,” and one of the band's best Richards-fronted tracks, the cheerfully sleazy “Little T & A.” The Richards-sung ballad “Worried About You” was another standout, as was the hit ballad “Waiting on a Friend,” which caught Jagger in an uncharacteristically reflective mood and featured a sax solo by jazz great Sonny Rollins. Rollins overdubbed his part years after the original track was recorded; it and “Tops” had both been cut during the *Goats Head Soup* sessions and featured the guitar work of the long-departed Mick Taylor.

Tattoo You was followed by a stadium tour that was captured on the 1982 live album *Still Life* and shot by director Hal Ashby for the concert film *Let's Spend the Night Together*. That tour also marked the introduction of American pianist Chuck Leavell, formerly of the Allman Brothers Band and Sea Level, to the Stones' stage lineup.

In 1982, Bill Wyman, who rarely got the chance to display his songwriting abilities within the Stones, achieved a surprise European solo smash with “(Si Si) Je suis un Rock Star,” a playful, new-wavey pop novelty that spoofed his status as a French tax exile.

ACHING IN THE 1980s

The Rolling Stones continued to tour and record consistently through the 1980s. While their tours continued to be tremendous money makers, their albums were largely disappointing, both musically and commercially. The creative rut was widely assumed to be the result of the ongoing strained relations between Jagger and Richards. One source of disagreement was Jagger's desire to take the band in a direction more in keeping with contemporary pop trends and Richards's insistence on sticking with rock and roll basics.

Nineteen eighty-three's *Undercover* is generally regarded as Jagger's attempt to give the Rolling Stones a more modern sound, integrating a variety of then-contemporary beats and flashy production techniques. But the ionic frills felt awkward, and the songs' self-consciously nasty, nihilistic lyrics—manifested in the tawdry images of kinky sex, sleazy violence, and political corruption on

such numbers as “Undercover of the Night,” “Pretty Beat Up,” and “Too Much Blood”—seemed less like musical growth and more like a forced attempt to give the band an edgy veneer.

The ill will between Jagger and Richards was exacerbated when Jagger signed a solo deal with Rolling Stones Records’ new distributor, CBS. Richards, who’d largely refrained from extracurricular musical pursuits, resented Jagger’s apparent lack of commitment to the group. The public feuding between the two longtime bandmates seemed to cast serious doubt on the Stones’ future.

The much-ballyhooed 1985 release of Jagger’s first solo effort *She’s the Boss* seemed to confirm the widely held assumption that the Stones were nearing the end of their run. But the album—recorded with a sprawling cast of players that included Jeff Beck, Pete Townshend, Herbie Hancock, and the reggae rhythm section of Sly and Robbie—was a flimsy collection of trendy, lightweight 1980s pop, with nary a trace of stoney spirit.

To help promote *She’s the Boss*, Jagger shot a series of elaborate promotional videos that received heavy MTV airplay. Although the exposure pushed the album to platinum status and helped to send its first single “Just Another Night” into the Top Twenty, the public response seemed muted in comparison to the promotional hype that had accompanied the project. That summer, Jagger teamed up with David Bowie to record a cover of Martha and the Vandellas’ 1964 Motown classic “Dancing in the Street” to benefit the Live Aid organization. The single reached number seven in the United States.

A further blow to the Stones’ stability came when beloved pianist and band retainer Ian Stewart—whose calming influence had long had a stabilizing effect on the group’s internal conflicts—died of a heart attack in December 1985. A set at a Stewart tribute concert in February 1986 was the Rolling Stones’ only public appearance during that period.

The Stones paid further tribute to their fallen comrade by including a snippet of a Stewart boogie-woogie piano solo in the final fadeout of 1986’s *Dirty Work*. That troubled album represented a conscious attempt to return the Stones to their rock and roll roots. But the largely Richards-penned album suffered from a paucity of memorable songs, and the lukewarm performances—not to mention the lightweight 1980s production—did little to put the subpar material across.

Despite its musical deficiencies, *Dirty Work*’s relatively lackluster sales probably had as much to do with Jagger’s decision that the Stones not tour to promote it. The growing perception of his lack of interest in the band was supported by the release of his solo title song for the film *Ruthless People* concurrently with *Dirty Work*.

Also in 1986, the Rolling Stones were honored with a Grammy lifetime achievement award. But that honor was undercut by the spectacle of Jagger and Richards frequently sniping at each other in interviews. The pair would have little contact over the next few years.

With no *Dirty Work* tour to keep him busy, Richards found an even more stubborn musical partner in his idol Chuck Berry, when Richards volunteered

to serve as musical director for a pair of concerts in Berry's hometown of St. Louis to honor the legendary singer/guitarist on his sixtieth birthday. The turbulent process of staging those shows was chronicled in the documentary film *Hail! Hail! Rock 'n' Roll*.

Rather than touring with the Stones, Jagger continued to put his energies into establishing his individual career. He teamed up with producer Dave Stewart, of Eurhythmics fame, to record a second solo album, 1987's *Primitive Cool*. Like *She's the Boss*, it was another attempt to reinvent the once-rebellious rock icon as a state-of-the-art 1980s pop star. Minus the curiosity factor and corporate hype that had accompanied its predecessor's release, *Primitive Cool* was a commercial bust.

Ironically, the lower-profile Richards—who had long been reluctant to record without the Stones, but was motivated to strike out on his own by Jagger's extracurricular ambitions—fared much better than Jagger as a solo artist. Richards's 1988 release *Talk Is Cheap* contrasted his bandmate's work by concentrating on spare, no-frills rock and roll. The album mixed catchy, Stones-style grooves and the guitarist's own enthusiastically ragged vocals, to make music that rocked harder than anything the Stones had done in years.

Richards proved a capable frontman when he supported *Talk Is Cheap* by doing a brief tour with a backup combo he dubbed the X-Pensive Winos. That lineup included veteran session guitarist Waddy Wachtel, bassist Charley Drayton, keyboardist Ivan Neville, and drummer Steve Jordan; Jordan had done some playing on *Dirty Work* and was part of the band that Richards had assembled to back Chuck Berry. That tour yielded the album *Live at the Hollywood Palladium, December 15, 1988*, released in 1991.

Charlie Watts, the Rolling Stones' most low-key member, used the band's frequent hiatuses to indulge his lifelong love for jazz. In 1986, he recorded and toured with the Charlie Watts Orchestra, the first of a series of instrumental groups that included many of England's top jazz players.

The Rolling Stones' 1989 induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame set the stage for the band's studio reconciliation on *Steel Wheels*. If not in the same league as their best work, the album at least found Jagger and Richards working in relative harmony again. Although *Steel Wheels* was generally well received, the world tour that accompanied it was bigger news. The tour grossed over \$140 million and spawned yet another live album, *Flashpoint*.

The success of the *Steel Wheels* tour demonstrated that public demand for the Rolling Stones remained as high as ever. For years to come, the band would follow a similar pattern, releasing a new album, followed by a high-profile tour, with both events routinely accompanied by widespread media speculation over whether they would be the band's last.

Those projects would proceed without founding bassist Bill Wyman, who quit the band following the *Steel Wheels* tour. Although he'd never had the high media profile of Jagger and Richards, Wyman had recently received much unwelcome publicity regarding his marriage to the thirty-four-years-younger

Mandy Smith, whom Wyman had begun dating when she was thirteen (the couple divorced after a year). The tabloid stories grew juicier when Wyman's thirty-year-old son Stephen became romantically involved with Mandy's forty-six-year-old mother.

The Stones did not announce an immediate replacement for Wyman, since various members were all working on individual projects in the period following *Steel Wheels*. In 1991, Wyman published a frank tell-all autobiography, *Stone Alone*, which recounted a litany of his randy exploits during his years with the band. In the years to come, Wyman would also publish books of his photography and his cartoon drawings, as well as launching the all-star R&B-oriented cover outfit Bill Wyman's Rhythm Kings, featuring such notable contemporaries as Gary Brooker, Eric Clapton, Georgie Fame, Peter Frampton, George Harrison, Albert Lee, and even fellow ex-Stone Mick Taylor.

The Stones' return to active duty with *Steel Wheels* was apparently enough to satisfy Richards's musical urges, and he put his solo career on hold after releasing a second studio solo outing, *Main Offender*, in 1992. Jagger, meanwhile, recorded a third slickly produced solo release, *Wandering Spirit*, with Beastie Boys/Red Hot Chili Peppers producer Rick Rubin in 1993.

Although *Steel Wheels* had apparently helped to mend the Jagger/Richards feud, it took five more years—two years longer than the gap between *Dirty Work* and *Steel Wheels*—for the Rolling Stones to reconvene for 1994's *Voodoo Lounge*.

Voodoo Lounge's producer, versatile American Don Was, was noted for helping veteran acts recapture their original essence. The album did, indeed, retain much of the stones' classic sound, with some additional nods to their *Beggar's Banquet/Let It Bleed*-era folk and blues excursions. But as with many of the recent Stones releases, *Voodoo Lounge*'s songwriting was more functional than inspired.

To fill the void left by Wyman's departure, the band, at Chuck Leavell's suggestion, tapped bassist Darryl Jones, a seasoned jazz/funk player whose credits included work with Miles Davis and Sting. Although Jones was hired as a sideman rather than a full member, he would continue as the Stones' touring bassist for the next dozen years as well as doing the lion's share of the bass work on their future recordings.

Whatever its flaws, *Voodoo Lounge* sold in higher quantities than its predecessor, and its accompanying tour was even more successful than the *Steel Wheels* extravaganza. *Voodoo Lounge* also won the Stones their first-ever Grammy award, in the Best Rock Album category.

Following the *Voodoo Lounge* tour, the Rolling Stones jumped on the "unplugged" bandwagon by releasing *Stripped* in the fall of 1995. Recorded during rehearsals and low-key club gigs in Amsterdam and Paris, the album recast an assortment of Stones classics, fan favorites, and blues covers—plus a punning but not altogether inappropriate reading of Bob Dylan's "Like a Rolling Stone"—with spare, largely acoustic arrangements. The concept had

grown out of the acoustic sets that the band had introduced during the *Voodoo Lounge* tour. As promising as the concept was, the performances were unremarkable, adding little to the familiar material.

A much bigger windfall for the Stones in 1995 was the band's licensing of "Start Me Up" to Microsoft to advertise the company's Windows 95 operating system for the tidy sum of \$14 million. The Microsoft campaign marked the first time the group had allowed its music to be used in a commercial.

According to legend, Microsoft boss Bill Gates had asked Jagger how much he'd want for the rights to use the song. Rather than refuse, the singer facetiously named the \$14 million figure—which he considered to be ridiculously high—and Gates readily agreed. Four years later, Apple Computers would use the *Their Satanic Majesties Request* tune "She's a Rainbow" to promote the introduction of multicolored iMacs.

The Stones worked with Don Was again on 1997's *Bridges to Babylon*. But while *Voodoo Lounge* attempted to reclaim the band's classic style, *Bridges to Babylon* made a concerted—and somewhat forced—effort to update their sound. With trendy alt-hitmakers the Dust Brothers and Danny Saber producing individual tracks, it augmented the band's familiar sound with samples and drum loops. Despite the postmodern gimmicks, the album—which featured a higher than usual vocal presence by Richards, who sang lead on three standout tracks—didn't sound all that different from *Voodoo Lounge*, with its solid execution compensating for the forgettable material.

Although ex-Sugarhill Gang/Living Colour vet Doug Wimbish played most of the album's bass parts, Wimbish reportedly turned down the offer of becoming the Stones' touring bassist, and Darryl Jones was back for the epic *Bridges to Babylon* world tour. This time, the shows included a segment during which a metal bridge unfolded from the stage, from which the musicians walked to a smaller stage set up in the middle of the audience to play a stripped-down mini-set. Not surprisingly, the tour spawned yet another live album, *No Security*, whose main selling point was that none of its songs had appeared on any of the band's six previous live releases.

In 2001 Jagger took another crack at his solo career with *Goddess in the Doorway*, whose sprawling roster of guest stars—including Pete Townshend, Bono, Joe Perry, Lenny Kravitz, Missy Elliot, Wyclef Jean, and Matchbox 20 singer Rob Thomas—smacked of commercial desperation rather than sound aesthetic judgment. Jagger also continued to take occasional acting assignments, earning positive notices for his roles in 1997's *Bent* and 2001's *The Man from Elysian Fields*.

In 2002, Allen Klein's label ABKCO, which controlled the Rolling Stones' pre-*Sticky Fingers* catalog, finally released upgraded, remastered editions of all of those albums, including separate versions of their U.S. and U.K. variants. The refurbished discs were welcomed by fans, who for years had had to make do with the inferior versions that ABKCO had issued early in the CD era. The remastered editions were initially released in the high-tech SACD

format, but were re-pressed as conventional CDs after the SACD format failed to catch on with consumers.

The belated reclamation of the Rolling Stones' best recorded work coincided with the band's rebirth as a performing unit. A 2002 tour—in conjunction with the career-spanning compilation *Forty Licks* rather than a new studio release—found the band playing with renewed fire and a heightened sense of purpose. This time around, the de rigueur concert album, *Live Licks*, was a worthy addition to the Stones' catalog.

On July 30, 2003, the Stones headlined a benefit concert in Toronto, in front of an audience estimated at 490,000, to help the city—which the band regularly used as a base for pre-tour rehearsals—recover from the effects of the recent SARS epidemic. On November 9, 2003, the Stones played their first-ever Hong Kong concert, a show staged as part of that city's post-SARS recovery effort.

The same month, the band released the four-DVD set *Four Flicks*, recorded on their most recent tour. In the United States, the package was distributed exclusively to the Best Buy retail chain, leading several other music retail chains to retaliate by temporarily removing all Rolling Stones merchandise from their shelves.

THE LAST TIME?

By this point, the Rolling Stones had fallen into an familiar (if undeniably profitable) pattern: release an album that's routinely hyped as a return to form, followed by an epic stadium tour, with both accompanied by intimations that they might be the band's last. The fact that the Stones can continue to reap massive rewards from this strategy every few years is powerful evidence of their bigger-than-life status as one of rock's few living legends.

So it was that in 2005, after countless false alarms and supposed artistic resurrections that never quite panned out, the Rolling Stones surprised even their most skeptical fans with their best and hardest-rocking album in years, *A Bigger Bang*. Eight years had passed since *Bridges to Babylon*—the longest-ever gap between new Stones discs—but the new disc embodied much of the revived spirit that the band had demonstrated on the *Forty Licks* tour. Where *Steel Wheels* and *Voodoo Lounge* had been consciously designed to resurrect the familiar Stones sound, *A Bigger Bang* (produced once again by Don Was) sounded more like the band had stopped considering audience expectations and just set out to make a good record.

Whatever the intentions, *A Bigger Bang* found the Stones sounding tougher and greasier than they had in a couple of decades, boasting a spacious sound that provided a solid framework for the revitalized band's tough, sinewy playing. The album's sixteen new originals represented their strongest batch of new

material since *Some Girls*, including such venomous rockers as “Rough Justice,” “Look What the Cat Dragged In,” and “Oh No Not You Again,” as well as some convincing ballads and blues tunes and Keith’s after-hours lament “This Place Is Empty.” *A Bigger Bang* briefly stirred some pre-release controversy over “Sweet Neo Con,” a pointed Jagger jab at the Bush administration’s recklessness. The song was reportedly almost left off the album due to the objections of the staunchly apolitical Richards.

The band began its tour in support of *A Bigger Bang* in August 2005, covering North America, South America, and East Asia in a mixture of venues. By the end of that year, the tour had racked up a record-setting \$162 million in gross receipts, breaking the record that the Stones themselves had set in 1994.

In February 2006, the Stones performed in the high-profile halftime slot of the Super Bowl. On April 27, while vacationing on the island of Fiji following some concerts in Australia, Richards suffered a head injury after a fall from a coconut tree. A few days later, he underwent successful brain surgery in Auckland, New Zealand, to relieve a blood clot. One of rock’s most durable anti-heroes was back on stage within a few months.

Whether *A Bigger Bang* signaled a long-term return to form or merely a fond farewell, it made the point that it’s possible to age gracefully and still make great rock and roll. Nearly four and a half decades after their formation, the Rolling Stones had successfully defended their status as the World’s Greatest Rock and Roll Band.

TIMELINE

July 12, 1962

Billed as The Rollin’ Stones, the band plays its first gig at London’s Marquee club, with a lineup composed of Mick Jagger, Keith Richards, Brian Jones, Dick Taylor on bass, Ian Stewart on piano, and Mick Avory on drums.

December 1962

Bill Wyman joins the Rolling Stones as bassist.

January 1963

Charlie Watts joins the Rolling Stones as drummer.

February 1963

The new Rolling Stones lineup begins an eight-month residency at London’s Crawdaddy Club. The band’s performances there will become so popular that the club is eventually forced to move to a larger location.

June 1963

The Rolling Stones’ first single, consisting of cover versions of Chuck Berry’s “Come On” and Willie Dixon’s “I Want to Be Loved,” is released in Britain.

January 18, 1964

Gene Pitney's version of "That Girl Belongs to Yesterday" enters the *Billboard* Hot 100, becoming the first Jagger/Richards composition to chart in the United States.

February 1964

The Rolling Stones' third single, a cover of Buddy Holly's "Not Fade Away," becomes the band's commercial breakthrough in Britain, reaching number three on the U.K. pop chart.

June 1, 1964

The Rolling Stones begin their first North American tour, which will include appearances on *The Ed Sullivan Show* and Dean Martin's *Hollywood Palace*, as well as a visit to Chicago's legendary Chess studio. At Chess, the band will record the EP *Five by Five*.

June 1966

The Stones release *Aftermath*, their first album consisting entirely of Jagger/Richards originals.

June 19, 1965

"Satisfaction" becomes the Rolling Stones' first number one hit in the United States.

February 1967

Mick Jagger and Keith Richards are arrested on drug charges when the police raid a party at Richards's estate in Sussex, and find four amphetamine pills in Jagger's possession. The pair will be convicted of the charge in June, but public outcry over the trumped-up charges and excessive sentences will prompt the reversal of their sentences.

May 1967

Brian Jones is arrested for the possession of cannabis, cocaine, and methamphetamine. He will escape with a fine and probation, but is ordered to seek professional help.

December 1967

The Stones release their controversial psychedelic album *Their Satanic Majesties Request*.

May 1968

The single "Jumpin' Jack Flash" is released.

July 26, 1968

Decca withdraws the original version of the Stones album *Beggars Banquet* due to its controversial cover art.

December 11–12, 1968

The Rolling Stones film their TV special *Rock and Roll Circus*, with guest appearances by John Lennon, Eric Clapton, Jimi Hendrix, the Who, and others.

June 8, 1969

Brian Jones is fired from the Rolling Stones.

July 3, 1969

Brian Jones is found dead in his swimming pool.

July 5, 1969

The Rolling Stones play a previously scheduled free concert in London's Hyde Park, in front of a crowd of 200,000, as a tribute to Brian Jones. The show is the debut of new guitarist Mick Taylor.

August 23, 1969

The Rolling Stones reach number one with "Honky Tonk Women."

November 1969

The band plays its first U.S. tour in three years.

December 6, 1969

The Stones headline an all-star free concert at Altamont Speedway in California. The event becomes a disaster when it's disrupted by violence from Hell's Angel members, with one audience member stabbed to death. The event will be documented in the feature film *Gimme Shelter*.

March 1971

Sticky Fingers, the band's first album on their own Rolling Stones Records label, is released.

February 1977

Keith Richards and Anita Pallenberg are arrested for heroin and cocaine possession in a Toronto hotel room. Richards will receive a suspended sentence and be ordered to play two free concerts for a local charity. The sentence sparks the formation of Richards's temporary supergroup the New Barbarians, which plays some U.S. dates as well as the court-ordered concerts.

1993

Bill Wyman quits the Rolling Stones.

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Flowers, 1967

Their Satanic Majesties Request, 1967

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The Who

Alan Bisbort

WHO ARE THEY?

In their lengthy career, the Who have been many things. They began as a mascot of England's Mod movement, recording a string of savage, anthemic singles that defined rock's rebellious adolescent edge. They then became a key force in rock's shift in emphasis from singles to albums, pioneering the idea of the concept album with their seminal rock operas *Tommy* and *Quadrophenia*. The thematic and musical complexity of those albums reflected leader Pete

Townshend's restless drive to conquer new musical territory, as well as his equally relentless instinct for self-examination. In later years, the band would be a vehicle for Townshend's introspective wrestling with the deeper meanings of rock and roll and the psychic demands of his role as an artist.

The Who has always been an unwieldy yet fascinating mass of complementary contradictions, with the four band members' divergent personalities lending depth and dimension to their musical output. Strutting, microphone-twirling singer Roger Daltrey set the standard for macho rock frontmen for decades to come. Swaggering guitar hero Townshend played his instrument with such abandon that his hands were often bloody by the end of the show. Townshend's violent performing style was matched by that of drummer Keith Moon, who flailed away at—and sometimes demolished—his drum kit with a manic madness that matched his lovably unhinged off-stage persona. Meanwhile, strong, silent bassist John Entwistle stood quietly at the eye of the sonic hurricane, anchoring the maelstrom with his thunderous bass lines.

While the band's live shows attained a heroic, bigger-than-life scale, Townshend's identity as one of the most cerebral and introspective rock songwriters of his era gave his songs a rare emotional and rhetorical depth. Townshend was also one of the first rock songwriters to wrestle with the thorny topic of the aging process, as it relates to the creators and consumers of rock and roll.

For all of their contradictions and misadventures—some of which manifested themselves in the premature deaths of Moon and Entwistle—the Who have made music that's often been magnificent and never been less than interesting. Indeed, even the band's musical failures have been fascinating and edifying ones.

TALKIN' 'BOUT THEIR GENERATION

Roger Daltrey, John Entwistle, and Pete Townshend all grew up in the same West London district of Shepherd's Bush. They were acquaintances at Acton County Grammar School, and Entwistle and Townshend became close friends, bound by their common musical interests. Entwistle performed with the Middlesex Youth Orchestra, gaining notice for his abilities on trumpet, French horn, and piano. Townshend came from a musical family; his mother Betty was a singer with the Sidney Torch Orchestra and his father Clifford was a clarinetist and sax player who led the Squadronaires, a Royal Air Force dance band. In their early teens, Entwistle and Townshend—then playing banjo—performed in traditional and Dixieland jazz combos, and in the rock and roll outfits the Confederates, the Aristocrats, and the Scorpions.

While Townshend and Entwistle were natural musicians, Daltrey was a natural leader. Blessed with a strong constitution and matinee-idol looks but cursed with a hair-trigger temper, Daltrey had been kicked out of school for

smoking and was already working by the time Townshend and Entwistle joined his band, the Detours. The Detours played covers of American blues, soul, and R&B standards, with Daltrey playing lead guitar, as well as booking the gigs and providing transportation with a company van borrowed from his job as a sheet-metal worker. Although Daltrey would soon drop guitar to concentrate on singing, Townshend later stated that at the time they met, Daltrey was a more accomplished instrumentalist than himself or Entwistle.

The Detours' original drummer, Doug Sandom, quit in March 1964, and the band recruited a temporary replacement to fulfill their prior live commitments. It was at one of those shows that Keith Moon—then playing in the London surf-covers outfit the Beachcombers and working in a cement plant—announced to Townshend that he was more capable than the band's replacement drummer. After sitting in with the Detours, Moon—who already had a reputation as London's loudest drummer—secured the job permanently.

With their soon-to-be-famous lineup in place, the Detours acquired a well-connected manager in Peter Meaden. Meaden was a prominent figure in London's Mod scene, a subculture comprising largely disaffected working-class youths fond of American rhythm and blues, French fashions, Italian motor scooters, Pop Art imagery, pills, and occasional punch-ups with their nemeses, the Rockers.

Although both groups were composed largely of working-class youths, the Mods and Rockers were bitter rivals. The rough-edged Rockers were descended from the Teddy Boys of the 1950s, working stiffs who affected Edwardian styles in a parody of the aristocracy. Sporting leather jackets and slicked-back hair, the Rockers rode motorcycles and favored the early rock and roll of Elvis Presley, Eddie Cochran, Gene Vincent, and Chuck Berry. The Mods, by contrast, viewed themselves as sophisticates, riding imported motor scooters and conforming to elaborate codes of style and behavior, and listened to American rhythm and blues.

The first of several widely publicized Mod/Rocker confrontations took place on March 27, 1964, in the coastal resort town of Clacton-on-Sea, when a group of local Rockers took umbrage at a group of Mods who'd ridden their scooters from London. The two factions' initial scuffling was exaggerated by the national press as a "teenage riot." The media frenzy became self-fulfilling prophecy to larger, weekend-long riots in various locations through the spring and summer of 1964 (the riots would later help to inspire the Who's rock opera *Quadrophenia*).

With an eye toward courting the Mod audience, Peter Meaden reinvented the Detours. He convinced the band to change its name to the High Numbers—"high" in honor of the Mods' penchant for amphetamines and "Numbers" being Mod slang for "the crowd." Since the Mods favored American R&B, Meaden sought to create an explicitly British variation to appeal to mod tastes.

For the High Numbers' first single, Meaden had the band cut two of his own derivative compositions, "I'm the Face" and "Zoot Suit." The tune of the former was appropriated from American bluesman Slim Harpo's "Got Love If You Want it," and the latter borrowed liberally from "Misery" by the Dynamics. Both songs were filled with Mod terminology designed to appeal to the disc's target demographic. Despite Meaden's canny marketing, the single failed to catch on.

Although Peter Meaden's machinations had failed to yield hit results, the struggling quartet—which had rechristened itself the Who shortly after the release of the High Numbers single—soon found a more productive association with the duo of aspiring filmmakers Kit Lambert and Chris Stamp. Lambert was the son of classical composer Constant Lambert, while Stamp was the brother of actor Terence Stamp, whose performances in such films as *Billy Budd* and *The Collector* had established him as an icon of 1960s British cinema. Lambert and Stamp had planned to make a film that would feature an unknown pop group. But after encountering the Who, they abandoned their film project and instead became the band's managers, purchasing their management contract from Meaden.

As it happened, the night that Lambert and Stamp first saw the Who, at the Railway Tavern in Harrow, Middlesex on July 14, 1964, was also the first time that Townshend smashed his guitar on stage. This destruction initially occurred by accident, when his guitar slammed against the club's low ceiling, cracking the neck. Angered by the damage to his precious ax, Townshend ritually disemboweled it, inducing ear-splitting feedback from his amplifier in the process.

Word of the incident soon spread through the Mod scene. Before long, audiences expected to witness similar chaos whenever the Who performed. When Townshend learned that a Who gig was to be covered by the London tabloid the *Daily Mail*, he made a point of destroying another guitar at the set's climax. Guitar-smashing soon became a regular feature of the band's shows, and Moon began to join in the destruction, kicking over his drum kit at the end of shows. Later, he added smoke bombs and explosives. Townshend augmented the pyrotechnics by adding a stack of Marshall amplifiers to achieve additional volume and more intense feedback. The excessive on-stage volume would have a long-term effect on Townshend's hearing, resulting in the chronic tinnitus that would plague him for the rest of his career.

Townshend later explained that his guitar-smashing was partially motivated by his frustration at the technical limitations of his own playing. But the act was also informed by Townshend's art school training. While attending Ealing Art College, he'd learned about "auto destruction" from instructor Gustav Metzger, who'd published a manifesto on the subject in 1959. Metzger's idea was to create art objects only to publicly destroy them, thus rendering them unexploitable, and Townshend viewed his ritual onstage destruction within that context.

After taking over the Who's management, Kit Lambert and Chris Stamp recognized and nurtured Townshend's nascent songwriting abilities and nurtured his talent, encouraging the twenty-year-old guitarist to write original material, in contrast to the covers of American R&B and rock and roll that still dominated the repertoire of most British bands.

Lambert and Stamp moved Townshend and his art-school classmate Richard Barnes into a flat above their offices, and plied Townshend with money, equipment, and intellectual stimulation. With access to a small home recording setup, Townshend cut demo tapes of his new songs, meticulously overdubbing all of the instruments and vocals himself, in order to present the material to the band in its most complete and favorable light (years later, Townshend's demo recordings would form the basis of several albums released under his own name).

The Who achieved a crucial breakthrough when they played an extended Tuesday night residency at London's Marquee club, a former jazz club that had become ground zero for the swinging London scene, as well as a popular Mod hangout.

Lambert and Stamp helped to build the Marquee gigs into events by promoting them with distinctive Pop Art graphics. Lambert helped to cement the band's image by designing a poster to promote the shows, picturing Townshend caught in mid-wind-up for one of his fingertip-severing power chords. The poster hung on the walls of virtually every record shop and trendy clothing store in London, building public excitement and curiosity for the gigs. The managers further strengthened the band's mod image by giving the band members money to deck themselves out in trendy Carnaby Street fashions. Moon soon became known for his bull's-eye T-shirts and Townshend for his Union Jack suits.

Lambert's inventive approach to visual presentation would prove crucial in establishing the Who's early identity. But the expense of his and Stamp's promotional efforts, along with the need to constantly replace the musicians' decimated equipment, would cause the band to remain in debt for years.

The managers' confidence in Townshend paid quick dividends. The guitarist's first major composition was "I Can't Explain," an insistent evocation of adolescent dislocation that became the Who's first Top Ten hit single in Britain, and would remain the opening number of the band's concerts for decades to come. Townshend later asserted that he modeled "I Can't Explain" on the Kinks' breakthrough smash "You Really Got Me." The two bands shared a producer in talented, abrasive American transplant Shel Talmy.

On the strength of "I Can't Explain," Lambert and Stamp got the Who a spot on the popular and influential British TV pop show *Ready Steady Go!* The band first appeared on the show on January 29, 1965, and were so well received that they were invited back eight more times over the next two years.

The Who's next single, "Anyway Anyhow Anywhere," was a swaggering barrage of guitar feedback, cacophonous drumming, and macho lyrics, and

followed its predecessor into the U.K. Top Ten. The defiant youth anthem “My Generation” arrived in late 1965, at the height of the excitement surrounding the band’s Marquee residency. “My Generation” amplified the rebellious vibe of the Who’s prior singles to maximum intensity, with Townshend’s and Entwistle’s frenzied solos and Daltrey’s aggressive, stuttering vocal, while Townshend’s lyrics drew a line in the sand with the blunt catchphrase “Hope I die before I get old.” Townshend would come to rue the line in future years, but at the time it perfectly encapsulated the in-the-moment spirit of Swinging London in the mid-1960s. Daltrey’s memorable stutter was initially the result of his stumbling in his first run-through in the studio, and was kept in at Lambert’s suggestion.

“My Generation” was a sensation in Britain, where it reached number two on the singles chart. But its success was not repeated in America, where it stalled at number seventy-four. The song became the title track of the Who’s first LP, released in Britain at the end of 1965 and in the United States in early 1966. The album also contained such Townshend-penned teen anthems as “The Kids Are Alright,” “Out in the Street,” and “Circles” (which was unaccountably deleted from *My Generation*’s U.S. edition). The album reached the Top Five in the band’s homeland, but in America it was lost amid a flood of British Invasion acts.

By the end of 1965, the pressures of touring the British Isles and Europe, combined with Townshend assuming the leadership role that had previously been held by Daltrey, took its toll upon the Who. The tensions within the band manifested themselves in Copenhagen, where Daltrey, angered by Moon’s jibes at his vocal abilities and by the drummer’s prodigious pill-popping, physically attacked the drummer, leaving him nearly unconscious and prompting his bandmates to ask Daltrey to leave the group. Following a cooling-off period, and Daltrey’s promise to keep his hands to himself, the hatchet was buried.

NO SUBSTITUTIONS

Frustrated with producer Shel Talmy’s dictatorial approach, the Who split from Decca Records and signed to Reaction, a label run by British rock impresario Robert Stigwood. The change in labels resulted in a rash of legal disputes and competing singles releases. Meanwhile, the personal tensions within the band continued to fester. Entwistle and Moon, who’d incurred Townshend’s and Daltrey’s wrath after failing to show for a gig in May 1966, briefly considered leaving to form their own band. They’d fantasized naming their new group Led Zeppelin, a moniker that noted London session guitarist Jimmy Page would later borrow when forming his own band.

The Who’s next single was the self-produced “Substitute,” which marked a substantial leap forward for the band. Although Townshend later claimed

that the song was a parody of the Rolling Stones' "19th Nervous Breakdown," its lyrics suggest otherwise. Its deceptively simple pop structure actually masked a vivid meditation on pretense and inauthenticity. When Townshend's line "I look all white, but my dad was black" was judged to be too controversial for U.S. airplay, the band re-recorded the line as "I try walking forward but my feet walk back" for Stateside consumption. Despite the revision, the song didn't make the American charts, although it reached the British Top Five.

Kit Lambert took over production duties for the Who's next single, "I'm a Boy," which offered an early glimpse of the band's future conceptual ventures. Townshend had originally written the song as part of a never-completed science fiction concept project. Removed from its original futuristic context, the catchy gender-confusion vignette gave the band another British Top Five hit.

In an effort to defuse tensions within the band, Townshend and Lambert suggested that the other three members try writing songs for the Who's second album, which would be released in the United Kingdom as *A Quick One* and in the United States as *Happy Jack*. Daltrey's and Moon's contributions were serviceable enough, but Entwistle's songs "Boris the Spider" and "Whiskey Man" were genuinely impressive, revealing a macabre sensibility and a dark sense of humor that would remain key elements in his future songwriting efforts.

But it was a Townshend composition, the infectious "Happy Jack," that finally gave the Who the U.S. Top Forty hit that had long eluded them. The song, partially inspired by his recollections of childhood trips to the Isle of Man with his father, managed to capture youth's innocence as well as its casual cruelty, a dichotomy that was further reflected in the track's ironic, sing-songy la-la backing vocals.

Equally significant was Townshend's "A Quick One While He's Away," a multi-part mini-opera that pointed the way toward the larger conceptual projects that the Who would soon pioneer. The piece was originally encouraged by Lambert, who needed more material to fill out *A Quick One's* second side, and suggested that Townshend try writing a ten-minute song to fill the gap. Townshend balked at that idea, but was more receptive to Lambert's alternate suggestion that he build an extended track out of five shorter pieces.

In its nine-minute length, "A Quick One While He's Away" introduced a series of distinct musical themes and characters, telling the story of a lonely woman who, in her lover's absence, has an affair. On her man's return, she tearfully confesses her infidelity, and is ultimately forgiven.

Townshend would construct another multi-part story-song, "Rael," for the band's third album, *The Who Sell Out*, released in late 1967. Townshend had originally intended "Rael"—which contained some musical themes that would reappear on the Who's subsequent rock opera *Tommy*—as part of another never-completed science fiction concept project. He had originally intended the piece as a vehicle for Arthur Brown, whose flamboyant stage theatrics had won him a deal with Track Records, the new Lambert/Stamp-run label for which

the Who now recorded. (Brown didn't end up cutting Townshend material but, recording as the Crazy World of Arthur Brown, he would score a major international hit the following year with the Lambert-produced "Fire.")

"Rael" wasn't the only visionary aspect of *The Who Sell Out*. The album was structured to resemble a radio broadcast, with the songs framed by tongue-in-cheek jingles, advertisements, and public service announcements. The format was patterned after that of Radio London, one of several pirate radio stations that were then popular in England, which themselves emulated the flashy, hyperactive sound of American Top Forty radio.

The Who Sell Out was both conceptually ambitious and sonically compelling, offering a cohesive long-form listening experience as well as a cogent satire of the pandering pop milieu that had given the Who its initial fame. *Sell Out* also offered withering commentary on modern consumerism, via humorous fake commercial spots for deodorant, pimple cream, a body-building course, and Heinz baked beans. Those ads were echoed in the album's memorable cover art, which depicted each band member delivering a cartoonish testimonial for one of the aforementioned products.

Beyond its conceptual and satirical accoutrements, *The Who Sell Out* featured some of the Who's catchiest songs and strongest performances yet, including such memorable Townshend tunes as "I Can't Reach You," "Mary Anne with the Shaky Hand," and "I Can See for Miles." The latter, cited by many fans as the Who's greatest pop single, was a masterpiece of production by Lambert, who seamlessly integrated parts recorded in London, New York, and Los Angeles. "I Can See for Miles" would be the Who's only U.S. Top Ten U.S. single. Despite the song's breakthrough success in America, its disappointing chart showing in Britain was a key impetus in Townshend's decision to stop attempting to write hit singles.

Although they would eventually reap substantial commercial success in America, the Who made relatively little Stateside headway during the mid-1960s British Invasion, watching most of their singles gain little attention while such contemporaries as the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Animals, the Kinks, the Hollies, the Searchers, the Yardbirds, and the Zombies stormed the American charts.

Unlike most of those bands, the Who did not undertake a major American tour until the summer of 1967, by which time the British Invasion's unpretentious, singles-oriented sensibility had begun to give way to a more album-oriented, self-consciously serious attitude that would soon manifest itself in the Who's musical output.

The Who's first U.S. tour found them opening for cuddly popsters Herman's Hermits, whose teen fan base was hardly the ideal audience for the confrontational mayhem of the Who's live performances. The trek opened with a week-long run at New York's RKO Theater, as part of an all-star musical extravaganza staged by New York disc jockey Murray the K. The show required the Who to play a ten-minute set three times per day, with each set climaxing in

the gear-smashing pyrotechnics that now routinely ended Who performances. Over the course of the week, the band managed to destroy five guitars, four speaker cabinets, twenty-two microphones, and sixteen pieces of percussion equipment.

More prodigious destruction occurred later that summer when Moon, celebrating his twenty-first birthday with members of Herman's Hermits, trashed a meeting room at a Holiday Inn in Flint, Michigan, before driving a Lincoln Continental into the motel's swimming pool. Moon lost one of his front teeth in the melee, and was taken by helicopter to a medical facility. Though the drummer could have drowned or served prison time, the two bands pooled their money to reimburse the hotel for damages.

The Who had actually begun their assault on America in June with a landmark appearance at the historic Monterey Pop Festival, a star-studded event that kicked off the Summer of Love and served as an unofficial death knell for the sort of mainstream gigs that the band would play for most of the summer. The Who's now road-tested visual act came close to stealing the thunder from career-launching performances by Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix. In fact, Hendrix was scheduled to perform the same night as the Who. Because Hendrix had now appropriated Townshend's guitar-smashing routine, the two guitarists flipped a coin backstage to determine the running order. Townshend won the toss and the Who played first. Hendrix still managed to wow the crowd, setting fire to his guitar in an effort to top Townshend.

The Monterey International Pop Festival (1967)

"Monterey Pop" (June 16–18, 1967) was the first and perhaps the most successful multi-day rock festival ever held. The festival took place at the Monterey (CA) County Fairgrounds, site of the venerable Monterey Jazz Festival. The festival board of governors—including music executive Lou Adler, John Phillips of the Mamas and the Papas, Paul McCartney, and Paul Simon—announced that all net proceeds would be donated to charity, so thirty acts performed for expenses only (save for Indian sitar master Ravi Shankar, who was paid \$3,000). The weather was excellent, and services—including sanitation, security, and medical care—were more than adequate for a crowd estimated at 200,000 spread over three days. Like its jazz predecessor, Monterey offered seats (priced at \$3.50–\$6.50) as well as a \$1 daily general admission; camping was available within a mile of, but not on, the fairgrounds.

Their Monterey Pop performances had a profound impact on the careers of several artists. Soul singer Otis Redding's well-practiced but furiously energetic set brought the largely white crowd to its feet—a potential career breakthrough for this gifted artist, who died in a plane crash the following December. The Jimi Hendrix Experience made its American debut at Monterey, two months before the U.S. release of *Are You Experienced*, and the audience roared its approval as Hendrix set fire to his guitar at the climax of an intense set.

His album reached the Billboard Top Five and remained on the chart for two years.

Janis Joplin trembled with anxiety as her band, Big Brother and the Holding Company, played out of tune on their blues showpiece, "Ball and Chain." They earned a standing ovation anyway, and were promptly signed to Columbia Records by company president Clive Davis, who was in the audience.

The Byrds, Canned Heat, Electric Flag, the Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, Steve Miller Band, Simon and Garfunkel, the Mamas and the Papas, Lou Rawls, and the Who all performed at Monterey. Director D.A. Pennebaker kept the cameras rolling, and his documentary *Monterey Pop* was released the following year. (The original seventy-eight-minute film was expanded later into a multi-disc DVD set with a running time of nearly four hours.)

Andy Schwartz

Comedian/musician Tom Smothers, who'd served as one of the MCs at Monterey, was impressed with the Who and invited them to perform on his and his brother Dick's CBS-TV variety show *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*—by far the hippest and most politically conscious network show of the period—that September.

By now, Moon was routinely packing his drum kit with explosives, in order to blow out the head of his bass drum at the end of the band's shows. Not surprisingly, CBS's fire marshals forbade such shenanigans for the studio taping. Undaunted, Moon convinced a stagehand to pack extra explosives in the drum, in order to end the band's TV performance with an extra flourish. The ensuing blast, occurring soon after Townshend smashed his guitar and shoved its neck through the speaker cabinet, was more than even Moon had bargained for. It deafened Townshend for twenty minutes, sliced open Moon's arm with cymbal shrapnel, blew Daltrey off his feet, and caused veteran actress Bette Davis, waiting backstage, to faint into the arms of fellow guest Mickey Rooney. Meanwhile, the cameras continued rolling as Tom Smothers strolled over for a post-boom interview. A still-dazed Townshend grabbed Smothers's acoustic guitar and smashed it against the floor.

TOMMY, CAN YOU HEAR ME?

The Who attempted to consolidate the success of "I Can See for Miles" and the notoriety from their Monterey Pop Festival and TV appearances, but the subsequent singles "Dogs" and "Magic Bus" failed to generate substantial chart action. The band was also unhappy when their American label, Decca, issued the deceptively titled *Magic Bus: The Who on Tour*—a ragtag assortment of singles tracks that had been issued in Britain as *Direct Hits* the previous month—in November 1968. Despite its scattershot quality, it proved to be their biggest-selling U.S. LP to date, rising to number thirty-nine on *Billboard's* album chart.

Meanwhile, the Who's creative output was suffering from tour fatigue. Townshend felt desperate to break out of the pop-single mode and record his ambitious "rock opera" about a deaf, dumb, and blind boy who becomes a modern messiah. Frustrated and consuming large quantities of drink and drugs, Townshend found himself unable to work. It was at that point that he became a follower of the Indian spiritual leader Meher Baba, whose teachings would become a key influence on Townshend's life and work.

Baba, who had in 1925 taken a vow of silence that he would maintain until his death in 1969, communicated through writings. He did not proselytize or attempt to convert followers. He taught that life was an "illusion," and that people exist mostly in a dream state, unable to grasp the infinite nature of reality. His followers were asked to deny greed, lust, and anger, in order to begin a journey back to God.

His embrace of Baba's teachings helped to clear Townshend's troubled mind, allowing him to focus on the major project that had been germinating for the prior two years. A newfound spirituality infused Townshend's new rock opera. After toying with such titles as *The Amazing Journey* and *Deaf Dumb and Blind Boy*, he settled on *Tommy*, partially because he thought his main character's name sounded essentially British, and because the name contained the mystical syllable "om."

Kit Lambert gave Townshend a wide berth in order to create his musically and thematically ambitious opus. Meanwhile, Townshend's often fractious bandmates, uncharacteristically, united around the album's creation. To bring the band into the process of constructing what would be their masterpiece, Townshend enlisted Entwistle to write songs for the supporting characters Cousin Kevin and Uncle Ernie, and to utilize his talents on French horn. Moon, meanwhile, was credited with writing "Tommy's Holiday Camp."

The Who interrupted *Tommy*'s eighteen-month recording process to perform at the Woodstock Music and Art Fair on August 17, 1969. Despite the exposure to an audience of over 600,000, the band wasn't happy to be there. They had only agreed to the gig because they needed the money, but when they arrived, they learned that the promoters were unable to pay them. The band refused to perform until cash was procured. By the time the band was asked to take the stage at 4 A.M., the musicians had been surreptitiously dosed with LSD. A seething Townshend knocked over filmmaker Michael Wadleigh, who was shooting a feature documentary on the event, when one of Wadleigh's cameras got too close to the guitarist during the set. He also clobbered Abbie Hoffman with his guitar when the Yippie activist attempted to commandeer a stage microphone.

The Woodstock Music and Art Festival (1969)

The Woodstock Festival (August 15–18, 1969) was the culmination of a two-year period during which such events became a familiar feature of the pop

culture landscape. It was held on 600 acres of pastureland in Bethel, New York—50 miles west of the actual town of Woodstock—and drew an estimated 450,000 fans, most without tickets. This was nearly double the number anticipated by promoters Michael Lang, John Roberts, Artie Kornfeld, and Joel Rosenman, the oldest of whom was twenty-six.

The “miracle” of Woodstock was simply that—despite drenching rain, backstage chaos, a seventeen-mile traffic backup, and drug taking on a massive scale—nearly everyone made it through alive. (There were three accidental deaths in the course of the weekend.) The outcome might have been much worse if not for the heroic volunteer efforts of communes like the Hog Farm. These counterculture veterans prepared large quantities of free food, assisted the overtaxed medical staff, and did much to create the festival’s near-mythic sense of community.

Richie Havens played the first set at Woodstock, beginning at 5:00 PM on Friday. The festival had been planned as a series of evening concerts but by the second day, to pacify the immense crowd, the organizers decided to have live music played nearly around the clock. Among the thirty-one acts that took the stage were Joan Baez, The Band, Creedence Clearwater Revival, Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, the Grateful Dead, Arlo Guthrie, Jefferson Airplane, Mountain, Santana, Ravi Shankar, Ten Years After, and the Who. With delays caused by thunderstorms, transportation problems, and disputes over payment, the festival ended up nine hours behind schedule. When Jimi Hendrix finally took the stage at 9 A.M. on Monday, he played to a trash-filled and nearly empty field.

Woodstock, directed by Michael Wadleigh, won the Academy Award for Documentary Feature in 1970. A three-LP soundtrack album topped the *Billboard* chart for four weeks and sold more than two million copies; its two-LP sequel *Woodstock Two* (1971) reached number seven and was certified gold. The festival gave rise to memoirs and photography books, and its signature illustration (a white bird perched on a guitar) has adorned countless T-shirts and coffee mugs. Woodstock ’69 brought forth the forgettable Woodstock ’89 and the disastrous Woodstock ’94, where angry fans set fires and looted concessions. On July 1, 2006, the Bethel Woods Center for the Arts opened on the site of the festival. The inaugural season included a performance by Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young.

A. S.

Despite the less-than-ideal circumstances, the Who’s timing could not have been more propitious. As dawn broke over Yasgur’s farm, they played “See Me, Feel Me,” “Pinball Wizard,” and the instrumental “Sparks,” from the unreleased *Tommy*. As captured in Wadleigh’s hugely successful *Woodstock* film, the scene carried immense resonance, instantly establishing the Who as Aquarian-age icons. Three weeks later, the band reprised most of their Woodstock set list at another gigantic rock festival, this one on the Isle of Wight.

The Who’s high-profile, high-energy performance in the *Woodstock* film helped to make the LP *Tommy*, released in May 1969, a massive commercial

and critical success on both sides of the Atlantic. The groundbreaking two-LP set closed the door on the Who's days as makers of pop singles, and made the band's Mod epoch seem like a thing of the distant past.

Tommy was hardly the first pop concept album, or even the first to be built around an extended narrative. For example, the Pretty Things' seminal *S.F. Sorrow* had been released the year before, and Townshend admitted that it had influenced him. But *Tommy* was the first album to be billed as a "rock opera," and the first of its kind to make a substantial impression on mainstream popular culture.

Tommy's plotline charts the spiritual journey of Tommy Walker, who becomes deaf, blind, and mute during childhood, after seeing his mother's lover murdered by his father. He becomes a target for abuse and molestation by relatives, endures his parents' misguided attempts to cure him, and becomes a pinball champion. After being cured of his afflictions, he becomes the leader of a messianic cult, but is eventually abandoned by his followers.

Beyond its ambitious lyrical themes, *Tommy* greatly expanded the Who's musical and compositional palette. The album's richly complex, layered arrangements were generally built around Townshend's acoustic guitar and incorporated an assortment of new instrumental textures.

Tommy would have a lengthy shelf life, and would be revived in various incarnations in the years to come. In 1972, rock entrepreneur Lou Reizner staged an all-star version of *Tommy*, as both a new studio recording and a concert presentation at London's Rainbow Theatre. Both featured the London Symphony Orchestra, with various roles performed by such guest singers as Sandy Denny, David Essex, Richie Havens, Ringo Starr, Rod Stewart, and Steve Winwood. That version would subsequently be staged in Australia, with Moon appearing in the role of Uncle Ernie alongside a cast of Australian rock performers.

Controversial filmmaker Ken Russell would turn *Tommy* into a big-budget 1975 feature film, with Daltrey starring as Tommy and Moon reprising his role as Uncle Ernie, along with a cast that included Ann-Margret, Oliver Reed, Jack Nicholson, Eric Clapton, Elton John, and Tina Turner. Townshend substantially reworked and fleshed out the storyline for the film, altering some key plot points and updating the story's time frame. Although the film received mixed reviews, Daltrey's work demonstrated sufficient screen presence to allow the singer to build a prolific and varied acting career.

The Who would also revive *Tommy* on stage in 1989, performing the complete work in concert in Los Angeles and New York, with guest performances by the likes of Elton John, Phil Collins, Billy Idol, and Patti LaBelle. Their performance of *Tommy* became a television special and home-video release.

In 1993, Townshend and playwright Des McAnuff wrote and produced a Broadway musical adaptation of *Tommy* that added a new song, reworked some old lyrics, and substantially altered the story's ending. The stage musical became a Tony Award-winning smash, and was revived for subsequent touring productions.

But in 1969, before *Tommy* became a pop-culture touchstone, it became the focus of the Who's live shows, with its epic narrative condensed into a lean hour-long stage set. The band rose to the challenge of the material, and their dramatic performances helped to establish the foursome's status as a bigger-than-life live act.

One highlight of the *Tommy* tour was a week-long stand at the Fillmore East in New York, capped by an appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show* on October 5, 1969. On December 14, the band announced its triumphant return to England with a show at the London Coliseum, in which the band played *Tommy* in its entirety, backed by an orchestra.

The Second Atlanta International Pop Festival (1970)

The first "Atlanta Pop," held July 4–5, 1969, was a marginally profitable event that drew 150,000 fans to Atlanta International Raceway. For the June 3–5, 1970 sequel, organizers relocated to Middle Georgia Raceway in Byron, Georgia, ninety miles south of Atlanta and two miles off Interstate 75. This second Atlanta Pop is remembered today as "the Woodstock of the South," but at the time it was largely overlooked by the major media on both coasts.

By dusk of the first day, there were approximately 200,000 people on and around the site and all of the by-now-familiar attributes of a major rock festival—blazing heat, inadequate sanitation, casual nudity, endless traffic backups—were suddenly and startlingly present in conservative rural Georgia. Overwhelmed state and local police made almost no arrests after the first day. On a footpath leading into the site, drug dealers set up tables to hawk their wares as if selling household utensils at a flea market.

Local favorites the Allman Brothers Band played the first set in mid-afternoon on Friday. During a break in their performance, it was announced that the gates had been thrown open and the festival was now free. On Saturday, the temperature hit 115°F: it was literally too hot to play, and the music did not resume until late afternoon.

In the course of the weekend, a crowd that swelled to nearly 500,000 heard performances by (among others) Cactus, Captain Beefheart, the Chambers Brothers, Chicago, B.B. King, Mott the Hoople, Mountain, Poco, Procol Harum, Terry Reid, Ravi Shankar, Spirit, Ten Years After, and Johnny Winter. Shortly before midnight on Saturday, Jimi Hendrix performed for the largest audience of his career. Fireworks lit up the night sky as the guitarist rampaged through his greatest Woodstock hit, "The Star-Spangled Banner."

At 4 A.M. Monday, the Allmans returned to play the last official set of the festival. But other bands continued intermittently into the afternoon, and Atlanta Pop ended only when the Memphis cast of *Hair* led a few hundred stragglers in a sing-along version of "Aquarius (Let the Sunshine In)."

The Who followed the groundbreaking, elaborately recorded *Tommy* with its polar opposite, the back-to-basics *Live at Leeds*, an unadorned concert recording which captured the raw crunch of the band's then-current stage act. Rather than the *Tommy* material that had come to dominate their shows, the live disc—recorded on February 14, 1970, at the University of Leeds—combined punchy readings of “Substitute,” “My Generation,” and “Magic Bus” with thunderous interpretations of Mose Allison’s “Young Man Blues,” Eddie Cochran’s “Summertime Blues,” and Johnny Kidd and the Pirates’ early Brit rock and roll classic “Shakin’ All Over.”

Live at Leeds was something altogether different from the quirky pop of the band's early singles and the layered art rock of *Tommy*. Daltrey seemed to explode through the speakers, and Townshend's furious guitar work had evolved tremendously from the days when he claimed to be so self-conscious about his talent that he'd developed his arm-flailing style to mask it. Decades after its release, rock critics continue to list *Live at Leeds* among rock's greatest in-concert albums.

WHO'S BACK

While *Live at Leeds* filled public demand for new Who product, and gave Townshend time to prepare another major thematic work: the futuristic rock opera *Lifehouse*, which he envisioned as both an album and a film. The concept ultimately proved too complex to execute, creating stresses within the band, leading to a falling out with longtime producer/manager Kit Lambert, and driving Townshend to the brink of a nervous breakdown.

Although *Lifehouse* would not be completed, several of its songs formed the basis of *Who's Next*, which is widely considered to be the Who's greatest album. Although ostensibly a collection of unconnected songs, *Who's Next* presented a seamless package of serious rock music that connected with the audience that had grown up with the band. Much of the credit for the album's powerful sound could be attributed to new producer Glyn Johns, who took over after Townshend and Lambert parted ways.

Among the songs rescued from the aborted *Lifehouse* were, “Behind Blue Eyes” and “Won't Get Fooled Again,” both of which were hit singles in the United Kingdom and the United States. From the opening synthesizer riff of “Baba O'Reilly” to the screaming dénouement of “Won't Get Fooled Again,” *Who's Next* was an inspired blend of emotion, intellect, craft, and raw power.

Townshend didn't allow the non-appearance of *Lifehouse* to keep him from beginning work on another rock opera, this one with an earthier, more autobiographical edge. The protagonist of the new project, *Quadrophenia*, was a Mod named Jimmy.

Townshend wanted to recapture what it was like to be a teen rebel and simultaneously encapsulate ten years of the Who's existence. The album's title

referred to the four-sided personality of the band members. Townshend underlined the concept in the booklet that accompanied the album insisting the four distinct personalities of Jimmy the Mod actually reflected the four members of the Who.

In some ways, Jimmy's story is like Tommy's, a quest for self-awareness and a sense of place and purpose. Rather than witnessing a murder, Jimmy is traumatized by everyday life and beginning to suspect that the affectations of his teen-rebel phase were as illusory as his family bond, his girlfriend's constancy, his job and his drug intake. Like Tommy and Townshend, Jimmy wants to discover the meaning of life. After all of his illusions are dashed on a two-day trip to Brighton in 1964 during the height of the Mod-Rockers clashes, he ends up stranded on a rock out at sea, undergoing a spiritual awakening in a drenching rain (during the closing cut, "Love, Reign O'er Me").

The material from *Quadrophenia* worked better on the album than on stage, as it necessitated the use of synthesizers, sound effects, and long instrumental interludes that often meandered in front of the paying customers. Despite its complicated story line and murky themes *Quadrophenia* proved to be one of the Who's biggest selling albums, hitting the number two slot on the *Billboard* album chart.

Although the Who continued to develop as a formidable live act, they would never approach such creative peaks in the studio again. Perhaps the June 1974 departure of Kit Lambert and Chris Stamp as managers (replaced by Bill Curbishley) was more than just an administrative move. It marked the end of one of the most creative and productive management teams in rock and roll history. Meanwhile, on May 31, 1976, the group's show in Charlton entered the *Guinness Book of World Records* as the loudest performance by any rock band.

As a new decade dawned, each member of the Who pursued outside projects. Entwistle released two albums, *Smash Your Head Against the Wall* (1971) and *Whistle Rymes* (1972), spotlighting his sardonic lyrics and voice. Daltrey recorded a series of middling solo efforts, tackling blustery hard rock and lightweight folk-pop. Moon moved to Malibu and led the decadent rock star life.

Only Townshend's solo releases stand alongside the work of the Who. Especially notable was his first solo album, *Who Came First*, a deeply affecting tribute to Maher Baba and his devotees released in 1972. *Rough Mix* (1977), a collaboration with Ronnie Lane, a fellow Baba devotee and member of the Small Faces, was also a fine understated work. *Empty Glass* (1980) was Townshend's hardest rocking solo album, at times bringing a Who-like fury to what turned out to be a commercially viable collection of songs. Townshend even took time to pursue a job in publishing and author a book of his own, *Horse's Neck* (1985) a quirky collection of metaphorical short stories.

In 1975 *The Who by Numbers* produced the humorous hit "Squeeze Box," but was otherwise dominated by Townshend's pensive introspection. And 1978's

Who Are You proved to be the last album by the Who's classic lineup. Just weeks after its release, Keith Moon died, overdosing on the prescription he'd been taking to combat his alcoholism.

With Moon's friend, ex-Small Faces drummer Kenney Jones, taking over his vacant chair, the band went on tour to support *Who Are You*. But disaster struck at a Who concert in Cincinnati on December 3, 1979, when eleven people were killed in a stampede for unreserved "festival seating." The band learned in April 1981 that their former manager, producer, and friend Kit Lambert died from a fall down a flight of stairs at his mother's house. Meanwhile, punk rock had emerged and shunted the Who aside with all the other rock "dinosaurs."

Although a capable drummer, Jones lacked Moon's fiery unpredictability, and for many fans the "real" Who ended with *Who Are You*. Nonetheless, the band recorded two studio albums with Jones on drums—*Face Dances* (1981) and *It's Hard* (1982). Largely on the strength of the opening cut, "You Better, You Bet," *Face Dances* sold well, reaching number four on the U.S. charts and number two in the United Kingdom. *It's Hard*, produced by Glyn Johns, yielded the concert staple "Eminence Front," but critical reaction to the album was lukewarm. It would be another twenty-four years before the Who would release another studio album.

Ironically, it wasn't until after Entwistle died—from a cocaine-induced heart attack on June 27, 2002—that the fire returned for Townshend and Daltrey, now the heart and soul of the Who. Entwistle died on the eve of an American tour, leaving the two survivors to make what they called the hardest decision in Who history: whether to carry on without the "Ox." They weighed the economics, possible lawsuits by promoters, loyalty of, and to, their fans, and their own responsibility, and chose to carry on.

In October 2006, Townshend and Daltrey released a new Who studio album, *Endless Wire*. *Endless Wire* is a fascinating work, pulling fragments from the Who's past out of the fire and recasting them in the Internet age. At the center of the album is yet another mini opera, called "Wire & Glass," which is based on Townshend's then-unpublished novella *The Boy Who Heard Music*. It is both elegiac and innovative reflecting an ending and perhaps a new beginning.

TIMELINE

March 1964

Drummer Doug Sandom quits the Detours, clearing the way for Keith Moon to join Detours members Roger Daltrey, Pete Townshend, and John Entwistle in the band that would eventually become the Who.

July 14, 1964

Pete Townshend smashes his guitar on stage for the first time, at the Railway Tavern in Harrow, Middlesex.

August 1964

The band, now known as the High Numbers, release their unsuccessful first single, "I'm the Face" backed with "Zoot Suit."

September 1964

Filmmakers Kit Lambert and Chris Stamp attend a High Numbers gig and are so impressed that they agree to manage the band.

November 1964

The band changes its name to the Who and begins playing a regular Tuesday night gig at the Marquee in London.

January 1965

The Who record their first single, "I Can't Explain," with producer Shel Talmy.

July 1965

The Who's second single, "Anyway Anyhow Anywhere" becomes the theme song for the popular British pop TV show *Ready Steady Go!*

November 5, 1965

The Who release their single, "My Generation."

December 3, 1965

The group's debut album, *My Generation*, is released in Britain.

February 1966

The Who record "Substitute," their first self-produced single.

June 18, 1967

The Who perform at the Monterey Pop Festival in California.

July 14, 1967

The Who begin their first official U.S. tour, opening for Herman's Hermits.

September 17, 1967

The Who makes a memorably chaotic appearance on TV's *Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*.

November 25, 1967

"I Can See for Miles" becomes the Who's first American Top Ten hit.

January 1968

The Who Sell Out, the band's first concept album, is released.

February 22, 1968

The group begins a three-night gig at the Fillmore West, becoming the highest-paid act to have played at the venue.

August 7, 1968

The Who perform in New York City's Central Park.

May 1969

The Who's first rock opera, *Tommy*, is released.

August 16, 1969

The Who performs at the Woodstock Music and Art Fair.

August 31, 1969

The Who perform at the Isle of Wight festival, sharing the bill with Bob Dylan.

October 5, 1969

The Who perform on *The Ed Sullivan Show*.

Dec. 14, 1969

The Who performs *Tommy* in its entirety, backed by an orchestra, at the London Opera House.

February 14, 1970

The band performs at Leeds University. A recording of this show will be released in June 1970 as *Live at Leeds*.

August 1971

Who's Next is released.

October–November 1973

Another Pete Townshend–penned rock opera, *Quadrophenia*, is released.

May 31, 1976

The Who's concert at Charlton soccer stadium enters the *Guinness Book of World Records* as the loudest performance ever by a rock band.

August 18, 1978

Who Are You is released. It will be the Who's last album with Keith Moon.

September 7, 1978

Keith Moon dies in London, of an overdose of the drug prescribed to control his alcoholism.

January 1979

Former Faces drummer Kenney Jones replaces Moon as the band's drummer.

December 3, 1979

Eleven audience members are crushed to death at a Who concert in Cincinnati's Riverfront Stadium.

March 1981

Face Dances, the first Who album with Kenney Jones as drummer, is released.

June 27, 2002

John Entwistle dies of a cocaine-induced heart attack while on tour in Las Vegas.

October 31, 2006

Endless Wire, the first album by the surviving duo of Pete Townshend and Roger Daltrey, is released.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

The Who

My Generation, 1965

A Quick One (Happy Jack), 1966

The Who Sell Out, 1967

Tommy, 1969

Live at Leeds, 1970

Who's Next, 1971
Quadrophenia, 1973
The Who by Numbers, 1975
Who Are You, 1978
Thirty Years of Maximum R&B, 1994

Pete Townshend

Who Came First, 1972
Rough Mix (with Ronnie Lane), 1977
Empty Glass, 1980

NOTES

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2. *Mojo*, December 2006, p. 83.

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Courtesy of Photofest.

The Byrds

Scott Schinder

COSMIC TROUBADOURS

As much as any American rock act of the 1960s, the Byrds embodied their era's ideals of creative risk taking, restless experimentation, and artistic evolution. The Byrds' development paralleled a period of massive changes in popular music and culture, and the band remained on rock's cutting edge for most of its existence.

Through a variety of personnel shuffles and stylistic shifts, the Byrds spearheaded more than one movement that altered the course of popular music, and many of the group's innovations have become deeply ingrained into rock's sonic vocabulary.

In their original incarnation, the Byrds were widely celebrated as America's answer to the Beatles, and even acknowledged as such by the Fab Four themselves.

The Byrds pioneered the folk-rock genre by applying jangly twelve-string guitars and organic vocal harmonies to Bob Dylan songs, traditional material, and the band members' own thoughtful compositions.

But the Byrds weren't content to stick with the style that they helped to invent. After scoring a pair of genre-defining folk-rock hits with "Mr. Tambourine Man" and "Turn! Turn! Turn," the band helped to usher in the psychedelic era with the landmark space-rock epic "Eight Miles High." Within a few years, they became the first major long-haired rock act to make the then-radical move of embracing the traditions of country music.

Beyond their immense influence as a group, the Byrds' various lineups hosted a remarkable array of individuals who would continue to make significant music after leaving the group. In addition to singer, guitarist, and sole charter member Roger McGuinn, notable Byrds alumni included Gene Clark, whose broodingly poetic songwriting and frustratingly spotty solo career would make him one of rock's most intriguing cult figures; David Crosby, who would achieve massive commercial success with Crosby, Stills, and Nash and fight a very public battle with drug addiction; and Gram Parsons, the charismatic self-styled cosmic cowboy whose brief but pivotal tenure as a Byrd was instrumental in putting country rock on the map, and whose remarkable post-Byrds career would be cut short by an early drug-induced death.

The Byrds' commercial peak was relatively brief, encompassing their first two years as a recording act, during which they scored seven Top Forty singles. But the band's propensity for rebirth and reinvention resulted in a long and prolific life span, one fraught with frustration, tension, and disappointment but which also yielded a remarkably large and diverse body of music. Although their record sales never matched those of the Beatles and the Beach Boys, history has shown the Byrds' long-term influence to be comparable with those groups.

Despite their crucial role in rock's evolution, none of the Byrds' founding members had much experience playing electric rock music prior to the group's formation. Instead, they graduated to rock from the worlds of folk and bluegrass.

Before launching the Byrds, Jim McGuinn (who would change his first name to Roger in 1965, as part of his conversion to the spiritual sect Subud), Gene Clark, and David Crosby were all young veterans of the folk music world, having performed on the early 1960s coffeehouse scene as well as the more commercial end of the folk world.

Of the Byrds' five founding members, the Chicago-born McGuinn had the most prior show business experience. He became active on his hometown's folk scene during his teens, and later worked as a sideman for the popular mainstream folk acts the Limelighters and the Chad Mitchell Trio. He also

backed pop star Bobby Darin as Darin was exploring folk, and found session work with Judy Collins, Hoyt Axton, and Simon and Garfunkel. By the time the Beatles hit the American charts in 1964, folk's popularity was on the wane, and McGuinn was in New York working as a staff songwriter for Darin's publishing company.

The Beatles' arrival ignited McGuinn's imagination, inspiring him to envision a fusion of the Beatles' electric energy and the lyrical substance of folk. By the spring of 1964, he was performing Beatles numbers on acoustic twelve-string guitar at the famed L.A. folk club the Troubadour. While McGuinn's Beatles covers offended some audience members, it thrilled others, including fellow restless folkie Gene Clark, who'd been harboring similar thoughts about breaking out of the acoustic ghetto.

Clark had grown up in Tipton, Missouri, with a love for country and rock and roll. By his early teens, he'd begun writing his own songs and performing with a local rock combo, the Sharks, with whom he recorded one single. When the folk boom arrived in the early 1960s, his interests turned toward acoustic. His work with some Kansas City folk groups led to an offer to join the New Christy Minstrels, an upbeat, unabashedly commercial folk-pop act that had achieved mainstream stardom with a squeaky-clean style that ignored folk's traditional topical and political edge.

After a two-album stint with the New Christy Minstrels, Clark grew frustrated and quit. Determined to play his own songs, he moved to Los Angeles. There, he became a regular at the Troubadour, where he was impressed enough by McGuinn's Beatles act that he approached him and proposed that they join forces. Not long after, McGuinn and Clark were harmonizing in a stairwell at the Troubadour; they were joined by an uninvited third voice, belonging to David Crosby.

The son of Academy Award-winning cinematographer Floyd Crosby, David grew up in Los Angeles and dropped out of drama school to pursue a musical career. He'd developed a local reputation for his beautiful tenor voice and his uncanny facility for vocal harmony—not to mention his outspoken, assertive personality. Like McGuinn and Clark, Crosby had also paid some dues in the commercial folk world, touring as a member of the white-bread act Les Baxter's Balladeers.

Beyond his musical talents, Crosby also had some helpful local connections, including access to free recording time at World Pacific, a Hollywood studio where he'd recently been cutting solo demos with producer Jim Dickson, who would become the Byrds' co-manager and play a key role in helping the band to refine its sound.

Dubbing themselves the Jet Set, the new trio recorded a series of demos that were impressive enough for Elektra Records head Jac Holtzman to offer a deal. Rechristened the Beefeaters by Holtzman in a somewhat feeble attempt to suggest that the group was British, the trio released its first and only Elektra

single, “Please Let Me Love You” backed with “Don’t Be Long,” in mid-1964. Although the disc flopped, it offered an embryonic glimpse of the style that the Byrds would unveil a few months later.

At around the same time, McGuinn, Clark, and Crosby went to see the Beatles’ first movie *A Hard Day’s Night*. McGuinn later recalled coming away from the theater with a laundry list of the instruments that his band would need to compete, including the Rickenbacker electric twelve-string guitar that George Harrison played in the film—which would soon become one of McGuinn’s trademarks.

Soon, the trio expanded to a quintet with the addition of two musicians who, like McGuinn, Clark, and Crosby, also lacked experience playing electric music. Enlisted to play bass was Chris Hillman, a former teenaged bluegrass mandolin prodigy who’d recorded albums as a member of the Scottsville Squirrel Barkers and the Hillmen, and who’d never played bass before. (The Scottsville Squirrel Barkers, whose LP was produced by Jim Dickson, also included guitarist Bernie Leadon, who would later play with Hillman in the Flying Burrito Brothers before becoming a founding member of the Eagles.)

Drafted as drummer was Michael Clarke, whom McGuinn and Crosby had spotted playing congas in a San Francisco coffeehouse. Although he’d never played a full drum kit in public, Clarke reportedly won the job on the strength of his physical resemblance to the Rolling Stones’ Brian Jones. Clarke didn’t even own a drum kit at the time; in his initial rehearsals with the new band, he kept the beat on cardboard boxes.

Despite their inexperience, the new bandmates quickly mastered their respective instruments and became a cohesive unit, spending much time recording demos and honing their sound at World Pacific. Many of those embryonic recordings would later be released in album form as *Preflyte*.

FINDING THEIR JANGLE

In November 1964, the quintet signed with Columbia Records, with some help from jazz giant Miles Davis, who also recorded for the company and made some phone calls to Columbia execs to praise the band. A few weeks later, the group officially became known as the Byrds.

Although its artist roster included Bob Dylan and the soon-to-be-famous Paul Revere and the Raiders, Columbia had been one of the last major record companies to seriously embrace rock and roll, thanks in large part to former A&R director (and TV sing-along king) Mitch Miller’s long-standing aversion to teen music. But the Byrds were fortunate to be assigned to Columbia staff producer Terry Melcher. The twenty-three-year-old son of actress/singer Doris Day, Melcher was the company’s resident rock specialist, having already achieved success as producer/songwriter/performer on a series of surf music

hits for the company, many in collaboration with future Beach Boy Bruce Johnston. Melcher's recording and arranging skills would play a key role in crafting the Byrds' classic sound.

Paul Revere and the Raiders: Steppin' Out on Network TV

Paul Revere and the Raiders were a proto-garage band whose Revolutionary War costumes and high-stepping choreography earned them a national television audience and a string of Top Ten hits. Founded by Paul Revere (his real name), the son of pacifist Mennonites and a conscientious objector during his Vietnam War draft term, the Portland, Oregon-based quintet worked the Northwest teen dance and frat party circuit.

In 1963, the Raiders became the first rock and roll band signed to prestigious Columbia Records. That same year, Dick Clark moved his *American Bandstand* operation from Philadelphia to Los Angeles. As the group's first Columbia hit, "Steppin' Out," began to climb the charts, Clark offered them a steady gig as the house band on his new ABC network show *Where the Action Is*. It debuted in June 1965 and aired five days each week for nearly two years—not surprisingly, the most successful years of the Raiders' career.

On their Top Ten hits "Just Like Me," "Hungry," and "Kicks," L.A. producer Terry Melcher bolted Mark Lindsay's gritty white R&B voice to a driving guitar and organ instrumental attack as potent as that of British bands like the Kinks and Yardbirds. In 1971, the Raiders scored a left-field hit with "Indian Reservation." Ironically, this million-seller—the group's only number one single—marked the beginning of the Raiders' chart decline. Within a few years, they were playing casinos, state fairs, and "oldies" package shows.

Andy Schwartz

At Jim Dickson's suggestion, the song slated for the Byrds' first single was "Mr. Tambourine Man," an as-yet-unreleased Bob Dylan composition of which Dickson had obtained a demo version. The band converted Dylan's wordy original into a catchy pop tune by eliminating all but one of the verses, and adding warm, angelic harmonies and McGuinn's infectious, Bach-inspired guitar hook.

McGuinn, whose reedy lead vocal would be the track's most Dylan-esque element, would be the only Byrd to play an instrument on "Mr. Tambourine Man" and its Gene Clark-penned B-side "I Knew I'd Want You." With studio time at a premium, Melcher judged the other band members to be a bit too green to be trusted with the task. So when the debut single was recorded at Columbia's Hollywood studio on January 20 and 21, 1965, most of the playing was left to A-list session men Jerry Cole (guitar), Larry Knechtel (bass), Hal Blaine (drums), and Leon Russell (keyboards), with McGuinn playing lead guitar and Clark and Crosby providing the vocals.

Regardless of who played on it, “Mr. Tambourine Man” offered a brilliant crystallization of the Byrds’ original sound, with its chiming guitars and luminous vocal blend already in place. The band’s distinctive harmonies were achieved by McGuinn and Clark singing the lead in unison, with Crosby providing high harmony. McGuinn credited Columbia staff engineer Ray Gerhardt with helping him to achieve the warm, resonant trademark guitar tone, by applying copious amounts of compression when recording his parts.

At once majestic and earthy, “Mr. Tambourine Man” was unlike anything previously heard in rock. It made an immediate splash upon its release, climbing to the top slot on the U.S. pop charts at the height of the British Invasion. Its B-side was the Gene Clark composition “I Knew I’d Want You,” which offered an early example of Clark’s ability to merge Beatles-esque songcraft with pensive lyrical melancholy.

In March, the Byrds cut their second single; this time, Melcher was finally confident enough in the band’s abilities to allow them to play on the session, which they did brilliantly. The sophomore disc repeated its predecessor’s formula of a McGuinn-sung Dylan cover on the A-side and a Gene Clark composition on the flip. The former was “All I Really Want to Do,” backed by the Clark original “I’ll Feel a Whole Lot Better.”

The same month, the Byrds began a now legendary residency at the hip Hollywood club *Ciro’s*, a high-profile event that would cement the band’s status as darlings of the emerging Hollywood rock scene. They followed their *Ciro’s* engagement with an extended run of live work that included a series of shows with the Rolling Stones, a nationwide tour with Dick Clark’s *Caravan of Stars*, TV appearances on various teen pop shows, and a somewhat disappointing U.K. visit that was marred by sloppy performances.

Love and the Doors: Sunset Strip Visionaries

The Byrds were not the first rock and roll act to be signed as a direct result of their appearances in the clubs of L.A.’s Sunset Strip. But their rapid rise to stardom was an important catalyst in the transformation of the Sunset scene and, by extension, the West Coast music industry. In 1963, the stages of the Strip were filled with groups in matching suits and pompadours playing generic Top 40 music in teen clubs like *Gazzari’s* and the *Whisky A Go Go*. Within two years, some of the same clubs had become career launching pads for some of the most adventurous rock groups in the country.

Love was the first prominent integrated rock group of the 1960s. Lead singer and primary songwriter Arthur Lee and guitarist Johnny Echols were playing in an instrumental R&B band when they witnessed a Byrds show at *Ciro’s*. The two black musicians abruptly changed course and recruited blonde, sweet-voiced singer-guitarist Bryan MacLean (1947–98) for their new group called Love. These three were its only constant members in the crucial years

from 1965 to 1968. MacLean composed and sang lead on several key album tracks but the mercurial Arthur Lee was the group's acknowledged leader and creative guiding light.

Love's self-titled Elektra debut album, released in May 1966, spun off the mid-chart single "My Little Red Book," a radical remake (both menacing and yearning) of a Burt Bacharach/Hal David pop song. The group expanded to seven pieces on their second album *Da Capo* (January 1967). "Stephanie Knows Who" incorporated a Coltrane-style saxophone solo and "Orange Skies" floated on a light Latin rhythm. "7 and 7 Is," Love's only hit single, was a furious proto-punk rocker that climaxed with the sound of a nuclear blast.

Drug use, lineup changes, and personality clashes brought the group to the brink of dissolution. But Love pulled itself together for one more album: *Forever Changes*. A commercial failure in the United States when issued in November 1967, today it is hailed as a masterpiece of visionary lyrics and prescient musical fusion. The basic band tracks are played with intuitive dexterity, and adorned by stirring horn and string arrangements. In 2003, *Rolling Stone* magazine ranked *Forever Changes* at number forty on its list of the "500 Greatest Albums of All Time."

Lee disbanded Love in 1968 but then reconstituted the group with new members for a few less impressive albums. In the 1990s the singer served a five-year prison sentence following his conviction on a firearms charge—a victim of California's "three strikes" law. Upon his release in 2001, Lee mounted a successful performing comeback with a sturdy new Love lineup that sometimes included Johnny Echols. Arthur Lee died of leukemia on August 3, 2006 at age sixty-one.

After Jim Morrison (vocals), Ray Manzarek (organ), Robbie Krieger (guitar), and John Densmore (drums) formed the Doors, their first career goal was to become as big as Love. The Doors paid their dues on the same L.A. club scene and were signed to the same label, Elektra. Jim Morrison's lyrics, like Arthur Lee's writing on *Forever Changes*, tapped into the undercurrent of dread that ran through American society in a time of war, social unrest, and mass political protest.

But unlike their Sunset Strip predecessors, the Doors worked well with their Elektra producers, played live at every opportunity, and maintained their internal cohesion. In Jim Morrison, the group had a forceful but melodic singer whose intense charisma blended danger and sensuality. In March 1967, the first billboard ever erected on the Sunset Strip advertised their debut album *The Doors*, and in July "Light My Fire" became the band's first Number One single.

Critics derided albums like *Waiting for the Sun* (1968) as pretentious and over-arranged, but the fans didn't care: of the eight Doors albums released between 1967 and 1971, seven reached the Top Ten. In May 1971, the band made a compelling return to basic blues-rock form with *L.A. Woman*, which sold over two million copies. But Jim Morrison was now a confirmed alcoholic

whose escapades (including a 1969 obscenity conviction for exposing himself onstage in Miami) threatened to tear his band apart. The singer moved to Paris, where he died of an apparent heart attack on July 3, 1971, at the age of twenty-seven.

A. S.

June 1965 saw the release of the Byrds' first album, *Mr. Tambourine Man*, a remarkably accomplished effort that stands as one of its era's most dynamic debut LPs. The band's dynamic performances belied their producer's early reservations about their ability to cut it in the studio, and the assortment of material was unusually ambitious.

The album featured no fewer than four Dylan covers—the title hit plus “All I Really Want to Do,” “Spanish Harlem Incident,” and “Chimes of Freedom,” the latter three from the *Another Side of Bob Dylan* LP, released the previous fall. All followed the basic “Mr. Tambourine Man” blueprint, with McGuinn's Dylan-esque lead vocal on the verses, uplifting group harmonies on the choruses, prominent guitar hooks, and abbreviated lyrics.

The band tapped another folk icon, Pete Seeger, for one of *Mr. Tambourine Man*'s standout numbers. Seeger originally adapted “The Bells of Rhymney” from a piece by Welsh poet Idris Davies, who borrowed the structure of a well-known British nursery rhyme to craft a mournful lament about a deadly mining disaster. The Byrds' version managed to craft the dour subject matter into a radio-friendly pop song without sacrificing the song's haunting message. McGuinn created a central guitar riff that was so memorable that his hero George Harrison would adapt it for the Beatles' “If I Needed Someone,” released six months later.

The album closed with a tongue-in-cheek reading of the World War II-era pop standard “We'll Meet Again,” which the band included as a tip of the hat to filmmaker Stanley Kubrick, who had made ironic use of the song in his 1964 doomsday satire *Dr. Strangelove (or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb)*.

Mr. Tambourine Man's original tunes—three by Clark and two co-written by Clark and McGuinn—were equally notable. Highlights included Clark's “I'll Feel a Whole Lot Better,” a rousing pop-rock gem on which Clark brought a subtle sense of poetry to standard teen subject matter. Another standout was the Clark ballad “Here Without You,” whose yearning lyric is matched by melancholy melody and unearthly harmonies.

The Byrds once again tapped the Pete Seeger catalog for their next single, “Turn! Turn! Turn!” Released in October 1965 as a last-minute substitution for a shelved version of Dylan's “It's All Over Now, Baby Blue,” “Turn! Turn! Turn!” became the band's second number one. The song's lyrics, which Seeger adapted from the Bible's book of Ecclesiastes, embodied a timely message of

acceptance and hope that struck a responsive chord with listeners troubled by the turbulent events of the era. Two years earlier, McGuinn had arranged and played on a version of the song for Judy Collins's album #3. The Byrds' reading featured distinctive guitar arpeggios and subtle tempo changes as well as some subtly inventive Hillman bass work.

In keeping with previous Byrds singles, "Turn! Turn! Turn!" carried a Gene Clark-penned original on its B-side. "She Don't Care About Time" was his most accomplished effort yet, a lyrical and melodic tour de force that showcased Clark's knack for weaving evocative abstract images with accessible pop lyrics. The song climaxed with a McGuinn guitar solo borrowed from Johann Sebastian Bach's *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring*.

"Turn! Turn! Turn!" became the title song of the Byrds' second album, released in time for Christmas 1965. Although it's sometimes dismissed as being weaker than its predecessor, *Turn! Turn! Turn!* featured confident, imaginative performances that demonstrated how much the band had matured in the months since their debut LP.

Clark's songwriting showed increasing assurance and sophistication, with the wordy, Dylan-inspired "Set You Free This Time" becoming the first Byrds original to be released on the A-side of a single. "The World Turns All Around Her" spotlighted Clark's propensity for marrying uplifting melodies to downbeat lyrics. Another Clark-penned highlight was the melancholy "If You're Gone," whose droning harmonies hinted at the raga-rock style that the band would soon unveil.

McGuinn also checked in with a pair of solid pop numbers. "It Won't Be Wrong" was a fizzy reworking of "Don't Be Long," previously heard on the Beefeaters' single. "Wait and See," co-written by McGuinn and Crosby, was the latter's first songwriting credit on a Byrds album.

Elsewhere on *Turn! Turn! Turn!*, the Byrds dipped into the Dylan songbook for "The Times They Are A-Changin'" and "Lay Down Your Weary Tune." Although the former was uninspired and listless by Byrds standards, the latter ranked among the band's best Dylan covers, thanks to a heartfelt McGuinn vocal and anthemic vocal and instrumental arrangements. "He Was a Friend of Mine" was a traditional folk standard that Dylan had adopted early in his career; the Byrds' version featured new McGuinn lyrics paying tribute to John F. Kennedy.

Turn! Turn! Turn! was also notable for the Byrds' first venture into country music, "Satisfied Mind," a homespun message number that was originally a hit for Red Foley in 1955 and subsequently covered by Jean Shepard and Porter Wagoner. The country motif continued with the album's closing number, a somewhat tongue-in-cheek rendition of Stephen Foster's "Oh! Susannah," with McGuinn on banjo. That track's campy presentation contrasted the more respectful attitude that the Byrds would adopt in their future country forays.

FREQUENT FLYERS

Mr. Tambourine Man and *Turn! Turn! Turn!* had established the Byrds as one of rock's most vital creative forces, on a par with the Beatles, the Beach Boys, and the Rolling Stones. But by early 1966, the band's volatile mix of personalities, which had initially been one of their strengths, had begun to take a toll on the Byrds' stability.

The first casualty of the group's turbulent internal chemistry was Gene Clark. The prodigiously talented yet emotionally fragile singer/songwriter had been a magnetic stage presence as well as the band's primary songwriter, but he abruptly quit in February 1966. His departure was officially attributed to his fear of flying—an explanation that held some poetic resonance—but Clark later attributed his decision to a nervous breakdown brought on by a combination of internal and external pressures, including the punishing pace of the band's schedule.

Clark's parting gift to the Byrds was their next single, "Eight Miles High," a landmark track that constituted a radical departure from their established style. The song, the last track Clark recorded with the group, would be widely interpreted—and, in some conservative quarters, vilified—as an ode to psychedelic drugs. But Clark's lyrics, which carried a darker and more menacing tone than anything the group had done previously, were actually inspired by the disorientation he felt during the band's first trip to England, with vivid imagery that referred to their transatlantic flight and the mania that greeted them upon their arrival in London—the "Rain grey town/Known for its sound" referred to in the song.

More significant than the brouhaha over the song's lyrical content was the quantum musical leap that "Eight Miles High" represented. The song dispensed with the standard verse/chorus structure, and the musicians' fiery interplay reflected their recent obsessions with the music of Indian sitar master Ravi Shankar and jazz icon John Coltrane (McGuinn borrowed the central four-note riff from "India," from a track on Coltrane's *Africa/Brass* album). McGuinn and Crosby's stratospheric guitar work made good on McGuinn's stated desire of playing guitar the way Coltrane played saxophone. Hillman and Clarke drove the track with a force and dexterity that belied their status as relative neophytes on their respective instruments.

In addition to heralding the birth of psychedelia, "Eight Miles High" marked the end of the Byrds' days as pop hit makers. It would be their final Top Twenty single, stalling at number fourteen after many radio stations banned it due to its alleged drug references. The disc's B-side was the Crosby/McGuinn composition "Why," whose innovative use of Eastern musical scales won the Byrds notoriety as the creators of "raga-rock."

"Eight Miles High" and "Why" were prominent on the Byrds' third LP, *Fifth Dimension*, released in July 1966. The album found the group adapting smoothly to life as a quartet, with Hillman revealing an angelic singing voice

that filled Clark's spot in the band's harmony team, with McGuinn and Crosby stepping forward to fill the songwriting void. Stylistically, *Fifth Dimension* found the Byrds exploring unknown sonic territory with exhilarating urgency—and largely resisting the straightforward pop-song format that they'd perfected on their first two albums. And while *Fifth Dimension* was uneven in comparison with its predecessors, its high points were as original, and as thrilling, as any music being made in 1966.

McGuinn's interests in philosophy and space travel were reflected, respectively, in "5D," which appropriately ponders a reckless leap into the unknown, and the whimsical, countrified alien encounter "Mr. Spaceman." McGuinn and Crosby co-wrote "I See You," a semi-sequel to "Eight Miles High" that featured a crashing modal melody, free-verse lyrics, and more of McGuinn's Coltrane-inspired guitar excursions. Crosby received his first solo songwriting credit for the introspective "What's Happening?!?"

Although *Fifth Dimension* included no Bob Dylan or Pete Seeger songs, the Byrds updated their approach to folk material with gorgeous adaptations of the traditional standards "Wild Mountain Thyme" and "John Riley," which augmented the band's sound with graceful orchestrations. More disturbing was "I Come and Stand at Every Door," which combined a traditional melody with lyrics adapted by McGuinn from a poem by Nazim Hikmet, narrated by the ghost of a child killed in the Hiroshima atom bomb blast.

Fifth Dimension nonetheless included some fairly obvious filler in the form of the aimless jam "2-4-2 Fox Trot (The Lear Jet Song)" and the R&B-inflected instrumental throwaway "Captain Soul" (featuring harmonica from a visiting Gene Clark), as well as a somewhat redundant Crosby-sung take on the garage-punk standard "Hey Joe." The latter had long been a feature of the Byrds' live sets, but had been recorded in the meantime by fellow L.A. combos Love and the Leaves (the song would subsequently receive a definitive reworking from Jimi Hendrix).

Gene Clark wasn't the only member of the Byrds' original creative team missing from the *Fifth Dimension* sessions. Producer Terry Melcher, who'd played a key role on the first two albums, was out of the picture as a result of disputes with Jim Dickson. Instead, the album's producer was the straight-laced Allen Stanton, Columbia's West Coast head of A&R. Although Stanton had little experience recording rock bands, by now the Byrds had apparently amassed sufficient studio experience—and commercial clout—to be trusted with their own artistic decisions.

While his former band regrouped, Gene Clark launched a promising solo career, remaining with Columbia Records and still working with the Byrds' management team of Jim Dickson and Eddie Tickner. Assembling a new live combo, known as Gene Clark and The Group, he played a series of well-received L.A. shows, including an extended engagement opening for the Byrds at the Whisky A Go Go.

In making his first solo album, Clark didn't stray far from the Byrds' extended circle. Enlisted to sing harmony were siblings Vern and Rex Gosdin, veterans of the California country scene who shared management with Clark and the Byrds, and who'd played with Chris Hillman in his early days. Clark also enlisted Hillman and Michael Clarke to serve as rhythm section on the album sessions, with further support provided by guitarists Clarence White, Glen Campbell, and Jerry Cole, keyboardist Leon Russell, and banjoist Doug Dillard.

Although the album's title, *Gene Clark with the Gosdin Brothers*, blurred his new solo status, it was Clark's show all the way, with catchy, memorable songs, expressive performances, and a distinctive, dynamic sound that fused folk-rock, power pop, and country in a manner that anticipated the Byrds' future explorations of American roots music.

Gene Clark with the Gosdin Brothers confirmed Clark's status as a powerful singer and a highly original songwriter. By all rights, it should have been the start of a stellar solo career. But a variety of factors conspired to keep the album from making much of a public impact. For one thing, its February 1967 release was simultaneous with that of the Byrds' fourth album, *Younger Than Yesterday*, virtually guaranteeing that Columbia would focus its promotional resources on the Byrds disc. Clark's ambitious, orchestrated single "Echoes" received some promising airplay around L.A. but got little attention elsewhere. Although Clark had put together a solid live band that included Clarence White and bassist John York (both of whom would resurface in later Byrds lineups), he did little live work outside of the Los Angeles area. Clark would continue to produce first-rate music that reached a limited audience for the remainder of his career.

Sonny and Cher and the Monkees: Top of the Pops in L.A.

By 1964, a new wave of young producers and songwriters—combined with heightened exposure for rock and roll on network television—was transforming Los Angeles into the capital of American pop music. One familiar figure on the Hollywood recording scene was Salvatore "Sonny" Bono—songwriter, session percussionist, and gofer for super-producer Phil Spector. Born in 1935, Sonny had years of music industry experience under his belt when he met and then married eighteen-year-old singer Cherilyn Lapierre. As Sonny and Cher, they scored their first Top Ten single in 1965 with "Baby Don't Go," which Bono wrote and produced.

For the next year or so, the outlandishly dressed couple with the weirdly similar singing voices epitomized Sunset Strip hippie glamour to middle America. This image was reinforced musically by the chiming folk-rock sound of their number one single "I Got You Babe" and by Cher's hit version of the Bob Dylan classic "All I Really Want to Do." In the early 1970s, Sonny and Cher became a headlining attraction in mainstream show business. The couple

hosted a popular comedy-variety TV series and had many more hit records (mostly Cher solo efforts) until they were divorced in 1975.

Television was important to Sonny and Cher's career, but it was the reason that the Monkees *had* a career to begin with. Davy Jones, Mickey Dolenz, Mike Nesmith, and Peter Tork were actors and musicians selected by producers Bert Schneider and Bob Rafelson to play a madcap rock and roll band in a *Hard Day's Night*-inspired TV series. *The Monkees* premiered in September 1966 on NBC and was an immediate hit. Meanwhile, the "band" was brought into the studio where—with the aid of top session players and professional songwriters—they created such catchy number one hits as "I'm a Believer," "Last Train to Clarksville," and "Daydream Believer." The Monkees topped the charts with each of their first four albums; in concert, they performed to sold-out crowds of screaming teenage girls.

Jones, Dolenz, Nesmith, and Tork soon tired of being puppets tied to strings pulled by television and record executives. They demanded to write and produce their own songs (with mixed results), and made a further bid for hip credibility by starring in *Head*, a psychedelic pastiche written by actor Jack Nicholson. The skimpy plot of this 1968 film satirized the corporate mechanisms that had brought the group into existence: "Hey-hey, we're the Monkees, a manufactured image," they sang. *Head* bombed at the box office, *The Monkees* was canceled, and the group disbanded in 1969.

A. S.

Clark's former group, meanwhile, continued to thrive. *Younger Than Yesterday* offered an appealing mix of the spacy experimentalism of *Fifth Dimension* and the sparkling pop sensibility of the first two albums, along with a more pronounced country influence that reflected Hillman's expanded influence in the band. Although the bassist had written no songs and sang no lead vocals on the first three albums, on *Younger Than Yesterday* he emerged as able singer and songwriter, holding his own with the more experienced McGuinn and Crosby.

Hillman's four *Younger Than Yesterday* compositions were among the album's highlights. "Have You Seen Her Face" and "Thoughts and Words" restored the savvy pop craftsmanship that had been largely absent from *Fifth Dimension*, while "Time Between" and "The Girl With No Name" drew upon their author's country background and featured stellar guitar work by guest Clarence White, an old friend of Hillman's from the bluegrass scene.

Hillman and McGuinn co-wrote "So You Want to Be a Rock 'n' Roll Star," a good-natured jab at the pop industry's star-making machinery that was ahead of its time, both thematically and sonically. The track, which became a minor hit when released as a single, featured the sounds of an audience of screaming teenaged Byrds fans, recorded in Bournemouth, England, on the band's 1965 tour by publicist Derek Taylor (who had previously

worked with the Beatles) on one of the first commercially available cassette recorders, which had recently been purchased by inveterate gadgeteer McGuinn.

“So You Want to Be a Rock ‘n’ Roll Star” also featured a guest appearance by noted South African trumpet player Hugh Masekela, with whom the Byrds now shared management. In addition to being the first to add brass to a Byrds record, Masekela was credited with helping to ignite Hillman’s burst of songwriting on *Younger Than Yesterday*. The bassist said that he was inspired to step up his writing output after he and Crosby played alongside a group of South African musicians on a demo session for South African singer Letta Mbulu, which Masekela was producing.

McGuinn’s fascination with space travel and extraterrestrial contact fueled “C.T.A.-102.” Its title referred to a recently discovered object in space, which scientists briefly speculated might be emitting radio transmissions from an alien civilization; it turned out to be the first known quasar. The song was a giddy ode to the prospect of extraterrestrial contact, with a bouncy hook and speeded-up alien voices provided by McGuinn and Crosby. In his book *The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark*, astronomer Carl Sagan discussed the discovery of CTA-102 and the media sensation that followed, citing the Byrds’ song as evidence.

Crosby’s contributions to *Younger Than Yesterday*, meanwhile, found him embracing the emerging hippie counterculture, for better and for worse. His “Renaissance Fair” captured the heady rush of a social revolution in its early stages, maintaining a playful energy that was completely absent from his bloated, pretentious “Mind Gardens.” Far more satisfying was Crosby’s jazz-tinged “Everybody’s Been Burned,” which offered a clear-eyed alternative to hippie naiveté.

Younger Than Yesterday also featured one of the band’s best Bob Dylan interpretations with “My Back Pages,” whose chorus gave the album its title. The song’s message, which had originally been interpreted as Dylan’s repudiation of his early protest phase, made it a rather paradoxical choice for the Byrds. On one hand, the track found the group reverting to their tried-and-true Dylan cover format on an album on which they otherwise staked out new musical territory. At the same time, the song’s examination of the arrogance of youth made it an interesting choice for a group that was, by the standards of the day, entering its middle age. It was also the fifth song from 1964’s *Another Side of Bob Dylan* that the Byrds had covered, and it became the band’s last U.S. Top Forty single.

Younger Than Yesterday found the Byrds beginning a productive association with a supportive new producer, Gary Usher, who shared the band’s passion for experimentation. Like Terry Melcher, Usher had gotten his start in surf music, having co-written several early Beach Boys songs with Brian Wilson. Usher also produced *Gene Clark and the Gosdin Brothers* back-to-back with *Younger Than Yesterday*.

July 1967 saw the release of the Byrds' Crosby-penned non-LP single "Lady Friend." The song was Crosby's most ambitious effort to date, a soaring mini-pop-opera incorporating surging horns and massed harmony vocals, as well as borrowing Gene Clark's old method of marrying sad lyrics to uplifting music. Although it was one of Crosby's finest achievements as a Byrd, "Lady Friend" would not find a home on a Byrds album until the CD era.

"Lady Friend"'s B-side was the Hillman-led "Old John Robertson," which marked the Byrds' most adventurous venture into country music yet, with its rollicking country arrangement punctuated by a bridge that featured a string quartet.

The same month, the Byrds began work on what would become their fifth album, *The Notorious Byrd Brothers*, with McGuinn, Crosby, and Hillman retreating to a beach house on the Hawaiian island of Oahu to recharge their creative batteries and write new material. The bucolic surroundings would help to inspire some of the Byrds' most introspective, thoughtful work to date.

But the idyllic retreat provided only a temporary respite from the turmoil that was brewing within the band. Crosby's combative personality fueled tensions between himself and McGuinn, a situation that was exacerbated that by Crosby's moonlighting with another L.A. outfit, Buffalo Springfield (he'd played with both the Byrds and the Springfield at the historic Monterey Pop festival in June).

Another source of ill feeling was the Byrds' refusal to include Crosby's ménage à trois love song "Triad" on *The Notorious Byrd Brothers*, despite having recorded a compelling version of it during the album sessions. With no outlet for the song, Crosby eventually passed "Triad" on to his friends in Jefferson Airplane, who recorded it on their 1968 album *Crown of Creation*.

In October, more than two months into recording *The Notorious Byrd Brothers*, McGuinn and Hillman informed Crosby that he was out of the band. Gene Clark briefly returned to the lineup for a three-week stint that included some TV appearances but no recording sessions. After Clark departed once again, the Byrds went back to recording as a trio, but Michael Clarke quit in November.

In later years, McGuinn and Hillman would both express regret over their decision to part ways with Crosby. After producing Joni Mitchell's 1968 debut album, Crosby would outpace his former band's commercial success after linking with the Buffalo Springfield's Stephen Stills and former Hollies member Graham Nash to form one of the next decade's most successful musical partnerships.

Although he exited during its former recording, Crosby remained a prominent presence on *The Notorious Byrd Brothers*, which has been described as the best album ever made by a band in the process of breaking up. Despite the bitter turmoil that accompanied its creation, it features some of the most harmonious music the Byrds ever made, brimming with pastoral beauty and utopian optimism.

A seamless weaving of tradition, topicality, and futurism, *The Notorious Byrd Brothers* reflected its era's emerging spirituality, addressing such timely lyrical themes as nature, social harmony, and non-conformity, while acknowledging the worldly horrors that threatened Aquarian idealism.

The fracturing of the Byrds' lineup actually seemed to have a liberating effect on *The Notorious Byrd Brothers'* sonic palette, which featured significant contributions from several outside players, including Clarence White, electronic music pioneer Paul Beaver, steel guitarist Red Rhodes, and ace session drummer Jim Gordon, who supplanted Michael Clarke on about half of the tracks.

With sympathetic support from producer Usher, the tracks employed a variety of studio gadgets and sound effects, with washes of Moog synthesizer and electronic phasing, with subtle fades and segues that linked the individual tracks. But the sonic frills never overshadowed the craftsmanship of the songs or the immediacy of the performances.

The Notorious Byrd Brothers' opening track "Artificial Energy," powered by a spacy-sounding phased horn section, was a gentle repudiation of chemical abuse that seemed to be a pointed response to accusations that the band had advocated drugs in "Eight Miles High" and "5D." Representing McGuinn's science fiction interests was "Space Odyssey," which was released a few months before Stanley Kubrick's film *2001: A Space Odyssey* and inspired by the same source, Arthur C. Clarke's short story "The Sentinel."

While "Dolphin's Smile" and "Natural Harmony" celebrated nature, the darkness of the human world intrudes with Crosby's "Draft Morning," in which a reluctant draftee is torn between his orders and his conscience. The song's gentle, ethereal melody eventually dissolves into a volley of fade-out harmonies and battlefield sound effects (the latter provided by visionary comedy troupe the Firesign Theatre), while McGuinn mournfully picks "Taps."

The band members' own compositions were augmented by a pair of memorable Gerry Goffin/Carole King songs that despite their Tin Pan Alley origins, meshed seamlessly with the Byrds' sound and the album's introspective vibe. The twangy "Wasn't Born to Follow" featured distinctive country picking by Clarence White. "Goin' Back," previously a U.K. hit for Dusty Springfield, was a sweet ode to childhood innocence. Despite its wistful Hillman vocal, the song failed to make the Top Forty when released as a single. Although "Goin' Back" was cut while he was still a Byrd, Crosby hated the song and refused to participate in its recording.

The Notorious Byrd Brothers was released in January 1968, with a front cover shot of McGuinn, Hillman, and Clarke peering out the windows of a stable, with a horse occupying a fourth window, an image which many observers interpreted as a parting shot at the departed Crosby.

In the wake of *The Notorious Byrd Brothers'* free-spirited experimentation, McGuinn began to plan an expansive double album that would explore the entire history of contemporary music, encompassing folk, bluegrass, country,

and jazz, as well as the electronic music of the future. But fate would take the Byrds in a very different direction.

With the Byrds down to the core duo of McGuinn and Hillman, the pair set out to rebuild the band. To fill the vacant drum seat, they tapped Hillman's cousin Kevin Kelley, who had previously played alongside Ry Cooder and Taj Mahal in the Rising Sons, an under-recorded L.A. combo whose ahead-of-its-time fusion of blues, folk, and rock would subsequently win them cult-legend status.

The next addition to the Byrds lineup would be a crucial one. Gram Parsons was a twenty-one-year-old trust-fund kid from an affluent Southern family. According to popular legend, Parsons faked his way into the gig by auditioning as a jazz pianist for McGuinn's proposed concept album. But Parsons's real love was country and western music, and his influence would steer the Byrds toward a wholehearted embrace of country on their next album, the seminal *Sweetheart of the Rodeo*.

NASHVILLE SWEETHEARTS

Born in Florida and raised in Georgia, Gram Parsons possessed an intimate knowledge of Southern rock and roll and rhythm and blues as well as country. He'd previously played Buddy Holly covers in his teen combo the Pacers, worked on the Greenwich Village scene with his folk group the Shilohs, and dropped out of Harvard University. He'd moved to L.A. with his group the International Submarine Band, with whom he recorded one album, *Safe at Home*, whose country/rock/soul fusion previewed the direction that the Byrds would pursue on *Sweetheart of the Rodeo*.

Once he'd joined the Byrds, Parsons found a kindred spirit in Chris Hillman. Hillman, who'd initially been the one to bring Parsons into the fold, shared his new bandmate's extensive grounding in country music. Soon Parsons and Hillman had persuaded McGuinn to abandon his grandiose album concept in favor of a full-on plunge into country.

Although the Byrds' embrace of country was not without precedent in rock, it was nonetheless a radical and audacious move. Rock and roll had originally been born as a hybrid of country, gospel, and blues, but by 1968, the divisions in American culture were reflected in the us-versus-them dichotomy that divided rock and country. Rock was the music of the counterculture, while country was the sound of conservative, blue-collar white America.

As the first high-profile long-haired rock act to seriously explore country, the Byrds were entering enemy territory. But while outsiders had tended to treat country music with one-dimensional condescension, *Sweetheart of the Rodeo* embraced the music's emotional honesty as well as its sound, showing young listeners that the alien genre could be both hip and heartfelt.

In March 1968, the Byrds and Gary Usher traveled to Nashville to cut tracks for the album. For the sessions, they were accompanied by such seasoned country session pros as steel guitarist Lloyd Green, pianist Earl P. Ball, and standup bassist Roy Huskey.

During their stay in Music City, the Byrds made a now-legendary appearance on the *Grand Ole Opry*, the fabled bastion of the country-music establishment, where Elvis Presley was reportedly advised to go back to driving a truck. The band's performance outraged influential Nashville DJ Ralph Emery, who gave them a chilly reception when they appeared on his popular late-night radio show. McGuinn and Parsons responded by writing "Drug Store Truck Drivin' Man," which portrayed Emery as a stereotypical redneck bigot; the song would appear on the next Byrds album, *Dr. Byrds and Mr. Hyde*.

Although he'd only been in the band for a few months, Parsons quickly assumed a dominant role on the *Sweetheart of the Rodeo* sessions, singing lead on more than half of the tracks and writing most of the original material. But the vocal spotlight shifted back toward McGuinn and Hillman after artist/producer Lee Hazlewood, for whose LHI label the International Submarine Band recorded, asserted that Parsons was still under contract to his company.

Depending on whose version of events one believes, the LHI situation either forced the removal of several of Parsons's lead vocals, or simply gave McGuinn an excuse to wrest control of his band back from the upstart newcomer. In any event, several of Parsons's vocals were deleted from the album rerecorded by McGuinn and/or Hillman, making the released version of *Sweetheart of the Rodeo* less of a radical departure from the Byrds' established sound than it might have been otherwise.

Even in its ostensibly compromised form, the version of *Sweetheart of the Rodeo* that was released in July 1968—by which time Parsons had already quit the band—was a masterpiece and a potent testament to Parsons's talent. Although his lead vocals remained on only three of its eleven tracks, the album was nonetheless an early manifestation of the expansive vision that Parsons dubbed Cosmic American Music, which encompassed R&B, soul, and early rock and roll as well as country.

Among *Sweetheart of the Rodeo*'s highlights were its two Parsons compositions, "Hickory Wind" and "One Hundred Years from Now." The former is one of his finest songs and most moving performances, a poignant evocation of lost innocence and homesick longing. The latter—on which Parsons's voice was replaced by those of McGuinn and Hillman—is actually the closest the album gets to a conventional pop-rock track, with Clarence White's guitar taking the place of pedal steel (a third Parsons original, "Lazy Days," was cut from the album, and was restored, along with some of the deleted Parsons vocals, on the 1990 box set *The Byrds* and on a 1997 expanded edition of *Sweetheart of the Rodeo*).

Beyond Parsons's new compositions, *Sweetheart of the Rodeo* emphasized interpretations of material drawn from various country traditions, for example, bluegrass, gospel, heart-on-sleeve balladry, and hard-core honky-tonk.

Perhaps as a nod to the Byrds' own history, the album opened and closed with a pair of songs—"You Ain't Going Nowhere" and "Nothing Was Delivered"—from Bob Dylan's then-unreleased "basement tapes," which had become a rich source of material for a variety of performers.

Elsewhere, *Sweetheart of the Rodeo* dipped into country's gospel tradition with the traditional "I Am a Pilgrim," which featured a stripped-down acoustic arrangement and an affecting Hillman vocal. Less moving was a version of the Louvin Brothers' "The Christian Life," on which Parsons's sincere delivery was replaced by a rather cartoonish McGuinn vocal. McGuinn fared better on a banjo-powered reading of Woody Guthrie's outlaw "Pretty Boy Floyd," while the band explored the country-soul connection with a bittersweet reading of Stax singer/songwriter William Bell's "You Don't Miss Your Water." Parsons stepped out front for solid versions of the George Jones hit "You're Still on My Mind" and Merle Haggard's fatalistic "Life in Prison."

Commercially, *Sweetheart of the Rodeo* was probably doomed from the start. Although the album divided critics, alienated some of the band's fans, and failed to win over mainstream country audiences, its popularity and influence in the decades since has vindicated the Byrds' contention that traditional country could be adapted for rock-weaned listeners, without sacrificing the music's timeless emotional appeal.

Gram Parsons was vocal in his dissatisfaction with the released version of *Sweetheart of the Rodeo*, and had ended his six-month stint with the band by the time it was released in July 1968. He abruptly quit in London on July 8, on the eve of a scheduled tour of South Africa. His official reason for leaving was his refusal to perform in the racially segregated country. But many observers, including McGuinn, felt that the tour offered Parsons a convenient excuse to bail out in order to launch his own band, and to pursue his budding friendship with Rolling Stone Keith Richards.

The latter view carries a good deal of weight when one considers the fact that while in South Africa, McGuinn and Hillman (who drafted roadie Carlos Bernal to fill in for Parsons on guitar) were openly critical of the country's apartheid regime, and that the musicians received death threats and were ultimately not paid for their performances. The tour ended prematurely when authorities attempted to arrest the group on bogus drug charges, and the musicians had to charter a plane to escape the country. The South African tour also caused the British Musicians Union to impose a ban on the Byrds, but the prohibition was lifted after the band provided evidence of its anti-apartheid statements during the tour.

PHASE THREE

Their South African experience took a heavy toll on the Byrds, and Kevin Kelley quit soon after. Hillman then left, surprising many by reconciling with Parsons to launch the Flying Burrito Brothers, the fulfillment of a concept—country

music played with rock and roll attitude—that they'd kicked around while they were both in the Byrds. The Flying Burrito Brothers signed with A&M Records and made good on Parsons's grand musical ambitions with their landmark debut album *The Gilded Palace of Sin*, released in February 1969. By the time the Burritos delivered their less focused sophomore effort *Burrito Deluxe*, their lineup included a third ex-Byrd, Michael Clarke. But Parsons's drug use and increasing unreliability soon got him kicked out of the band he'd started. He then moved to Warner Bros./Reprise and released a pair of much-celebrated solo efforts, *GP* and *Grievous Angel*, before dying of a drug overdose at the age of twenty-six in a motel room in Joshua Tree, California, on September 19, 1973.

The Flying Burrito Brothers shared a label and some band members with the Dillard and Clark Expedition, a similarly innovative country-rock outfit co-led by Gene Clark and ace banjo player/multi-instrumentalist Doug Dillard, who'd led the noted bluegrass combo the Dillards and worked as a sideman with the *Sweetheart*-era Byrds. They made an impressive debut with 1968's *The Fantastic Expedition of Dillard and Clark*, which featured some of Clark's finest writing and singing. Its 1969 follow-up *Through the Morning, Through the Night* relied a bit too heavily on cover material, and the Expedition folded its tent soon after. Clark resumed his solo career with 1971's *Gene Clark*, aka *White Light*, whose pensive poetry and brooding performances again marked Clark as one of his era's finest and most distinctive singer-songwriters.

Meanwhile, Roger McGuinn picked up the pieces and put a new Byrds lineup together from scratch, recruiting the gifted country guitarist Clarence White, who was a natural choice for the job, having guested on the Byrds' three previous albums. White was a former teen prodigy who'd gotten his start playing with his brothers Eric and Roland in the bluegrass group the Kentucky Colonels. He subsequently went electric and developed a singular flatpicking style that made him a popular session player on the L.A. studio scene.

White brought along drummer/multi-instrumentalist Gene Parsons (no relation to Gram). White and Parsons had played together in the California country-rock outfit Nashville West, as well as collaborating on the development of the Parsons/White String Bender, a device that allowed six-string guitarists to replicate steel-guitar licks, and which became a key tool in White's arsenal.

Before joining the Byrds, White and Parsons had done some informal recording and rehearsing with Gram Parsons and Chris Hillman in an informal aggregation that was a prototype for the Flying Burrito Brothers. But they'd turned down an offer to become founding Burritos members, opting to join McGuinn in the new-look Byrds instead.

Rounding out the new Byrds lineup was bassist John York, who'd played alongside White in the Gene Clark and The Group. York had also done an

extended stint with the Mamas and the Papas, and done time with Hollywood proto-punks the Standells and seminal roots rockers the Sir Douglas Quintet.

The new Byrds would never attain the original lineup's commercial success, and McGuinn would later publicly opine that he should have put the band to rest and began a solo career after *Sweetheart of the Rodeo*. But the Byrds still had plenty of worthy and distinctive music ahead of them. The group would also emerge as a formidable live act and a consistently popular attraction on the expanding touring circuit. Evidence of the White-era Byrds' potency would appear on *Live at the Fillmore, February 1969*, a vintage performance that would be released on CD three decades later.

The White-era Byrds debuted with *Dr. Byrds and Mr. Hyde*, which, despite Bob Johnston's murky production, showed the new lineup to be worthy of the Byrds name. As indicated by its split-personality title—and by its cover art, which depicted the band members decked out in spacesuits and cowboy outfits—the album found the band working in two contrasting but complementary modes. While some tracks picked up *Sweetheart of the Rodeo*'s country-rock threads, others carved out a distinctive brand of heavy psychedelic rock, embodying a dark, turbulent vibe that reflected the fatalism and social unrest that were the flipside of the hippie dream.

The latter style was represented by “Bad Night at the Whiskey,” which combined a heavy, rumbling bottom, ethereal background vocals, bluesy guitar work by White, and a vitriolic McGuinn vocal. The energetic protest tune “King Apathy III” came close to garage-punk, alternating electric verses with acoustic choruses. The band also applied the hard-edged approach to Bob Dylan on a blistering reading of his “This Wheel's on Fire,” with apocalyptic fuzz-tone guitar by White.

The album's country tunes, aside from the aforementioned *Sweetheart of the Rodeo* throwback “Drug Store Truck Drivin' Man,” were somewhat less convincing. And there was plenty of obvious filler in the form of a live medley and “Candy” and “Child of the Universe,” a pair of McGuinn tunes written for the film disaster *Candy*. Despite its inconsistency, and despite the fact that it was the lowest-charting album of the Byrds' career (peaking at a pallid number 153 on the *Billboard* album chart), *Dr. Byrds and Mr. Hyde* was in many ways a remarkable rebirth.

Following *Dr. Byrds and Mr. Hyde*, the Byrds and Bob Johnston cut a lackluster version of “Lay Lady Lay” (from Dylan's *Nashville Skyline*, which Johnston produced) which was issued as a stand-alone single. Beyond its drab arrangement and uninspired performance, the most memorable thing about the track was its overproduction, including a prominent female backup chorus that Johnston added without the musicians' knowledge. The band was mortified with the result, and vowed to work with a more sympathetic producer the next time around.

For that task, they turned to their original studio mentor, Terry Melcher, for their next album, *Ballad of Easy Rider*. Melcher brought sonic clarity to the

album, which otherwise featured a diverse mixed bag of styles. McGuinn's sole songwriting contribution to *Ballad of Easy Rider* was its title song, which he had previously performed in a solo version on the soundtrack of the recent counterculture film smash *Easy Rider* (which also included the *Notorious Byrd Brothers* number "Wasn't Born to Follow").

The song, "Ballad of Easy Rider," which boasted lush orchestrations and one of McGuinn's prettiest melodies, was the result of an offbeat collaboration between McGuinn and Bob Dylan. When *Easy Rider*'s producer/star Peter Fonda asked Dylan to write a theme song for the film, Dylan wrote a few lines on a napkin and told Fonda to pass them on to McGuinn. McGuinn finished the song, using Dylan's lyrics as the first verse. Dylan later insisted on his name being removed from the song's credits.

Beyond its title track, *Ballad of Easy Rider* presented a more democratic Byrds. At the time, McGuinn was devoting much of his attention to *Gene Tryp*, a Broadway rock musical he was co-writing with director/lyricist Jacques Levy. McGuinn's involvement in that project allowed White, York, and Parsons to play more prominent roles on *Ballad of Easy Rider*, with each member taking turns writing and singing.

With its scattershot assortment of styles, *Ballad of Easy Rider* did little to establish a consistent sound for the reorganized Byrds. But the album's best tracks show the band to be tight and in control, tackling diverse material with confidence and verve. McGuinn delivered affectingly melancholy performances on the country-pop number "Tulsa County Blue," and Woody Guthrie's "Deportee (Plane Wreck at Los Gatos)," although his reading of Dylan's "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue" (which the Byrds had previously attempted unsuccessfully in 1965) was one of their weakest Dylan covers.

Elsewhere, White steps out front on the country-gospel tune "Oil in My Lamp," which he wrote with Parsons. York takes the lead on the uncharacteristically funky "Fido." Parsons wrote and sang the catchy pop number "Gunga Din," which describes such autobiographical incidents as an outdoor Byrds concert in New York being rained out and John York being denied entrance to a restaurant for wearing a leather jacket. The band harmonizes mightily on another gospel song, "Jesus Is Just Alright," featuring droning, bluesy guitar by White.

In addition to demonstrating the new Byrds' versatility, *Ballad of Easy Rider* restored some of their commercial momentum, returning the band to the *Billboard* Top Forty. The sales upswing was undoubtedly aided by the band's increased touring activity, as well as their new association with the massively popular *Easy Rider*.

McGuinn's musical *Gene Tryp* would never be staged, due to financing problems and Jacques Levy's impractically grandiose production plans. But several of the twenty-six songs McGuinn and Levy wrote for the show would resurface as highlights of subsequent Byrds albums. The project was the source for much of the McGuinn material on 1970's *Untitled*.

By then, the band included a new bassist, Skip Battin, a music-biz veteran whose résumé stretched back to the late 1950s, when he scored the hits “It Was I” and “Cherry Pie” as half of the teen-pop duo Skip and Flip. He’d since worked extensively as a songwriter and studio musician, as well as forming a writing partnership with notorious L.A.-scene hustler Kim Fowley.

An inconsistent double LP divided between live and studio material, *Untitled* was the late-era Byrds’ most popular album. Its best tracks were four McGuinn/Levy compositions rescued from the stillborn *Gene Tryp*. The wild-west fantasy “Chestnut Mare” recaptured the transcendent, twelve-string-driven beauty of the Byrds’ early classics and became an album-rock radio staple, while “All the Things” and “Just a Season” manifested an autumnal reflectiveness, and the live “Lover of the Bayou” found the band working convincingly in greasy swamp-rock mode. White contributed a twangy reading of Little Feat’s “Truck Stop Girl,” while “You All Look Alike,” one of four Battin co-compositions, put a timely hippie twist on the folk murder-ballad tradition.

Untitled’s muddy but energetic live disc was alternately self-indulgent and exciting, thanks largely to White’s rewiring of songs associated with earlier Byrds lineups, including “So You Want to Be a Rock ‘n’ Roll Star,” “Mr. Tambourine Man,” “Mr. Spaceman,” and a jam-heavy fifteen-minute version of “Eight Miles High.” The band also expands Dylan repertoire with an enjoyably ragged take on his “Positively Fourth Street,” featuring an appropriately venomous McGuinn vocal.

The next Byrds release, 1971’s *Byrdsmaniax*, is generally regarded as their worst album, distinguished mainly by a surfeit of weak material and uninspired performances, as well as extraneous production frills that diluted the album’s better songs. The studio tinkering—which drowned the tracks in excessive keyboards, horns, strings, and backup vocals—was done by Melcher and co-producer Chris Hinshaw while the band was out on tour. The morass of overdubs marred two of the album’s strongest numbers, McGuinn’s lovely, fragile “Kathleen’s Song” (a *Gene Tryp* number cut during the *Untitled* sessions) and White’s tender reading of Jackson Browne’s “Jamaica Say You Will.”

The Byrds hated *Byrdsmaniax* as much as fans and critics did, and attempted to atone by recording its followup, *Farther Along*, quickly and with a minimum of embellishment. The band produced the sessions themselves using no outside players or singers, and got the album into stores within six months of its predecessor.

The fact that various band members were hoarding their best songs for solo projects ensured that *Farther Along* wasn’t exactly a decisive return to form. But it was a consistently spirited, unpretentious evocation of the late-model Byrds’ salient qualities. McGuinn’s “Tiffany Queen” was his best rocker in ages, while White delivered a heart-tugging performance of the boy-and-his-dog story “Bugler” and some nimble bluegrass licks on the instrumental “Bristol Steam Convention Blues.” Another highlight was the title track, a

harmony-laden rendition of a country gospel standard. On the whole, though, *Farther Along* was insubstantial enough that no one was particularly surprised to learn that it would be the band's final album, and that McGuinn was already in discussions to reunite the original Byrds lineup.

Following a brief spell with L.A. session man John Guerin replacing Parsons on drums, McGuinn disbanded the Byrds. With several live dates still on the calendar, McGuinn and White honored their commitments using replacement musicians. The Byrds finally limped to a halt in February 1973, playing their final show in Passaic, New Jersey, with a makeshift lineup that included Chris Hillman (who'd left the Burritos in 1972 and joined Stephen Stills's short-lived semi-supergroup Manassas) on bass and Joe Lala on drums.

REUNIONS AND RECRIMINATIONS

After the Byrds' dissolution, Clarence White returned to session work, played some shows with a reunited Kentucky Colonels, formed the new acoustic combo Muleskinner, and began planning his first solo album. But the guitarist's bright future was cut short on July 14, 1973, the twenty-nine-year-old White was killed by a drunk driver while loading his equipment into a van after a show in Palmdale, California. At his funeral, Gram Parsons led the mourners in singing "Farther Along."

Meanwhile, plans to reassemble the five original Byrds had been set in motion by David Crosby and Elektra/Asylum Records chief David Geffen, and had been a factor in McGuinn's decision to break up the then-current version of the band. The buzz surrounding the project built an air of anticipation around the reunion. But the resulting album, simply titled *Byrds*, proved to be a major disappointment.

Although *Byrds* sold well, it added little to the band's legacy or reputation. McGuinn, Clark, Crosby, and Hillman split lead vocal duties on mostly undistinguished originals, along with covers of tunes by Joni Mitchell and Neil Young (but not, surprisingly, Bob Dylan). The album made no effort to recapture the classic Byrds sound, instead pursuing a bland soft-rock approach, and bore little evidence of the collaborative chemistry that had originally helped to make the band special.

McGuinn later speculated that the ill-conceived reunion was motivated by the desire of Crosby—who now possessed considerable music industry clout due to his success with Crosby, Stills, and Nash and Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young—to return to his old band with a level of control he'd never possessed the first time around. McGuinn, whose presence on *Byrds* is noticeably diminished, also admitted that he'd held back his best songs for his first solo album.

The reunion LP's only compelling moments belonged to Gene Clark, who contributed two worthy originals, "Full Circle" and "Changing Heart," and

sang expressive leads on the Neil Young covers “Cowgirl in the Sand” and “See the Sky About to Rain.” Otherwise, *Byrds* sounded like competent hack-work from the sort of unremarkable country-rock outfit that were a dime a dozen in the early 1970s, rather than the historic reunion of one of rock’s most inventive and influential bands.

One positive result of the reunion is that Clark remained with Elektra/Asylum as a solo artist, releasing the classic *No Other* in 1975. Although it once again failed to substantially expand his audience, the album was Clark’s most thematically and musically ambitious work yet—and also featured perplexing cover photos of the artist decked out in glam makeup.

Chris Hillman also stayed with Elektra/Asylum after the Byrds reunion. In 1974, he teamed with singer/songwriter J.D. Souther and ex-Buffalo Springfield/Poco member Richie Furay to form the Souther-Hillman-Furay Band, an underwhelming attempt to launch a Crosby, Stills, and Nash–like supergroup. After two albums with Souther-Hillman-Furay, Hillman went solo with 1976’s *Slippin’ Away* and 1977’s *Clear Sailin’*.

Roger McGuinn launched his solo career strongly with 1973’s *Roger McGuinn*, a confidently eclectic effort that was a much stronger showcase for his talents than any recent Byrds album had been. It was followed by the more uneven *Peace on You* and *Roger McGuinn and Band*. McGuinn’s high-profile participation in Bob Dylan’s Rolling Thunder Revue tour was followed by 1976’s *Cardiff Rose*, probably his best solo effort.

In 1977, McGuinn was touring to promote his album *Thunderbyrd*, while Clark was on the road behind his *Two Sides to Every Story* and Hillman was supporting *Clear Sailin’*. The coincidental timing of their respective solo releases inspired a British promoter to book the three ex-Byrds on a package tour. Although the former bandmates hadn’t initially intended to perform together, on some nights they would end the show with a short joint set of Byrds hits, backed by McGuinn’s band. Their London shows were taped for broadcast by the BBC, and later released on CD as *3 Byrds Land in London*. Although much of the tour ended up being canceled due to financial disputes with the promoter, the experience was apparently satisfying enough for the trio to consider a more permanent collaboration.

In late 1977, McGuinn and Clark toured in the United States as an acoustic duo. Hillman joined them for several shows, and David Crosby sat in for three West Coast performances. The following year, McGuinn, Clark, and Hillman toured as a trio in the United States, Canada, and Australia. In late 1978, the trio signed with Capitol Records. Since they’d informally agreed at the time of the 1973 reunion not to resurrect the Byrds name unless all five original members were involved, they billed themselves as McGuinn, Clark, and Hillman, which was also the title of their 1979 album.

Even more so than the 1973 LP, *McGuinn, Clark and Hillman* went out of its way not to replicate the Byrds’ trademark sound. Instead, it was a blatant effort to craft a contemporary commercial product, with slick production that

integrated disco beats as well as treacly strings, horns, and synthesizers. Producers Ron and Howard Albert were so intent on downplaying the trio's musical history that they forbade McGuinn from playing guitar on the sessions and wouldn't even allow the three singers to harmonize, instead backing each individually with anonymous session vocalists.

In spite of, or because of, its mainstream production, *McGuinn, Clark and Hillman* was fairly well received. The album made the Top Forty, as did its first single, McGuinn's effervescent "Don't You Write Her Off." Still, the commercial direction may have been short-sighted. At the time, the rise of new wave had made the Byrds' vintage sound hip and fashionable again, and an edgier, more substantial album might have been the basis for a longer-term resurgence, rather than a one-off minor hit.

Despite the project's initial success, McGuinn, Clark, and Hillman quickly lost momentum. Clark began to drift away midway through a second album, 1980's somewhat Byrdsier-sounding *City*. That disc ended up containing a pair of Clark songs, and was released under the unwieldy billing of "Roger McGuinn and Chris Hillman featuring Gene Clark." The remaining duo stuck together for 1981's inappropriately R&B-flavored *McGuinn/Hillman*, produced by soul vets Jerry Wexler and Barry Beckett, before going their separate ways.

McGuinn took an extended break from recording, spending much of the 1980s touring as an acoustic solo performer. Hillman achieved a late-blooming solo breakthrough by returning to his bluegrass and country roots with *Morning Sky* and *Desert Rose*, both released on the independent Sugar Hill label. Those albums would lead to the formation of the Hillman-led Desert Rose Band, which scored a series of mainstream country hits between 1987 and 1994.

McGuinn and Hillman briefly reunited to guest on the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band's all-star *Will the Circle Be Unbroken, Vol. 2*, duetting on a version of "You Ain't Going Nowhere" that became a surprise Top Ten country hit. Considering the unfriendly reaction they'd gotten from the Nashville establishment when they'd first cut the song on *Sweetheart of the Rodeo*, the song's belated success on the country charts must have been a particularly sweet vindication.

During the first half of the 1980s, David Crosby fought a very public battle with drug addiction that included a series of scrapes with the law, including arrests for possession of cocaine and illegal weapons. He eventually conquered his demons and chronicled his experiences in his autobiography *Long Time Gone*. In the 1990s, Crosby would experience two more brushes with death, first suffering severe injuries in a motorcycle accident and later being diagnosed with hepatitis C and undergoing a successful organ transplant. Since then, he's participated in successful reunions with Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young, both on tour and in the studio.

In 1984, Gene Clark led a tour billed as a "20th Anniversary Tribute to the Byrds," fronting an ensemble that included fellow founding member Michael

Clarke and late-1960s Byrd John York, along with The Band's Rick Danko, ex-Beach Boy Blondie Chaplin, and former Flying Burrito Brother Rick Roberts. Many promoters couldn't resist the temptation to shorten the name of the show and simply bill the aggregation as the Byrds. The opening act on many of those dates was a tenuous incarnation of the Flying Burrito Brothers that included another ex-Byrd, Skip Battin.

Finding continued demand on the club and oldies circuits after the anniversary tour ended, Clark continued to use the Byrds name for subsequent band lineups that at various times included York and even ex-Byrds roadie and short-term Gram Parsons impersonator Carlos Bernal. McGuinn, Crosby, and Hillman were understandably perturbed by Clark's use of the Byrds name—particularly since the members had informally agreed not to revive it again without the participation of all five original members—but grudgingly looked the other way to allow their former cohort to earn a living.

In 1987, Clark recorded *So Rebellious a Lover*, a collection of duets with Carla Olson, leader of L.A.'s Textones. The album was a surprise cult hit, becoming Clark's biggest-selling solo release. In 1988, with election to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame imminent and public interest mounting for a proper high-profile Byrds reunion, Clark acceded to his former bandmates' wishes and stopped touring under the Byrds banner. At around the same time, he developed health problems aggravated by his years of heavy drinking, undergoing major surgery to treat a stomach ulcer.

A few months after Clark put his "Byrds" to rest, drummer Michael Clarke assembled his own faux Byrds with some little-known players, at various times bringing in Skip Battin, John York, and Carlos Bernal in a feeble effort to boost the act's dubious pedigree.

Clarke's low-rent act prompted McGuinn, Crosby, and Hillman to reunite for a handful of California shows, billing themselves as the Byrds. The move was partially an effort to strengthen the lawsuit that the three were planning in an attempt to stop their former drummer's appropriation of the band's name. The first of these shows was in June 1988 at L.A.'s Ash Grove, with Gene Clark, still recuperating from surgery, in the audience.

In August 1990, McGuinn, Crosby, and Hillman recorded four new studio tracks in Nashville, backed by guitarist John Jorgenson and drummer Steve Duncan of Hillman's Desert Rose Band. These new efforts, along with some tracks recorded at one of the trio's recent reunion shows, appeared on the career-spanning box set *The Byrds*.

In January 1991, the five original Byrds were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. The honor offered a chance for the musicians to set aside their differences and bury the hatchet. But the evening was marred by the news of the first air strikes against Iraq in the Gulf War, and by the condition of an inebriated Michael Clarke. Despite the less-than-celebratory mood, the five original Byrds reunited on stage to perform several of their vintage classics.

The Hall of Fame induction would be the original Byrds lineup's final reunion. On May 24, 1991, forty-six-year-old Gene Clark's declining health caught up with him, and he died from the effects of a bleeding ulcer.

Michael Clarke continued to tour with his ersatz Byrds until December 19, 1993, when he died of liver disease brought on by years of alcohol abuse. Incredibly, Clarke's death didn't stop his unknown cohorts from going ahead with the New Year's Eve gig they'd already booked, or from continuing to bill themselves as the Byrds for years after Clarke's death, until David Crosby's ongoing legal efforts against them finally proved successful in returning the name to the surviving originals.

While the deaths of two founding members killed the prospect of a full Byrds reunion, Roger McGuinn, David Crosby, and Chris Hillman have remained active in their individual musical pursuits. Meanwhile, the body of music that the Byrds produced endures as one of rock's most rewarding catalogs.

TIMELINE

January 20–21, 1965

The Byrds record their first single, "Mr. Tambourine Man" at Columbia Records' Hollywood studio

March 1, 1965

The Byrds begin a residency at Ciro's nightclub in Hollywood, helping to build their local reputation and energize the emerging Sunset Strip rock scene.

June 20, 1965

"Mr. Tambourine Man" hits the number one spot on the *Billboard* Pop chart.

June 21, 1965

The Byrds' first album *Mr. Tambourine Man* is released.

December 4, 1965

"Turn! Turn! Turn!" becomes the Byrds' second number one single.

February 1966

Gene Clark quits the Byrds.

March 14, 1966

"Eight Miles High," Clark's last Byrds composition, is released as a single. It will stall at number fourteen on the pop chart after it's banned by some radio stations due to its lyrics' alleged drug references.

October 1967

Roger McGuinn informs David Crosby that Crosby is no longer a member of the Byrds. Michael Clarke quits the band the following month.

March 1968

The Byrds, with new member Gram Parsons, begin recording their album *Sweetheart of the Rodeo* in Nashville. During their stay, they also make a controversial appearance on the *Grand Ole Opry*, and have a now-infamous on-air confrontation with veteran country disc jockey Ralph Emery.

July 8, 1968

Gram Parsons abruptly quits the Byrds on the eve of the band's tour of South Africa.

September 1968

Chris Hillman quits the Byrds to join Parsons in the Flying Burrito Brothers, leaving McGuinn to regroup with new members Clarence White, Gene Parsons, and John York.

February 24, 1973

The Byrds play their final show at the Capitol Theater in Passaic, New Jersey.

March 5, 1973

Byrds, a one-off reunion album by the five original Byrds, is released.

October 22, 1990

A career-spanning box set titled *The Byrds* is released, including some new studio and live tracks recorded by McGuinn, Crosby, and Hillman under the Byrds name.

January 17, 1991

The five original Byrds reunite on stage for the last time on the occasion of their induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

The Byrds

Mr. Tambourine Man, 1965

Turn! Turn! Turn!, 1965

Fifth Dimension, 1966

Younger Than Yesterday, 1967

The Notorious Byrd Brothers, 1968

Sweetheart of the Rodeo, 1968

There Is a Season (box set), 2006

Gene Clark

Gene Clark and the Gosdin Brothers, 1967

The Fantastic Expedition of Dillard and Clark, 1969

Gene Clark (White Light), 1971

No Other, 1974

The Flying Burrito Brothers

The Gilded Palace of Sin, 1969

Roger McGuinn

Roger McGuinn, 1973

Cardiff Rose, 1976

Gram Parsons

The Complete Reprise Sessions, 2006

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Courtesy of Photofest.

Jimi Hendrix

Alan Bisbort

In his all-too-brief four-year recording career, Jimi Hendrix forever redefined the role of the electric guitar in rock, altering the instrument's basic vocabulary while drastically expanding guitarists' technical and creative options for generations to come. Like no other player before or since, Hendrix coaxed a vibrant new universe of sounds from his ax.

Hendrix's technical wizardry and dizzying showmanship continues to overshadow his immense gifts as a songwriter and vocalist, as well as his effortless

mastery of a broad range of musical styles, all of which he integrated into music that was wholly his own.

When he rose to international stardom in 1967, Hendrix had no precedent in contemporary music. Although he seemed to have come out of nowhere, Hendrix had actually served a long, unglamorous apprenticeship toiling as a sideman for countless R&B acts. By the time he was spotted by Animals bassist Chas Chandler, who plucked him from the Greenwich Village club scene and brought him to London to groom him for stardom, Hendrix was a seasoned journeyman, albeit one who'd had little chance to spread his creative wings.

Once he gained that artistic freedom, Hendrix built a body of music that instantly took the rock world by storm and has lost none of its transformative power in the years since. Before his death in 1970 at the age of twenty-seven, with just three albums released, Hendrix's musical horizons seemed unlimited, and there's no telling what he might have achieved had he lived.

FIRST RAYS OF A NEW RISING SON

The future Jimi Hendrix was born on November 27, 1942, in Seattle, one of six children of Lucille and James Allen "Al" Hendrix. Although his name at birth was John Allen Hendrix, his father renamed him James Marshall Hendrix when he was four. Neither parent provided a stable home life, and the marriage ended in divorce in 1950. According to biographer Charles Cross, his part Cherokee mother was largely absent and died of alcohol-related health problems in 1958, while his father was abusive and distant.

After their parents divorced, Jimmy and his younger brother Leon were sent to Vancouver, British Columbia, to stay with an aunt and maternal grandmother, a half-Cherokee who lived on a reservation. The four other Hendrix siblings were either placed in foster care or given up for adoption. After returning to Seattle two years later, Jimmy and Leon often had to scrounge for food or shoplift from grocery stores. While attending Garfield High School, he regularly begged for leftovers at a fast food joint across the street. In contrast to his chaotic, impoverished home life, the shy Jimmy would often lose himself in dreams about outer space and Native Americans and fantasized about playing guitar, using a broom as his prop. Friends later quoted the young Jimmy's stated desire to travel far from Seattle and become rich and famous.

Upon receiving a \$5 acoustic guitar at the age of thirteen, Jimmy began his unorthodox relationship with the instrument. Since he was left-handed and the guitar was not, he turned it upside down and learned to play it that way, as he would continue to do for the rest of his life. (The approach wasn't unprecedented; famed southpaw bluesmen Albert King and Otis Rush also played "right-handed" guitars). Even then, Hendrix had eclectic

musical tastes, maintaining an affinity for such electric blues players as Muddy Waters and Buddy Guy as well as rock and rollers Eddie Cochran and Chuck Berry. He played guitar along with his father's R&B records and the radio hits of Elvis Presley, James Brown, Buddy Holly, and Little Richard. He eventually managed to acquire an electric Silvertone guitar from Sears Roebuck, and became proficient enough to join a local band, the Rocking Kings.

At sixteen, Hendrix was suspended from Garfield High School for disciplinary reasons. With few options—and partly because Rocking Kings leader Fred Rollins had quit school to enlist—Jimmy joined the U.S. Army in May 1961. As a member of the 101st Airborne Paratroopers elite Screaming Eagles squad, he was sent to Fort Campbell, Kentucky. In his free time, Hendrix practiced his guitar, often sleeping alongside the instrument. On furlough, he visited Nashville, where he combed the clubs for live music. He also hung out at the base's service club, strumming the guitar for beer-drinking GIs. It was there that he met bassist and fellow serviceman Billy Cox, with whom he formed a group, the Casuals, that played gigs on the base and in lounges in the area.

Although he'd enlisted for three years, Hendrix was as eager to be free of the military as he had been to escape Seattle. Hendrix would later state that he was honorably discharged after breaking an ankle, or injuring his back, on his twenty-sixth parachute jump. But in his 2005 biography *Room Full of Mirrors*, Charles Cross reported that Hendrix actually won his early release by telling the Fort Campbell psychiatrist that he was homosexual. The ruse worked. Hendrix was honorably discharged in July 1962, and immediately made moves to pursue a musical career. He went to Nashville and hooked up with Cox, who received his discharge soon after.

At the time, Nashville was a crossroads for a number of musical genres, and over the next three years Hendrix (using the stage name Maurice James) found work as sideman with an assortment of rhythm-and-blues acts, including Little Richard, the Marvelettes, the Impressions, Solomon Burke, Hank Ballard, Chuck Jackson, the Supremes, Tommy Tucker, Lonnie Youngblood, Ike and Tina Turner, and King Curtis. He also met and learned from some of his guitar heroes, including Muddy Waters, B.B. King, and Albert King.

Most of Hendrix's early live work took place on the so-called chitlin' circuit, the network of venues in the South and along the East Coast that were safe havens for black entertainers and audiences in the days of segregation. Many of the greatest African American entertainers had launched their careers on the chitlin' circuit, and the experience was invaluable to the young Hendrix, exposing him to a number of musical styles while teaching him invaluable lessons in discipline. Even at this early stage, Hendrix's instrumental showmanship often crossed the line of what was expected from a sideman, and Hendrix was fired from more than one band for excessive flash.

After being dismissed by Little Richard for, among other things, habitually missing tour buses, Hendrix moved to New York City in 1964 and found work as part of the Isley Brothers' band. After eight months, he quit to join another outfit, Curtis Knight and the Squires. Knight, a hard-working soul singer who gigged regularly in the city's nightclubs, saw the young guitarist's potential and encouraged him to stretch out on stage. Hendrix wowed the club crowds, both with his fiery playing and the flashy tricks he'd learned on the chitlin' circuit. Hendrix also recorded several tracks with Knight—tracks that would be reissued endlessly after Hendrix achieved fame.

The Isley Brothers: Fight the Power

Down to two siblings but still going strong in 2007, the Isley Brothers are the longest-lived group in rock and roll history. Ronald, Rudolph, and O'Kelly Isley of Cincinnati, Ohio, made their first recordings in 1957. In the first half of the 1960s, their material was often covered by white artists—including the Beatles ("Twist and Shout") and the Yardbirds ("Respectable")—who had more success than the Isleys had with the same songs. The rewards of crossover acceptance must have been all too apparent to the brothers as they went from label to label, never quite establishing their own musical identity.

During this time, the Isley Brothers played a significant role in the musical development of Jimi Hendrix (still known then as Jimmy James). The Isleys employed Jimi in their touring band and his first significant studio performance was on the group's recording of "Testify" in 1964. When the Brothers found themselves sidelined at Motown and unable to follow up their 1966 hit "This Old Heart of Mine (Is Weak for You)," they followed Hendrix's example and decamped to England, residing there for two years (1967–69).

After their return to the States, the Isleys added brother-in-law Chris Jasper on keyboards, brother Marvin on bass, and brother Ernie on guitar. Suddenly, they were transformed from a traditional R&B vocal group into a self-contained band equipped with a muscular rhythm section and Ernie Isley's Hendrix-influenced lead guitar. In 1969, the group declared its artistic and commercial independence when the first single on their own T-Neck label, "It's Your Thing," became a number one R&B/number two Pop smash.

More hits followed, including "That Lady" and the politically charged "Fight the Power." Reversing the cover-song syndrome that had stymied them ten years earlier, the Isleys recorded rock tunes by Stephen Stills, Bob Dylan, and James Taylor. The Brothers paid homage to their former sideman with two versions (studio and live) of Jimi Hendrix's anti-war epic "Machine Gun." From 1973 to 1978, the Isleys placed five albums in the Top Ten of the *Billboard* Pop Albums chart, going head to head with the best-selling white rock acts of the era.

Andy Schwartz

It was while playing with Knight that Hendrix was spotted by Linda Keith, the British girlfriend of Rolling Stone Keith Richards. She was staying in New York with friends for the summer of 1966 while the Stones were on a U.S. tour. After seeing Hendrix play with Knight's band and deciding that he was destined for bigger things, she befriended the frustrated guitarist and encouraged him to quit to form his own group. Soon, Hendrix was fronting Jimmy James and the Blue Flames, in the clubs of Greenwich Village. (Another member of the Blue Flames was young guitarist Randy Wolfe; Hendrix nicknamed him Randy California, and Wolfe would retain that stage name when he formed the revered cult band Spirit, in which he would carry on his former mentor's stylistic legacy.)

The Blue Flames' career peaked when they were hired to back folk-blues revivalist John Hammond Jr. (son of the legendary record company executive who'd discovered Billie Holiday and Bob Dylan) for a two-week stand at the renowned Café Au Go Go. Each night, Hammond allowed "Jimmy James" to close out the show with Bo Diddley's "I'm a Man," during which Hendrix employed every stage trick he'd learned on the chitlin' circuit—playing guitar behind his back, between his legs, with his teeth. Soon the word was out on the street about this wild new act.

Linda Keith tried to interest Rolling Stones manager Andrew Loog Oldham and Sire Records president Seymour Stein in Hendrix. Though both were impressed with Hendrix's talent, neither pursued him. Keith had more success on her third try, when she convinced Chas Chandler—bassist for English rock-blues sensations the Animals—to check Hendrix out. On August 3, 1966, Chandler accompanied Keith to the Café Wha? in Greenwich Village to see Jimmy James and the Blue Flames. He was so impressed that he vowed to return to New York at the end of the Animals' U.S. tour, quit the band, and make Hendrix a star.

That Chandler, then a member of one of the world's most popular rock and roll bands, was willing to ditch his own performing career to manage the career of an unknown says much about Hendrix's incipient talent and star quality. The fact that Hendrix, at the time, could barely sing above a mumble and had never written a single piece of his own music, made Chandler's faith in him even more impressive. True to his word, Chandler returned to New York on September 3, 1966, to become Hendrix's manager. He got the guitarist a passport, flew him to London, and set out to find the proper musicians to back rock's next superstar.

THE EXPERIENCE BEGINS

On September 23, 1966, Jimi Hendrix—he had decided to alter the spelling of his first name during the flight over—arrived in London. He brought only his guitar and the clothes on his back, leaving everything else (including an

unpaid hotel bill) behind in New York. His flamboyant fashion sense, which would become one of his visual signatures, was not yet in evidence. Much of his eclectic choices in clothing—including the antique British army coat in which he would later be photographed—were initially dictated by poverty, found in Portobello Road thrift shops or made for him, as a sort of walking advertisement, by hip London clothiers like *Granny Takes a Trip*.

Once established in London, Chandler and Hendrix quickly began seeking musicians for the band. Chandler approached organist Brian Auger, whose band the Trinity had already had some success. Auger was impressed with Hendrix's skills, but wasn't interested in breaking up his existing band to accommodate an unknown American who'd yet to play a single gig in the United Kingdom.

Chandler then invited Noel Redding, a seasoned guitarist who'd recently failed an audition with the Animals to sign on as Hendrix's bassist. Redding had never played bass, but learned quickly, developing a free-form approach that augmented Hendrix's playing well.

Meanwhile, Chandler showcased his protégé all over London, hitting jam sessions at hot clubs like the Speakeasy and Blaises. On October 1, 1966, Hendrix jammed with Cream—playing Howlin' Wolf's "Killing Floor"—at Regent Polytechnic in London. Cream guitarist Eric Clapton was shocked to encounter a player who could do things he himself never dreamed possible. This was, after all, the era when "Clapton Is God" graffiti was appearing on subways and walls all over London.

A series of auditions failed to turn up a suitable drummer, so Chandler contacted Mitch Mitchell. Though not yet twenty, Mitchell was already a seasoned session player and drummer for Georgie Fame and the Blue Flames. As fate would have it, Fame had laid off his band the week before Chandler called.

With Mitchell's ascension to drummer's chair, the Jimi Hendrix Experience was born. The band's name has been credited to Mike Jeffery, the Animals' manager who'd joined Chandler as co-manager (officially "agent") of the Experience. Jeffery, known for some shady connections, managed to secure vital work permits for non-citizen Hendrix.

The new power trio had little time to rehearse or work up original material before they were on their first tour, a two-week stint opening for Johnny Hallyday, France's answer to Elvis Presley.

Before embarking, Hendrix and Redding convinced Chandler to pay for proper equipment. They wanted new Marshall stacks—two amplifiers with four twelve-inch speakers in each—which gave them not only volume but a palpable sense of power. Chandler sold some of his own guitars to pay for the equipment, which they packed up and toted to France. Hendrix would use Marshall amps for the rest of his career; they, in fact, became as synonymous with him as his Fender Stratocaster guitar.

October 13, 1966 marked the first official gig of the Jimi Hendrix Experience, at Novelty, in Eveux, France. Mandated to play a fifteen-minute opening

set, the trio ran through R&B standards “In the Midnight Hour,” “Land of 1000 Dances,” “Have Mercy,” and “Hey Joe.” By their fourth gig, on October 18 at the prestigious Paris Olympia, the trio had attracted media notice and boisterous fans. Emboldened by the reception, Hendrix began to stretch out on stage, playing on his knees, picking the guitar with his teeth and behind his head. Mitch Mitchell later noted,

One thing that struck me about Jimi early on was his hands. He had these huge hands; his thumb was nearly as long as his fingers. Like many blues players he could use it to his advantage, hooking it over the neck of his guitar as an extra finger. But we’re not talking ‘secrets of his success’ here because Jimi could, and did, play anything—left-handed, right-handed, upside down, behind his back and with his teeth. He probably could’ve played with his toe-nails.¹

On October 23, 1966, the Jimi Hendrix Experience recorded their first two songs, at De Lane Lea Studio in Kingsway, London. In concert, they’d been stretching out on “Hey Joe,” a song that had been a hit for American garage-rockers the Leaves the previous year. Hendrix preferred the slow folk-blues arrangement of the song by Tim Rose, so the band simply electrified Rose’s version. It became their first hit single upon its release by Track Records on December 16, 1966. The day after recording “Hey Joe,” the Experience began work on “Stone Free,” which was originally slated to be the B-side to the single (though “51st Anniversary” ended up serving that role). “Stone Free,” the first Hendrix original the band recorded, was the result of prodding by Chandler, who was determined to unlock the gift for songwriting that he believed Hendrix possessed.

Between studio sessions the band played a brief residency at the legendary Munich club Big Apple. Here, it is alleged by Redding, Hendrix “accidentally” discovered feedback, yet another weapon in his guitar arsenal. Having left the stage in a hurry, Hendrix tossed his guitar down without unplugging it. By the time he returned to the stage, the guitar was spewing all kinds of noise through the Marshall amps.

Upon returning to De Lane Lea Studio on November 24, 1966, the Experience recorded “Love or Confusion” and “Here He Comes.” These songs, like the others that would appear on the band’s groundbreaking debut album, *Are You Experienced*, were not rehearsed or played live before they were recorded in the studio. Hendrix simply showed Redding the chords, then the trio ran through the song a few times, then recorded the basic instrumental tracks.

The Jimi Hendrix Experience moved to CBS Studios on New Bond Street in London. Here, in a brief but creative burst, their loose recording method paid even quicker dividends. They were able to nail “Purple Haze”—which would become Hendrix’s signature song—on only the third take, after having been shown the chords and hummed the melody by Hendrix before the tape began rolling. In the next two days, they also recorded “Red House,” “Third Stone from the Sun,” “Foxy Lady,” and “Can You See Me.”

Despite the seeming looseness of their recording regimen, Chandler ruled his protégé with an iron fist. Their bond was so close, in fact, that Hendrix and his girlfriend—a hairdresser named Kathy Etchingham, whom he met on his first night in London—moved into an apartment with Chandler and his girlfriend in Montagu Square, and later into a second flat in Mayfair. Parlaying his contacts from his days with The Animals, Chandler got the Experience gigs on the Ricky Tick circuit, a chain of clubs around England run by Phil Hayward. He also scored higher-profile “showcase” gigs at trendy London clubs like the Bag O’ Nails, 7 _ Club, and Blaises.

Through Track Records’ Chris Stamp and Kit Lambert—who also managed the Who—the Jimi Hendrix Experience won a guest spot on the British pop music TV institution *Ready Steady Go!*, promoting “Hey Joe,” which would peak at number seven on the U.K. charts in January 1967. “Purple Haze,” released as a single on March 17, 1967, would peak at number three.

Meanwhile, the reputation of the Jimi Hendrix Experience grew as members of the Rolling Stones, the Beatles, and Cream began to turn up at the band’s London gigs and rave about them to the press. Animals frontman Eric Burdon and Paul McCartney, in particular, played key roles in spreading the word. When John Phillips of the Mamas and the Papas, who was helping to organize a three-day pop festival in Monterey, California, called him for advice, McCartney recommended Hendrix. His appearance at the Monterey Pop festival in June 1967 would make Hendrix an overnight superstar.

Stevie Wonder: Living for the City

Seventeen-year-old Stevie Wonder was already a major Motown star in 1967 when he jammed with Jimi Hendrix on a BBC television broadcast. Born Steveland Hardaway Judkins in 1950 in Saginaw, Michigan, and blind since birth, Wonder was a versatile, soulful singer who taught himself harmonica, drums, and piano. At age thirteen, “Fingertips (Pt. 2)” became his first number one Pop/R&B hit, followed by such classic Motown singles as “Uptight (Everything’s Alright)” (1965) and “I Was Made to Love Her” (1967).

But Stevie chafed under his label’s creative and financial restrictions. His situation stood in contrast to those of Jimi Hendrix and Marvin Gaye, who seemed fully in charge of their music if not their business affairs. Hendrix in particular wrote, arranged, and produced his own songs, recorded in studios of his own choosing, then delivered the finished album to Warner Bros. Records.

Wonder’s Motown contract expired in 1971, and he turned twenty-one in May of the same year. He built his own studio and cut two self-financed albums of original material, playing most of the instruments himself. Stevie resigned with Motown only after the company agreed to release the albums. In 1972 the second disc, *Music of My Mind*, rose to number twenty-one among *Billboard* Pop Albums—his best chart showing since his first LP in 1963. Hendrix and Wonder shared a fascination with recording technology and the

desire to reach out beyond their established audience. In Stevie's case, that meant accepting a support slot on the Rolling Stones' 1972 tour rather than headlining his own more lucrative dates.

Some Hendrix songs had reflected the late 1960s climate of war and social protest; a few years later, Wonder's "Living for the City" depicted poverty, joblessness, and police brutality in the American inner city. His albums featured guest appearances by some of rock's top guitarists: Jeff Beck on *Talking Book*, Stevie Ray Vaughan on *Characters*. Surely Jimi Hendrix, had he lived, would have found himself welcome at a Stevie Wonder session—the results of which we can only dream about today.

A. S.

On January 24, 1967, a Jimi Hendrix Experience gig at London's Marquee club attracted all four members of the Beatles, some of the Stones, Eric Clapton, and Jeff Beck. On January 27, 1967, at a Bromley club called Chislehurst Caves, Hendrix talked shop with Roger Mayer, an inventor of guitar gadgets designed to alter and distort and vary the sound of the instrument. Thus began a long relationship with Mayer, who would guide Hendrix into new sonic pastures.

Whatever money the band made from performances went to pay off studio fees, as they continued to record sporadically between gigs. On February 3, Chandler booked the band at Olympic Studios, where they met Eddie Kramer, who would engineer all of Hendrix's subsequent albums. They continued to play nearly non-stop at gigs, and returned to De Lane Lea Studio to try to lay down tracks for "Manic Depression" and Bob Dylan's "Like a Rolling Stone," which they'd been playing as part of their regular live set.

LET ME STAND NEXT TO YOUR FIRE

Having completed most of the tracks for *Are You Experienced*, the Jimi Hendrix Experience embarked on a twenty-four-date package tour visiting back-water British cities, with a mismatched bill that included teen-idol headliners Walker Brothers, a young Cat Stevens, and Englebert Humperdinck as "special guest star."

Beyond its incongruously matched performers, the tour was notable in that it inspired Hendrix to set fire to his guitar for the first time, at Finsbury Park Astoria in London. Although the flaming-guitar trick would become an essential element of Hendrix's image, he would only do this three times in his career. The second time was at the Monterey Pop festival, famously captured on film.

"The Wind Cries Mary," not on the album, was released as the band's third U.K. single on May 5 and the U.K. debut album, *Are You Experienced*, was released on May 12 (it would peak at number two, unable to wrest The Beatles'

Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band from the top spot). On May 1, "Hey Joe" was released as their first U.S. single, paving the way for their pivotal performance at the Monterey Pop Festival on June 18, 1967, at which the trio was introduced on stage by Rolling Stone Brian Jones.

Before embarking for America, the Experience were on such a roll that they returned to the studio to lay down several tracks that would end up on their second album, *Axis: Bold as Love*.

When they arrived in California for the festival, they learned that they would be sharing the bill with the Who. Much has been made of the standoff between the two bands, but Chris Stamp—who had relationships with both—claimed the two acts' main concern was not competing unnecessarily with one another; following a coin toss, the Who played first, with the Grateful Dead playing in between. The mellowing effect of the Dead was enough to prime the crowd for a Hendrix performance as incendiary as the one they'd witnessed two hours earlier by the Who. It was a quintessential rock and roll moment, and both bands conquered America on the same stage, only hours apart.

Although they captivated the audience, the Experience had no other gigs booked. San Francisco concert promoter Bill Graham changed that, booking the band at the Fillmore Auditorium for six straight nights, while John Phillips—who'd brought Hendrix over for the festival—hired them to open for the Mamas and the Papas at the Hollywood Bowl later that summer. The Fillmore bill paired Hendrix with another performer who'd leaped to stardom on the Monterey stage, Janis Joplin. The visit to San Francisco also found the Experience playing a free afternoon concert in Golden Gate Park for an audience of stoned, gyrating flower people.

The Experience spent the remainder of the Summer of Love touring the United States. In New York, they played upscale discotheques like Ondines, Cheetah, the Salvation, and Steve Paul's Scene Club. They also played an open-air gig in Central Park, as the opening act for the Young Rascals.

The Jimi Hendrix Experience began their first formal tour in July, as the wildly mismatched opening act for prefab popsters, the Monkees, whose teen-aged fans were reportedly horrified by Hendrix.

The band managed to cut short their Monkees' tour after five dates—or it was suggested that they do so by tour management.

On September 1, 1967, *Are You Experienced* was released in the United States on the Reprise label, home of Dean Martin and Frank Sinatra. The album's American edition replaced "Red House," "Can You See Me," and "Remember" with the singles "Hey Joe," "Purple Haze," and "The Wind Cries Mary." Although the album did not spawn a hit single, enough ground had already been broken to lift it to number five on the *Billboard* charts.

Their newfound stardom allowed the Experience to record where they liked, rather than scraping together gig money and going where they were told. The band recorded some tracks with engineer Gary Kellgren, before returning to London to continue work on their followup to *Are You Experienced*.

Once money began coming in, Hendrix became extravagant giving away thousands of dollars in cash, buying cars for virtual strangers, covering old debts and new damage to hotel rooms and vehicles. Chandler felt duty-bound to tighten the leash over retakes in the studio. He and Hendrix were still sharing a flat, and tensions were growing between them, exacerbated by Mitchell's and Redding's demands to have a greater voice in how their playing was recorded.

Despite those hassles, the second Jimi Hendrix Experience LP was completed in June 1967 and released the following January.

The Jimi Hendrix Experience was back on the road in America in February 1968, topping a bill that also included the Soft Machine and Eire Apparent. The tour included a trip to Hendrix's old hometown of Seattle, where the guitarist was coaxed into addressing an assembly at the high school that had once made his life so miserable. After cancelling a show in Newark, New Jersey, in the wake of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination, the trio retreated to Manhattan's Record Plant to record tracks for the album that would be their magnum opus.

Meanwhile, Chas Chandler, having grown weary of Hendrix's extravagance and unpredictability, sold his management interest to Mike Jeffery. Chandler returned to England, where he would soon guide another band, Slade, to stardom.

Indeed, Hendrix's monetary excesses were already legendary. Often, he and Mitchell would jam at a New York club and then take limos the few blocks to the studio, which was filled with various friends and hangers-on, and where they would hold jam sessions until the sun came up. The Record Plant was a sophisticated and expensive state-of-the-art studio, decked out with twelve-track and sixteen-track machines. The party atmosphere of the sessions led to endless outtakes and improvisations that would later emerge on various posthumous releases.

No longer under pressure to produce hit singles, Hendrix stretched out to meet the album format. The resulting double album, *Electric Ladyland*, was a sprawling affair; one highlight was a searing cover version of Bob Dylan's "All Along the Watchtower," a haunting aural assault that perfectly embodied the chaotic state of affairs in America during a time of civil unrest and dissent over the Vietnam War. The album topped the *Billboard* charts, the biggest commercial success Hendrix would have in his lifetime.

The Jimi Hendrix Experience spent the rest of 1968 in a blur of concerts and festival gigs across America, Europe and Scandinavia. By the end of the year, without the stabilizing influence of Chandler, the Experience was on the verge of breakup. Redding started his own band, Fat Mattress, in which he played guitar. He agreed to rejoin the Experience for their outstanding commitments on the condition that Fat Mattress be added to the bill.

Manager Mike Jeffery had reason to keep the Experience going. They were the highest-grossing band in the world now, netting as much as \$100,000 per show. Their "final" tour took place in America, with Fat Mattress opening

the shows. The nadir, legally, was a gig at Toronto's Maple Leaf Gardens, prior to which the band was strip-searched by Canadian authorities. A small vial of heroin was discovered in one of Hendrix's bags, Hendrix was arrested, bail was paid, and a trial date was set. He was later acquitted, after claiming that the heroin had been put there by one of his fans.

The nadir, musically, was the Newport Pop Festival at San Fernando State College. Hendrix's set was so lackluster that he felt compelled to return without the band the next day and play for free, taking part in impromptu jams with other musicians. Despite the subpar performance, Newport was his highest-paying gig ever, at \$125,000. The next concert, an open-air concert at Denver's Mile High Stadium, was the final nail in the Experience's coffin with police firing tear gas at the stage when members of the audience rushed it.

BY THE TIME HE GOT TO WOODSTOCK

Redding and Mitchell returned to England, while Hendrix retreated to a house in upstate New York, that had been rented for him by Jeffery. Invited along were musicians with whom he felt comfortable, including old buddy Billy Cox. Jeffery also entertained the idea of Hendrix's dream of building his own recording studio. Despite the projected expense of the project, the choice was actually a pragmatic one, considering the massive studio bills that Hendrix had already racked up. The resulting studio, Electric Lady, was built on West 8th Street in Manhattan, but the facility became a money pit before the doors were opened. Workers hit an underground stream and flooded the building, delaying its opening and inflating the costs. To exacerbate the situation, Hendrix had grown weary of playing his familiar hits, and had expressed an interest in experimenting in more jazz-based directions. It had long been one of his dreams to record with Miles Davis, who had already begun playing on bills with rock bands and would soon release his own groundbreaking jazz-rock album, *Bitch's Brew*. Hendrix envisioned a collaboration with Davis, a project that was discussed but which never came to fruition.

Perhaps needing the advice of a trusted colleague, Hendrix called Mitchell in August and beseeched him to come to his upstate New York lair and rejoin him for an appearance at the Woodstock Music and Art Fair, taking place just down the road in Bethel in August. Although it would be a historic event, for Hendrix the Woodstock festival was a letdown. For Hendrix and his band, Woodstock turned into a meteorological mess and waste of time. It rained buckets on the final day—Hendrix, as its highest paid performer, was slated to close the festival—and the resulting delays pushed Hendrix's scheduled Sunday night slot into Monday morning. They finally hit the stage at 6:00 on Monday morning, with only one-tenth of the festival's audience remaining to hear him. Although the set was generally considered to be subpar, Hendrix's version of "The Star

Spangled Banner” provided an inspired climax to director Michael Wadleigh’s successful documentary film of the festival.

An outstanding legal commitment forced Hendrix to produce an album for Ed Chalpin, a New York studio entrepreneur who’d signed him to a contract during his Curtis Knight days. Hendrix agreed to form a band and perform two shows at the Fillmore East on January 1, 1970 to be recorded for an album that would satisfy Chalpin’s claims on Hendrix. The result was *Band of Gypsys* an uninspired jam session with Buddy Miles on drums and Billy Cox on bass. Some have suggested that Hendrix formed this all-black band to silence those critics in the black community who complained that Hendrix didn’t court a black audience.

With his Woodstock band Sky Church having yielded disappointing results and his expensive lifestyle draining his finances, Hendrix reformed the Jimi Hendrix Experience, with Mitchell back in the drum seat and Billy Cox replacing Noel Redding on bass. The new lineup began a three-month tour on April 25, 1970. They played in Berkeley on May 30, 1970, while mass demonstrations against the Vietnam War were taking place all over the Bay Area. Those events were captured in the documentary *Jimi Plays Berkeley*. The ad hoc Experience made lackluster appearances at two more huge pop festivals, in Atlanta and Randall’s Island, New York. They traveled to Maui, Hawaii, on July 30, 1970, to work on a joint film-soundtrack project dubbed *Rainbow Bridge*. The setting of the venue, between two extinct volcanoes, could not have been more stunning, but the musical and cinematic results were less than lovely.

The trio returned to Europe to honor some concert commitments, including the ill-fated and inaccurately named Love and Peace festival on the Isle of Fehmarn in West Germany. Neither love nor peace reigned, as anarchists and neo-Nazis engaged in bloody clashes and a member of the Experience road crew was shot in the leg. Hendrix was showing signs of exhaustion and depression, while the reliable and drug-eschewing Cox drank something that had been spiked with a hallucinogen. The drug initiated a breakdown causing Cox to be hospitalized and two shows to be canceled. Fearing that his old friend was not up to the grind of planned tours of Australia and Japan, Hendrix asked Noel Redding to rejoin.

Hendrix had repeatedly told friends that he wanted to return to the United States to finish work on a massive album tentatively titled *First Rays of a New Rising Sun*. He then aimed to take the demos to Chas Chandler in hopes that his old manager would reconsider renewing their working relationship.

Sly and the Family Stone: I Want to Take You Higher

Formed in 1967, Sly and the Family Stone were the progenitors of “psychedelic soul.” For founder and front man Sly Stone (born Sylvester Stewart in 1944 in Denton, Texas), it was a natural evolution. Sly had already moved

beyond the conventions of rhythm and blues by 1965, when he produced the Beau Brummels's "Laugh Laugh," a Top Ten hit for the Bay Area folk-rock group. As a disc jockey on KSOL in San Francisco, he injected Bob Dylan and Beatles songs into the station's standard soul fare.

The group's male/female, black/white lineup, unusual for its time, included Sly's brother Freddie Stone (lead guitar), Cynthia Robinson (trumpet), Larry Graham (bass, vocals), Jerry Martini (saxophone), Greg Errico (drums), and later Sly's sister Rose Stone (vocals, keyboards). Sly sang lead and played organ; he also wrote and produced the songs. The Family Stone's fresh, unique sound blended the stabbing horn riffs and danceable beats of contemporary soul music with extended instrumental jams, communal vocal interplay, and an irresistible kinetic energy. Sly's lyrics preached peace, brotherhood, or—as on the group's first hit "Dance to the Music"—simply getting the party started.

The U.S. debut albums of both Jimi Hendrix and Sly and the Family Stone were released in 1967. *Are You Experienced* eventually reached the Top Five, but *A Whole New Thing* didn't even make the chart. The group struggled along on the club circuit until May 1968 when they shared a weekend bill with Hendrix at New York's Fillmore East. Sly pulled out all the stops, and the Fillmore rock crowd was thrilled by his old-school R&B showmanship in a hip new package.

Hendrix's star turn at the 1967 Monterey Pop Festival paved the way for Sly and the Family Stone to appear at subsequent rock festivals where black artists were often under-represented. At Woodstock in 1969, the group went on-stage after 3 A.M. following a drenching rainstorm, but halfway through their set, the bedraggled crowd was on its feet.

In the mid-1960s, the recording of black music (and most rock and roll) was still subject to tight budgets and strictly regulated session hours. Jimi Hendrix again broke this mold by consuming long blocks of unstructured studio time to create his landmark double album *Electric Ladyland* (released September 1968). After the multi-platinum success of *Stand!* and its celebratory number one single "Everyday People" in 1969, Sly Stone would take full advantage of this new creative freedom.

For the follow-up to *Stand!*, Sly began recording (and re-recording) many of the instrumental tracks himself: the Family Stone never knew how or even if their individual parts would be used. Outside musicians—some as well-known as soul singer Bobby Womack and Beatles sideman Billy Preston, others who were complete strangers—came and went through weeks of inconclusive sessions. Finally, *There's a Riot Goin' On* was released in November 1971. Murky and downbeat, *Riot* was the group's first number one album; the strangely mournful "Family Affair" topped the Pop and R&B singles charts. Sly Stone took two years to create this dark masterpiece. In that time, Motown Records had rolled out *ten* albums by the Temptations, including a Christmas collection and a greatest hits package.

THE KILLING FLOOR

On the night of September 17, 1970, Hendrix, unable to sleep, took at least six and possibly as many as nine Vesperax, a sleeping medication given to him by Monika Danneman, a German woman he'd only met three days earlier. On top of whatever else he may have ingested, the potent drug sent him into a deep sleep from which he ultimately never awoke. At some point in his deep stupor, Hendrix vomited and, because he was lying on his back, suffocated on his vomit.

Hendrix, it has often been reported, seemed to think that he would not live a long, full life. In March 1967, on the verge of international fame, he was asked to answer a "Life-Line" questionnaire for the British pop magazine *New Musical Express*. For the "Personal ambition" category, Hendrix said, "To have my own style of music; to see my mother again." (His mother, Lucille, died ten years earlier.) For the "Professional ambition" category, he said, "To be a movie and caress the screen with my shining light."²

It is safe to say that Jimi Hendrix fulfilled both of these ambitions, and that the continuing worldwide fascination with his life and music—attested by the phenomenal amount of posthumous material released and purchased—proves that his shining light is still bright.

Hendrix never drew up a will and, upon his death, his father Al Hendrix became the main inheritor of his lucrative estate. Thus began a complex quarter-century legal battle over the rights to both Jimi Hendrix's music and his name. The situation was further complicated when Michael Jeffery died in a plane crash in 1973. After this, the lawyer for the Hendrix family, Leo Branton, sold the rights to Jimi Hendrix's music to a number of record companies outside the United States.

The management of the estate then fell to Alan Douglas, a producer who assembled some controversial albums from a backlog of 600 hours of studio tapes that Hendrix had left behind. Prior to tackling the Hendrix archives, Douglas had been instrumental in bringing together rock and jazz figures for some of the first work in what would later become known as fusion, and he was in negotiations with Hendrix to record with legendary jazz arranger Gil Evans. While Jeffery was dead-set against this, it seems plausible that Hendrix, had he lived, would have evolved into a progenitor of a new rock-jazz sound. Hendrix, in fact, died a week before the first rehearsal with Evans for what would have been a Carnegie Hall concert to be recorded live by Douglas.

After Hendrix died, Douglas hired used studio musicians to "complete" some of Hendrix's unfinished tapes, or to overdub parts he deemed inadequate—including parts played by Hendrix himself. While the players were competent enough, the sound was fusion and funk, hybrid genres that did not exist when Hendrix was alive. The two resulting albums, *Crash Landing* and *Midnight Lightning*—both released in 1975—have potentially good compositions that are marred by this awkward studio trickery. At times, the approach

created an unpleasantly jarring mish mash, something Hendrix himself would never be accused of doing.

In the early 1990s, Douglas oversaw the CD release of the three original Experience albums, minus their original artwork. In 1995, Al Hendrix regained the rights to his son's music; his legal fees were underwritten by Paul Allen, the Microsoft executive. Since then, under the family-run company, Experience Hendrix LLC, and with the help of Eddie Kramer, Mitch Mitchell, and Billy Cox, much of Hendrix's essential work has been restored and reissued in an appropriate and respectful manner.

In the years following Hendrix's death, literally hundreds of albums composed of the guitarist's early work as a sideman were released. Almost all were blatantly exploitative, and many misrepresented the nature of their musical contents. Meanwhile, it's estimated that anywhere from 500 to 1,000 hours of unreleased material existed at the time of Hendrix's death making it likely that this aural and sonic deluge will continue.

And why not? We still cherish newly unearthed recordings by Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, and Bill Evans, so why shouldn't the same reverence be applied to the man who revolutionized rock and roll in his all-too-brief twenty-seven years?

Meanwhile, the legend of Jimi Hendrix continues to grow. He was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1992. The Experience's first album, *Are You Experienced*, was included in the U.S. National Recording Preservation Board's National Recording Registry. Finally, Hendrix took top honors in *Rolling Stone's* list of 100 Greatest Guitarists of All Time.

Nearly four decades after his death, Jimi Hendrix's influence remains as strong as ever, and his musical legacy continues to beguile and inspire.

TIMELINE

May 1961

Jimmy (not yet "Jimi") Hendrix joins the 101st Airborne Paratroopers and is stationed at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. Here he befriends bass player Billy Cox; they form a group, the Casuals, and play gigs on the military base and in lounges in the area.

July 1962

Hendrix is honorably discharged from the U.S. military and moves to Nashville.

1962–64

Though nominally based in Nashville and Vancouver, Hendrix works the chitlin' circuit for the next two years, playing in the touring bands of the Marvelettes, Curtis Mayfield and the Impressions, Little Richard, Solomon Burke, Hank Ballard, Chuck Jackson, the Supremes, Tommy Tucker, Lonnie Youngblood, Ike and Tina Turner Revue, Joey Dee and the Starlites, and King Curtis.

1964

Hendrix ends up in New York City, playing guitar in the Isley Brothers' band. He meets soul singer Curtis Knight and joins his band.

April 17–18, 1965

As a member of Little Richard's band, Hendrix plays the storied Paramount Theater in New York.

June 1966

Encouraged by Linda Keith, Hendrix forms his own band, Jimmy James and the Blue Flames, and begins playing the Greenwich Village club circuit.

August 3, 1966

Chas Chandler, the Animals' bass player, accompanies Linda Keith to the Café Wha? to see Jimmy James and the Blue Flames. He's impressed enough with the guitarist's potential that he promises to return at the end of the Animals' U.S. tour and take Hendrix to England.

September 3, 1966

Chandler makes good on his promise, returns to New York, and arranges to take Hendrix to England.

September 23, 1966

Newly renamed Jimi Hendrix arrives with Chandler in London.

October 1, 1966

Hendrix jams with Cream at Regent Polytechnic in London. Cream guitarist Eric Clapton—whom fans liken to God—was shocked to encounter a player who could do things he himself never dreamed possible.

October 13, 1966

The newly formed Jimi Hendrix Experience—with Noel Redding on bass and Mitch Mitchell on drums—play their first official gig, at Novelty, in Eveux, France. They are the opening act for French pop star Johnny Halliday.

October 18, 1966

The Jimi Hendrix Experience play the prestigious Paris Olympia. The sensation they cause has the press and new fans buzzing.

October 23, 1966

The Jimi Hendrix Experience record their first two songs, at De Lane Lea Studio in Kingsway, London.

December 16, 1966

"Hey Joe" is released as the first single by the Jimi Hendrix Experience.

March 17, 1967

One of Hendrix's signature songs, "Purple Haze," is released by Track Records.

January 24, 1967

The Experience play the famed Marquee club; among the audience are all four members of the Beatles, some members of the Rolling Stones, Eric Clapton, and Jeff Beck.

May 12, 1967

The debut album of the Jimi Hendrix Experience, *Are You Experienced*, is released in the United Kingdom.

June 18, 1967

The Experience play a career-making set at the Monterey Pop Festival, finally establishing Hendrix as a bona fide star in his home country.

December 1967

The Experience's second album, *Axis: Bold as Love*, is released in the United Kingdom.

June 1968

The Experience begins recording their epochal third album, *Electric Ladyland*, a process that would, off and on, consume the next six months.

June-December 1968

The Experience embark on their first “proper” U.S. tour, an exhausting grind that ends with the group temporarily disbanding. Chandler quits as the band’s manager, and all such duties are relegated to Michael Jeffery.

February 1969

Reunited Experience play two dates at the famous Royal Albert Hall in London.

April-June 1969

The Experience tour the United States.

June 29, 1969

The Experience’s set at the Denver Pop Festival is their final gig together.

August 18, 1969

As the sun rises, Hendrix and his new assemblage of musicians perform the show-ending set at the Woodstock Music and Art Fair in upstate New York.

January 1, 1970.

Hendrix and the Band of Gypsies (Billy Cox, bass, Buddy Miles, drums) play at the Fillmore East. The live recording culled from the show is released as *Band of Gypsies*.

July 30, 1970

Hendrix plays at Rainbow Bridge in Hawaii.

September 17, 1970

Hendrix dies after choking on his vomit while in a stupor from sleeping medication.

SELECT DISCOGRAPHY

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Axis: Bold as Love, 1967

Electric Ladyland, 1968

The Cry of Love, 1971

The Jimi Hendrix Concerts,

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The Velvet Underground

Scott Schinder

OUTCASTS TO CLASS ACT

Today, the Velvet Underground's influence is widely acknowledged, and even casual rock fans maintain some awareness of their musical and cultural significance. But for most of its actual existence, the band barely registered on mainstream radar. Misunderstood by many, ignored by most, and treasured by a small coterie of broad-minded followers, the Velvet Underground introduced a multitude of innovations whose reverberations are still being felt decades later.

Even in the context of the social upheavals of the 1960s, the Velvet Underground was genuinely revolutionary, combining an uncompromising musical vision with songs whose lyrical content had no precedent in popular music. At a time when mainstream America was straining to come to terms with the hippie movement, the New York-based Velvets were presenting a darker, more confrontational vision of the world. In comparison with the

relatively upbeat peace-and-love vibes of the Summer of Love (which their first album preceded by a few months), the Velvet Underground was genuinely threatening.

Indeed, the seamy urban milieu and casual decadence of such confrontational masterpieces as “Heroin,” “I’m Waiting for the Man,” and “Venus in Furs” had never before been documented in popular music. Leader Lou Reed’s edgy scenarios were matched by music that was both primal and sophisticated, driven by Reed and Sterling Morrison’s alternately wrenching and nuanced guitar interplay, John Cale’s squalling viola runs, and drummer Maureen Tucker’s eloquently unadorned beats. Reed’s sung/spoken vocals maintained an oddly appropriate balance of involvement and detachment.

The Velvet Underground’s raw, often dissonant musical approach and gritty, boundary-pushing subject matter weren’t just transgressive by mainstream pop standards. They were also anathema to the emerging, self-consciously hip album-rock constituency, implicitly rejecting the hippie dream in favor of untidy, unflinching realism. Singer/guitarist/main songwriter Reed’s gripping portrayals of drug use, kinky sex, and casual violence were so shocking to many listeners that it was easy for them to overlook his lyrics’ consistent humanity and compassion, not to mention the affecting craftsmanship of his compositions.

Beyond the songwriting, the Velvet Underground’s most lasting influence was in its often-abrasive soundscapes, whose imaginative use of guitar feedback, distortion, dissonance, drones, white noise, and extended improvisations drew from a wide assortment of rock and roll and avant-garde elements. Their sonic extremes laid much of the groundwork for punk rock and its various offshoots. Indeed, it has been said that while few bought the Velvet Underground’s records when they were originally released, nearly everyone who did went out and started a band.

Iggy Pop and the Stooges: Gimme Danger

Producer Brian Eno famously noted that although the Velvet Underground didn’t sell many records in its lifetime, everyone who bought one went out and started his or her own band. The Velvets exerted a profound influence on rock performers seeking to carve out their own musical aesthetic without regard to established commercial trends. For the Stooges and their lead singer Iggy Pop, the Velvets’ approach validated a non-virtuosic instrumental style and the expressive potential of a three-chord (or even one-chord) song.

As working-class teenagers growing up in Michigan, the Stooges were far removed from the sophisticated New York milieu where rock and roll met pop art. But like the Velvet Underground, the Stooges weren’t afraid to explore the realm of pure noise whether through the groans and screams of front man Iggy Pop (born James Osterberg in 1947); Ron Asheton’s squalling, feedback-laden guitar; or the discarded fifty-five-gallon oil drums around which Iggy

built drummer Scott Asheton's first kit. Formed in 1967, the early Stooges played *sound* rather than *songs*—what Iggy later described as “thunderous, racy music, which would drone on and on. . . . The earth shook, then cracked, and swallowed all misery whole.”

In 1969, Elektra Records released *The Stooges*, produced by ex-Velvet John Cale. The group was now a recognizable rock quartet playing actual songs, but with a primal wall of sound perfectly suited to Iggy's no-holds-barred style of live performance. Songs like “No Fun” and “I Wanna Be Your Dog” later became punk-era standards when performed by the Sex Pistols, Joan Jett, the Damned, and Richard Hell.

For 1970's *Funhouse*, the Stooges added Steve McKay's caterwauling saxophone and recorded each song up to twenty times in consecutive complete takes (including live vocals) until they hit on a satisfactory performance. Iggy regrouped the Stooges in 1972 for *Raw Power*, produced by David Bowie and featuring new guitarist James Williamson (Ron Asheton switched to bass). Depending on one's point of view, Bowie's weirdly tinny mix either sabotaged the Stooges' music or lent it a certain mystery, as though heard through the cracked mirror that reflects Iggy's face on the album's back cover. The Stooges collapsed within a year and *Raw Power* passed into legend: the Dead Boys, Dictators, and Red Hot Chili Peppers all covered the track “Search and Destroy” in later years.

Iggy Pop went on to release many solo albums beginning in 1977 with two Bowie-produced efforts, *The Idiot* and the more compelling *Lust for Life*. These records lacked the Stooges' ferocity but revealed his expanded range as a singer and lyricist. In 2003, a few new studio tracks followed by a remarkable series of shows reunited Iggy with the Asheton brothers (plus ex-Minuteman Mike Watt on bass) and introduced the atavistic magic of the live Stooges to a new generation of fans.

Andy Schwartz

Although they were near-pariahs in their time, history has vindicated the Velvet Underground's artistic and cultural contributions. One measure of their late-blooming prestige was their 1996 induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, an honor for which they were elected over any number of their better-selling contemporaries. Where the band's LPs had once been allowed to fall out of print in the United States, their recorded legacy is now honored with expanded editions of the original albums, a career-spanning box set, archival collections of outtakes and rarities, and multiple releases of the handful of vintage live performances that happened to make it to tape.

Born in Brooklyn and raised in suburban Freeport, Long Island, Lou Reed spent much of his early life pursuing dual obsessions with rock and roll and literature. The first-born son of affluent tax accountant parents, he developed an early affinity for R&B and doo-wop. While in high school, he began playing

in local rock and roll combos, much to his parents' consternation. He even released a single with his teen vocal group the Jades, which was little noticed apart from one airing on popular New York disc jockey Murray the K's radio program. As a teenager, Reed suffered from depression, alarming his parents enough to have him treated with electroshock therapy (a traumatic experience that would inform his subsequent songwriting, most literally in the stirring "Kill Your Sons").

While attending Syracuse University in the early 1960s, Reed studied creative writing under noted poet Delmore Schwartz. Reed was also active in publishing a short-lived poetry magazine with some fellow students, briefly getting into hot water with the dean for writing an impassioned diatribe criticizing the student head of the Young Americans for Freedom. He hosted a jazz/R&B show on the college radio station, from which he was fired after making fun of a public service announcement on muscular dystrophy. He also experimented with sex and drugs, incurring the wrath of bullying local cops.

Syracuse had an active music scene, and Reed formed L.A. and the Eldorados, sometimes slipping some of his original compositions in between covers of familiar rock and R&B tunes. By then, Reed had written early versions of the future Velvet Underground standards "Heroin" and "Waiting for the Man." With Bob Dylan having recently expanded perceptions of what constituted appropriate subject matter for rock and roll songs, Reed was excited by the prospect of combining his musical and literary passions.

While at Syracuse, Reed found a kindred spirit in fellow English major and fellow Long Island native Sterling Morrison. They met after Morrison heard Reed cranking up his guitar, in order to annoy the ROTC troop that drilled on the football field behind the dormitory (Reed had earlier been kicked out of the ROTC for insubordination). Morrison also shared Reed's rebellious-intellectual stance, and was receptive to Reed's ideas about applying the sensibility of Dostoyevsky, Raymond Chandler, Hubert Selby, and Edgar Allan Poe to rock and roll.

GOING DOWNTOWN

By 1964, Reed had, despite his disciplinary problems, graduated from college with honors. Thanks to a recommendation from the Eldorados' old manager, he soon won a \$25/week job writing and recording quickie novelty tunes for the infamous Queens, New York, low-budget label Pickwick. In late 1964, the company decided to promote Reed's unlikely dance number "The Ostrich," which he'd recorded under the name the Primitives, and a live band was needed to impersonate his fictitious studio entity.

One musician tapped for the unlikely makeshift act was John Cale, a classically trained Welsh viola prodigy who had already established some impressive musical credits. The short-lived Primitives performing lineup also included

noted underground composer/filmmaker Tony Conrad and sculptor Walter DiMaria. Cale, Conrad, and DiMaria had been recruited by Pickwick exec Terry Philips, not for their artistic credentials, but because their longish hair convinced Philips that they looked like rock musicians.

The son of a coal miner and a schoolteacher, Cale had been a childhood classical prodigy who'd performed an original composition on the BBC before he'd even entered his teens. He later studied composition at London University's Goldsmiths College and at the prestigious Royal Academy of Music. He eventually gravitated toward the freedom of the underground and, with the patronage of Aaron Copland and Leonard Bernstein, won a scholarship to study music in the United States. After moving to New York in 1963, Cale participated in an eighteen-hour piano recital with avant-garde giant John Cage (photos of Cale performing at the event made the *New York Times*) and worked with renowned experimental composer LaMonte Young, whose use of extended electronic drones would be a key influence on the Velvet Underground.

Although Cale had been largely oblivious to the British rock and roll explosion that had been taking place while he was studying in London, his new acquaintance with Reed sparked an interest in fusing rock and art. Cale was fascinated by the literary aspect of the songs that Reed was writing, and by Reed's street-wise stance, which contrasted Cale's relatively sheltered upbringing.

Reed and Cale began writing songs together, and Reed was drawn into the Lower East Side creative community of which Cale was a part. The combination of Reed's rock and roll sensibility and Cale's grounding in classical and experimental disciplines—along with both men's drive to transcend the restrictions of their respective backgrounds—yielded a rich and rewarding partnership, with Cale helping to shape a compelling and original sonic vision to complement Reed's ambitious lyrics.

The duo's first known collaboration was "Why Don't You Smile Now," which was recorded as a single in 1965 by the All Night Workers, a band that included some old Syracuse friends of Reed's. The song also found its way to English R&B rockers the Downliners Sect, who covered it later that year.

A month after Reed and Cale began writing together, Reed ran into old friend Sterling Morrison, who was inducted into the band that the two new partners had decided to put together. With Reed playing guitar and doing most of the singing, Morrison on guitar and occasional bass, and Cale handling bass, viola (specially outfitted with guitar strings), and keyboards, the trio began rehearsing and recording embryonic demos of their compositions. Some copies of those tapes were circulated in the hope of generating record company interest. Cale even circulated some in London when he returned there for a visit; he reportedly gave one copy to Marianne Faithfull in the hope that she'd pass it on to Mick Jagger.

The new collaboration evolved quickly in unique and unexpected directions. Having never played in a rock band before, Cale was not bound by

rock's musical conventions—a distinction that was reflected in his unusual bass lines, which completely bypassed rock's rhythmic clichés.

Not surprisingly, the partnership of disparate, complex individuals Reed and Cale was fraught with tension from the start, thanks in large part to Reed's mercurial temperament. Depending upon the circumstances, Reed could be magnetically charming or cuttingly vicious.

One early sign of the band's internal fractiousness was Reed's insistence on taking individual songwriting credits on most of the ensemble's collectively constructed songs, a situation that would become a major bone of contention among the members in years to come.

The fledgling act found its first drummer in Angus MacLise, a free-spirited Scottish-born actor, artist, composer, and world traveler who lived next door to the squalid \$30/month Ludlow Street apartment that Reed and Cale shared. MacLise, who had worked with Cale in LaMonte Young's group, had picked up all manner of exotic rhythmic ideas in his travels through India, Nepal, and the Middle East. And his apartment, unlike Reed and Cale's, had heat and electricity.

The group had toyed with various names including the Warlocks and the Falling Spikes, before MacLise suggested the Velvet Underground, borrowing the phrase from the title of an erotic paperback novel that Tony Conrad had found lying on the sidewalk in the Bowery. The book's sensationalistic cover promised to expose "the sexual corruption of our age."

In July 1965, the newly christened Velvet Underground began performing (often hidden behind movie screens) as part of multi-media presentations staged by filmmaker Piero Heliczer. Those events were featured in a CBS TV news special on the New York underground film scene, narrated by no less an all-American authority figure than Walter Cronkite.

New York Post writer Al Aronowitz—one of the first journalists to write seriously about rock music, and a well-connected figure in the city's music scene—took an interest and became the Velvet Underground's first manager. Aronowitz offered the group their first paying job, opening for local combo the Myddle Class (whom he managed) in a high-school gym in Summit, New Jersey, on December 11, 1965, for which they would be paid \$75.

But Angus MacLise, who had exercised a substantial influence in shaping the band's early rhythmic sensibility, bailed out, horrified at the thought of the band playing formal shows and accepting payment for playing music. Needing a drummer for the Summit gig, the Velvet Underground tapped Maureen Tucker, known to her friends as Moe.

The sister of Reed's and Morrison's college pal Jim Tucker, the self-taught Moe adopted an eloquently minimalist percussive style that contrasted MacLise's complex rhythmic approach. Tucker played standing up, using a stripped-down kit consisting of tom toms, a snare, and an upturned bass drum, which she played with mallets rather than drumsticks. Tucker's simple-yet-exotic beats would prove an ideal foundation for the Velvets' raw instrumental flights.

As the Velvet Underground's most grounded member, Tucker would become a stabilizing force within the band. She didn't share her bandmates' drug-fueled Bohemian lifestyle, continuing to live on Long Island with her parents for most of her time in the group. In the years to come, Tucker would also be the only VU member to maintain consistently harmonious relationships with all of the others.

The Velvet Underground's Summit performance consisted of three songs, "There She Goes Again," "Venus in Furs," and "Heroin." Morrison later described the audience response as "a murmur of surprise" that grew into "a mighty howl of outrage and bewilderment" by the end of the set.

Feeling that the band needed to gain performing experience, Al Aronowitz helped them to get a residency at Greenwich Village's Cafe Bizarre. But despite Tucker being relegated to tambourine rather than drum kit, the quartet's volume levels soon invoked the ire of the club's manager, who threatened to fire them if they played "Black Angel's Death Song" again. Eager to be freed from the ill-conceived gig, the band obliged.

Multimedia artist and pop-culture provocateur Andy Warhol, who was at the peak of his notoriety at the time, had seen the Velvet Underground play at Cafe Bizarre two days before they got the ax, and was impressed enough to sign on as their new manager. In addition to providing rehearsal space and new musical gear, Warhol conferred the automatic notoriety that came along with his high-profile seal of approval. Perhaps most important, Warhol's patronage allowed the Velvets' music to continue to develop independently of commercial considerations.

WORKING AT THE FACTORY

It was Warhol's idea to augment the Velvet Underground with Nico, née Christa Päffgen. A striking, enigmatic, icy-voiced German model and jet-setter, Nico had already appeared in Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*, given birth to French film star Alain Delon's son, and recorded (with help from Brian Jones and Jimmy Page) a solo single for Rolling Stones manager Andrew Loog Oldham's Immediate label.

The musicians resented having the blonde chanteuse foisted upon them, and never considered her to be a genuine member of the band. But Nico's dour glamour and oddly alluring deadpan vocals added an additional dimension to the Velvets' otherness, and she would help to inspire some of Lou Reed's most memorable songs.

The Velvet Underground became the house band of Warhol's studio/headquarters the Factory, whose eccentric cast of characters would provide a fertile source of lyrical inspiration for Reed. Warhol filmed a rehearsal that ended with the police responding to a noise complaint, and edited the footage into *The Velvet Underground and Nico: A Symphony of Sound*, which was then projected behind the band during live performances.

The music-and-film concept was subsequently expanded to include more films, a light show, and dancers. Dubbed the Exploding Plastic Inevitable, the multi-sensory happening debuted in April 1966, with a month-long run at an old Polish community hall on St. Mark's Place. The show then went on tour across the country, lending a substantial boost to the Velvet's profile in the process.

The Warhol connection helped to win the VU a deal with MGM's Verve imprint. Warhol was credited as producer of their first album, *The Velvet Underground and Nico*, the bulk of which had been recorded quickly in April 1966, while the band was still unsigned. Although he was present for much of the recording, Warhol had little hands-on involvement in the sessions, which he co-financed (at a cost of \$2,500) with Norman Dolph, a former Columbia Records sales executive. Dolph oversaw the recording despite having little studio experience. The sessions took place over three nights in April of 1966 at New York's once-mighty, now-crumbling Scepter studios.

Reed later asserted that Warhol's biggest contribution to the album was his notoriety, which afforded the Velvet the leverage to evolve on their own terms and the financial clout to have free reign in the studio, cutting the bulk of their first album without record company input.

When the Velvet's recordings were shopped around to record companies, the band encountered widespread resistance, even from such hip labels as Elektra and Atlantic. They received a more enthusiastic response from Columbia Records producer/A&R man Tom Wilson. Wilson was a former jazz specialist who'd become one of the era's foremost rock producers, having recently played a key role in Bob Dylan's transition from acoustic folkie to electric rocker. Wilson had also helped to salvage Simon and Garfunkel's floundering career by overdubbing electric instruments onto the acoustic "Sound of Silence" to create a folk-rock smash.

Wilson saw the Velvet Underground as having the potential for greatness, and advised the band that he was about to leave Columbia for MGM/Verve, who had engaged his services to shore up the company's rock roster. Once settled in his new job, Wilson signed the Velvet Underground.

To augment the tracks recorded with Norman Dolph, Wilson and the group recorded five more songs for *The Velvet Underground and Nico* in Los Angeles and New York. The L.A. sessions were booked on short notice in May 1966, when the band was in town for a month-long run at the Trip club with the Exploding Plastic Inevitable, and found themselves stranded with time of their hands after the sheriff's department closed down the venue after the second night.

The Velvet had received a cool public reception during their truncated L.A. debut. But the gap between the Velvet's gritty, amphetamine-fueled urban attitude and the laid-back, acid-inspired vibe of the West Coast rock scene truly became clear when the band accepted an offer from concert impresario Bill Graham to bring the Exploding Plastic Inevitable to Graham's Fillmore

Ballroom in San Francisco. Sharing a two-night stand with Jefferson Airplane and Frank Zappa's Mothers of Invention, the Velvet Underground was greeted with outright hostility.

Although he'd been eager to have the Velvet Underground perform at the Fillmore, the prickly Graham was put off by the faux glamour of the Warhol entourage, whose outright rejection of hippie values didn't play well in the capitol of the emerging movement. Graham reportedly screamed, "I hope you motherfuckers bomb!" before the company took the stage. On the second night of the engagement, Graham pulled the plug after the Velvets left their axes leaning against their amps to create a squall of electronic noise.

The antipathy between the Velvet Underground and the hippie counterculture was further demonstrated by influential critic Ralph J. Gleason's *San Francisco Chronicle* dismissive review of one of the Fillmore shows. The hippie-hating Velvets, who felt that the San Francisco bands didn't know how to play rock and roll, reciprocated the ill will.

The VU's most formidable musical nemesis was Frank Zappa, iconoclastic leader of their Verve labelmates the Mothers of Invention, who had been the Exploding Plastic Inevitable's opening act at the Trip. Zappa—who, ironically, was also skeptical of the hippie movement—derided the Velvets as unmusical and sensationalistic, leading Reed to brand Zappa a pretentious academic. Ironically, Reed would deliver an admiring induction speech on the occasion of Zappa's posthumous induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1995.

The conflict between the VU and their era's arbiters of hipness may go a long way toward explaining the general incomprehension that greeted the release of *The Velvet Underground and Nico*. Beyond the Warhol-designed peelable banana sticker that graced its front cover, it remains one of the most audacious and accomplished debut albums in rock history.

The album immediately showcased the band's complementary contrasts with the opening one-two punch of the dreamy melancholy of "Sunday Morning" and the brutal street scene of "I'm Waiting for the Man." Although Reed had written "Sunday Morning" as a conscious attempt to come up with a commercial pop tune, the song's undercurrent of paranoia and regret gave it a bittersweet depth that was probably a bit too heady for the Top Forty. The adrenaline-fueled dope-scoring vignette of "Waiting for the Man" was trumped by "Heroin," a harrowing epic whose violent peaks and blissed-out valleys draw the listener into its narrator's distorted perception.

Equally intense was the sadomasochistic imagery and disquieting viola drones of "Venus in Furs" and "The Black Angel's Death Song." "Run Run Run" and "There She Goes Again," by comparison, were catchy, relatively straightforward pop-rock tunes distinguished by terse, astringent playing and Reed's blunt imagery.

Although Reed was lead singer on most of the album, Nico's vocals were featured on three memorable songs. "All Tomorrow's Parties" had already

been part of the band's repertoire before she joined, but Nico's dusky presence enhanced the disturbing majesty of Reed's lyrics. "I'll Be Your Mirror" and "Femme Fatale" were written by Reed specifically for Nico to sing, and both were ideal vehicles for her frosty yet evocative voice. Both of those numbers underlined the empathy and sensitivity that were sometimes overshadowed by the more sensationalistic aspects of Reed's writing.

While waiting for the album to be released, the Velvet Underground continued to perform with the Exploding Plastic Inevitable. During one six-night stand at Poor Richard's in Chicago, Reed was hospitalized with hepatitis and Nico was vacationing in Spain, so the band performed with a reshuffled lineup, with Angus MacLise returning to play drums, Tucker moving to bass, and Cale and Morrison sharing lead vocal duties. The temporary personnel change irritated Reed, who made it a point to remind MacLise that his return was only temporary.

The Velvet Underground and Nico sat on the shelf for nearly a year before Verve released it in March 1967. The cause of the delay remains unclear, although some have speculated that it was due to Frank Zappa pushing to have the Mothers of Invention's debut LP come out first. Whatever the reason, by the time *The Velvet Underground and Nico* arrived, the media buzz generated by the Exploding Plastic Inevitable shows had dissipated.

Too weird for the AM radio and too dark for the progressive, album-oriented FM stations that were emerging at the time, *The Velvet Underground and Nico* received minimal radio exposure. MGM did make a token attempt at gaining mainstream airplay by releasing two singles, one pairing "Sunday Morning" with "Femme Fatale" and another combining the Nico-fronted tracks "All Tomorrow's Parties" and "I'll Be Your Mirror," but neither charted. Meanwhile, many publications refused to accept ads for the album, and the few reviews it received were largely negative.

It also didn't help that when the album did begin to attract some attention, Warhol cohort Eric Emerson sued MGM over the unauthorized use of a photo of him on the back cover, causing the company to pull the album from the market for six weeks so the cover could be reprinted. *The Velvet Underground and Nico* peaked at a less-than-stellar number 171 on the *Billboard* charts.

By the time *The Velvet Underground and Nico* was released, the group was no longer working with Andy Warhol, who by then was focusing his energies on making films.

Meanwhile, Nico had ceased performing with the Velvet Underground, following various internal machinations regarding her desire to sing more songs. While the circumstances of her departure had not been completely amicable, Reed, Cale, and Morrison contributed to Nico's Tom Wilson-produced 1967 solo debut *Chelsea Girl*. Cale and Reed co-wrote three songs, while Reed and Morrison provided "Chelsea Girls," a stirring extended work that's on a par with the VU's most affecting recordings. Cale would continue to work extensively with Nico, producing her next three LPs, *The Marble Index*, *Desertshore*, and *The End*.

TURNING UP THE HEAT

The second Velvet Underground release, *White Light/White Heat*, recorded quickly with Tom Wilson and engineer Gary Kellgren in the fall of 1967 and released in January 1968, suggested that the mainstream's rejection of *The Velvet Underground and Nico* had had a liberating effect on the group.

White Light/White Heat reflected the louder, harsher direction that the Velvet Underground's live performances had been taking. Dispensing with the first album's ballads, pop hooks, and baroque touches, the foursome carried their improvisational explorations to new extremes, with distorted instrumental sounds and turbulent ensemble performances that manifested the anger and alienation of Reed's lyrics. And, thanks to a new endorsement deal with Vox guitars, the band had access to an array of new electronic gadgets to further indulge their sonic experiments.

White Light/White Heat's clattery title track offers a fearsome ode to amphetamines, while the frantic "I Heard Her Call My Name" bristles with free-jazz chaos. Even the album's lone melodic ballad, "Here She Comes Now," carried an uneasy undercurrent. "The Gift" has Cale narrating a black-humored short story written by Reed, as the band jams menacingly beneath him. Cale also sings lead on "Lady Godiva's Operation," whose melodic reverie is shaken when Reed grabs the mike to deliver random snatches of lyrics; the track's vocal tug-of-war seemed an apt metaphor for the pair's competitive relationship.

But *White Light/White Heat*'s centerpiece, musically and conceptually, is the churning epic "Sister Ray," a sonically and emotionally unsparing mini-opera that explored several of Reed's pet themes amidst seventeen and a half disquieting minutes of churning cacophony. Like most of the album, the track was recorded live in the studio, with no edits or overdubs, and its noisy climactic jam reflected Reed's interest in the free jazz of Ornette Coleman and Cecil Taylor.

Impressive as it was, it was no surprise that *White Light/White Heat*'s slap in the face of musical propriety sold even more poorly than the first album, rising no higher than number 199 on the *Billboard* chart.

It didn't help that MGM seemed to have little idea of how to promote the band, since the Velvets' opportunities for mainstream exposure were decidedly limited, and the prospect of the album spawning a hit single was pretty much out of the question. The group's principal method of winning over new fans was touring, since few observers could remain neutral after witnessing a Velvet Underground set.

With Nico and Warhol now both out of the picture, *White Light/White Heat* represented a startlingly pure distillation of the original Velvet Underground's assortment of talents and personalities. But the volatile nature of Reed and Cale's personal and creative chemistry virtually guaranteed that their partnership would have a limited lifespan.

By August 1968, friction between Reed and Cale had escalated to the breaking point. Reed called a meeting to inform Morrison and Tucker that he was kicking Cale out of the band, but left it to Morrison to inform Cale that he'd been fired. Although the band still had some significant music to make, Cale's departure meant that the innate tension and conflict that had been so crucial to the band's creative process was largely gone, and that the Velvet Underground was now Lou Reed's band.

Cale played his final shows with the Velvet Underground at the Boston Tea Party on September 27 and 28, 1968. The following month saw the arrival of new bassist Doug Yule, an acquaintance who'd been in the Boston group the Grass Menagerie. Yule had been a VU member for just a few weeks when the band began recording its next LP in Los Angeles.

Released in March 1969, the group's third album, simply titled *The Velvet Underground*, was, in its own way, as radical a departure as its predecessor. Where *White Light/White Heat* pushed the band's sound to its most abrasive extremes, the third album (whose production was credited to the band) took an unexpected detour into subtlety and restraint.

While "What Goes On" and "Beginning to See the Light" rocked out forcefully, *The Velvet Underground* (issued on MGM proper rather than on the company's Verve imprint) largely focused on such reflective, melodic numbers as "Pale Blue Eyes," "Some Kinda Love," "Jesus," "I'm Set Free," and "That's the Story of My Life," all of which muse eloquently on various forms of love. Yule made his lead-vocal debut on Reed's "Candy Says," on which the bassist's tentative, vulnerable vocal was perfectly suited to Reed's humane lyrics and the song's striking, languid melody.

Minus Cale's experimental sensibility, Reed and Morrison's twin-guitar dynamics became the Velvets' most prominent feature, and the third album's spare, distortion-free arrangements—some featuring the pair's newly purchased matching Fender twelve-strings—made it easier to appreciate the nuances of the guitarists' interaction. The album's sole nod to the band's left-field origins is the dizzying nine-minute "The Murder Mystery," which merges a raga beat, burbling organ, overlapping spoken-word passages, and lilting counterpoint vocals by all four members. The eponymous album closes in atypically light-hearted fashion with the impish "After Hours," featuring a plaintive lead vocal by Tucker.

Although it has been claimed that *The Velvet Underground's* relatively restrained sound was the result of the band's Vox amplifiers and effects pedals being stolen at the airport prior to the sessions, witnesses have dismissed this claim as a myth. A more plausible explanation might be that the album's calmer mood was a reflection of Reed's state of mind once his conflicts with Cale were no longer part of the equation process.

Indeed, all concerned remember the sessions for the third album being relatively harmonious and stress-free. Although Yule lacked his predecessor's genius for experimentation, his solid bass playing, capable keyboard work,

and supportive backing vocals helped to bring some temporary stability to the lineup.

Despite its relative accessibility, *The Velvet Underground* failed to achieve the commercial breakthrough that many had hoped for at the time, making no more mainstream impact than the band's prior releases.

The Velvet Underground has been issued at various times in two different mixes. The more familiar version is the one overseen by engineer Val Valentin, but some releases have used an alternate mix by Reed, which Morrison nicknamed the "closet mix" for its relatively cramped, claustrophobic sound.

The Velvets stayed on the road for much of 1969. Between tours, they recorded several new tracks for a projected fourth album. But those recordings were shelved when manager Steve Sesnick, who had come on board after Warhol's departure, negotiated the band's release from the company. The quartet then signed with Atlantic Records, a label far more in tune with the album-rock market, and whose president Ahmet Ertegun was a longtime VU admirer. Ertegun reportedly urged Reed to stop writing about sex and drugs and deliver an album "loaded with hits."

The result was 1970's *Loaded*, featuring the catchiest material and most polished production of the Velvet Underground's career. The album, released on Atlantic's Cotillion subsidiary, even spawned a pair of actual FM airplay favorites in the uncharacteristically upbeat anthems "Sweet Jane" and "Rock and Roll," which were both refreshing in their catchy choruses and their unironic embrace of rock and roll as a healing force.

Elsewhere on the album, "New Age" harkens back to the Warhol days with its images of decaying showbiz grandeur, while "Oh! Sweet Nuthin'," "I Found a Reason," and the Yule-sung "Who Loves the Sun" add to Reed's potent body of haunting ballads. The band ventures into marginally more mainstream musical territory on "Head Held High," which convincingly adopts a gospel/R&B style; "Train Round the Bend," the closest they ever came to a straight blues-rock track; and "Lonesome Cowboy Bill," a jaunty rocker which pays sly tribute to beat icon William Burroughs.

The quality of its material aside, *Loaded*—which Reed later disowned as a severely bastardized version of his intentions, insisting that several songs had been edited, mixed, and resequenced without his consent—is sometimes criticized by Velvets purists for its relatively conventional veneer. That was due in part to Cale's absence, as well as the diminished participation of Morrison, who was juggling the sessions with his classes at City College, where he was working to finish his bachelor of arts degree. The most dramatic difference was the absence of Tucker, whose pregnancy forced her to sit out the sessions entirely (she was replaced in the studio by Yule's sixteen-year-old brother Billy, as well as engineer Adrian Barber and session player Tommy Castanaro).

(In 1997, Rhino Records reissued *Loaded* in an expanded two-CD "Fully Loaded Edition" that restored the unedited versions of the songs that Reed claimed had been butchered, along with various outtakes and alternate versions.)

That *Loaded* smoothed some of the material's rough edges is confirmed by the fiercely inspired live renditions that later surfaced on the 1974 release *1969: Velvet Underground Live*. Culled from performances in Dallas and San Francisco, the album is a riveting document, documenting a ferocious side of the Reed/Morrison/Yule/Tucker lineup that was never captured in the studio. The album includes a majestic take of the then-new "Sweet Jane" that seemingly reflects Reed's original intention more accurately than the truncated version on *Loaded*.

The *Loaded* sessions, which took place between April and July 1969 at New York's Atlantic Studios, overlapped with a nine-week residency at Max's Kansas City, with the band recording by day and performing at night (with Billy Yule on drums). The demands of that arrangement took a toll on Reed's voice (hence Yule's presence as lead singer on three *Loaded* tracks) and contributed to tensions in the studio. At the end of a show late in the Max's engagement, a physically and emotionally fragile Reed abruptly announced that he was quitting. Reed's final Velvets performance happened to be captured on a portable cassette recorder by Warhol associate Brigid Polk, and was released by Atlantic in 1972 as *Live at Max's Kansas City*.

Ironically, upon its release in September 1970, *Loaded* would be the Velvet Underground's best-selling release, with "Rock and Roll" and "Sweet Jane" becoming the first Velvet Underground tracks to gain substantial radio play. In Reed's absence, manager Sesnick attempted to promote the more compliant Yule as the Velvets' new public face. Yule's name is listed above Reed's in *Loaded*'s credits, and he's the only member pictured on the album cover. The issue was further blurred by the album attributing the songwriting to the entire band (Reed later sued to regain individual credit). Despite those manipulations, Reed's departure limited *Loaded*'s marketplace potential.

When one considers how many of the Velvet Underground's innovations would be integrated into the rock mainstream in the coming decade, it's not hard to imagine that the band might well have been able to sustain a viable 1970s career if it hadn't splintered. Reed's protests aside, *Loaded* demonstrated that the Velvets could make commercially viable records without sacrificing their essence.

In Reed's absence, the remnants of the Velvet Underground attempted to continue, with Doug Yule moving to guitar and assuming lead vocal duties. But Morrison and Tucker bailed out the following year, after touring to support *Loaded*. Yule and manager Sesnick held onto the band's moniker long enough to take an in-name-only Velvet Underground on tour in Britain and to record 1973's now-forgotten *Squeeze*, which wasn't even released in America. Yule's ersatz Velvets sometimes included bassist Walter Powers and keyboardist Willie Alexander, both of whom had played with Yule in the Grass Menagerie. Despite the extended death throes, *Loaded* can be viewed as the Velvet Underground's real swan song, and it's a poignant and powerful one.

RECLAMATION AND RESURRECTION

In the years since the Velvet Underground's dissolution, its members have pursued divergent paths as their former band's status has continued to grow. Morrison hung up his guitar for decades, working as a tugboat captain before settling into an academic career as professor of medieval literature at the University of Texas at Austin for several years. Doug Yule recorded a pair of albums as part of the country-rock semi-supergroup American Flyer, before retiring from music to work as a cabinetmaker.

Reed, Cale, and Nico, meanwhile, launched long-running and artistically rewarding solo careers that have extended the Velvets' creative legacy. Following his abrupt exit from the group, an exhausted Reed initially retreated from music, moving back into his parents' house in Freeport and taking a job as typist at his father's accounting firm. After a period of "realigning" himself, he signed a solo deal with RCA Records and released 1972's *Lou Reed* (recorded in London with an odd assortment of players including Steve Howe and Rick Wakeman of British prog-rock kings Yes), a tentative, lackluster return whose best tracks—"I Can't Stand It," "Lisa Says," "Ride into the Sun," and "Ocean"—were inferior reworkings of tunes that had first been cut for the Velvet Underground's unreleased pre-*Loaded* album.

Although *Lou Reed* met with a muted public response, the artist would soon hit his solo stride, and achieve the commercial success that had long eluded his former band. By then, the rise of glam rock, whose embrace of decadent imagery and sexual ambiguity owed much to the Velvet Underground's pioneering example, helped to win Reed a receptive new audience on both sides of the Atlantic. It didn't hurt that David Bowie, glam's reigning superstar, offered to produce Reed's next album, 1972's *Transformer*, just as Bowie's *Ziggy Stardust*-era cachet was at its highest.

Bowie and guitarist Mick Ronson helped to craft a flashy, commercially astute sound that had little in common with the Velvet Underground's free-form approach, but which provided a compelling framework for such tunes as "Vicious," "Perfect Day," and "Walk on the Wild Side." The latter, a slinky ode to the heady days of the Warhol Factory featuring references to some of Warhol's most colorful cohorts, became a Top Twenty single—a development that would have been unimaginable a year or two before.

The commercially savvy *Transformer* was followed by the downbeat *Berlin*, one of Reed's most ambitious and fully realized works, a moving, partially orchestrated song cycle built around the doomed romance of two chemically dependent Bohemians. While *Transformer* had established Reed as a viable commercial act, *Berlin* reclaimed his credentials as a serious artist.

In the decades to come, Reed would continue to record prolifically, reinventing his music and his image numerous times. Along the way, he's built a worldwide audience considerably larger than the cult that sustained the Velvet

Underground during its lifespan. While his output has been mixed, Reed's best solo work—for example, 1974's live *Rock 'n' Roll Animal*, 1976's warmly humane *Coney Island Baby*, 1978's ominous, minimalistic *Street Hassle*, 1982's soul-baring *The Blue Mask*, and 1989's vividly observational *New York*—is stunning in its musical and emotional clarity. And his worst releases—like 1975's *Metal Machine Music*, two unlistenable LPs' worth of dense guitar noise, and 1978's *Take No Prisoners*, a double live album consisting largely of bitter, profane between-song diatribes—exercise a perverse fascination all their own.

John Cale has had an equally prolific and varied solo career that at various times, has drawn upon his raw Velvet background and his roots in classical and avant-garde composition. Beginning with 1970's misleadingly titled *Vintage Violence*, Cale has produced a steady stream of memorable albums that have achieved an artful balance of the accessible and the experimental, cementing his status as both a punk icon and a legitimate composer. As a producer, Cale's extensive résumé includes a trio of debut albums—the Stooges' self-titled 1969 effort, Patti Smith's 1975 classic *Horses*, and the Modern Lovers' eponymous 1976 release—whose influence on the birth of punk rock was as significant as the Velvet Underground's catalog.

Patti Smith: Radio Ethiopia

Primitivism as the launching pad for musical exploration was one element of the Velvet Underground's legacy that most clearly imprinted itself upon the Stooges. But Lou Reed's songs also captured a unique poetic voice that fused the cutting-edge literary techniques of William Burroughs (*Naked Lunch*) and Hubert Selby Jr. (*Last Exit to Brooklyn*) with the streetwise panache of the best rock and roll lyrics.

Few artists were more influenced by this side of the Velvet Underground's output than Patti Smith. Born in 1946 and raised in suburban New Jersey, Patti moved to New York City in 1967. As one who'd lived through the rock and roll upheaval of the 1960s, Smith felt a calling to re-inject the music with the visceral excitement that had been drained out of it: "something new is coming down and we got to be alert to feel it happening. something new and totally ecstatic. the politics of ecstasy move all around me. I refuse to believe Hendrix had the last possessed hand that Joplin had the last drunken throat that Morrison had the last enlightened mind" (p. 129).¹

Patti's reputation spread with the publication of her poetry books *Seventh Heaven* and *Witt*, and with the swagger, charisma, and self-deprecating humor of her public recitals. In 1973, she began working with guitarist Lenny Kaye; over the next two years, they were joined by Ivan Kral (guitar, bass), Richard Sohl (piano), and Jay Dee Daugherty (drums).

Patti Smith's Arista debut, *Horses*, appeared in December 1975. It was the product of years of experimentation in underground rock clubs like C.B.G.B.

and Max's Kansas City, and months of fractious but ultimately rewarding sessions with producer John Cale. "Using Rimbaud, Morrison, and Hendrix as central figures in her explorations, the album relates a series of cathartic moments in her life. . . . Without a hit single, but with considerable pre-release hype, *Horses* cracked the *Billboard* Top 50, something not achieved by any of Smith's precursors—the Velvets, the MC5, the Stooges, or the New York Dolls" (pp. 192–93). Ibid. (Heylin)

Less than a year later, the Patti Smith Group released their second album *Radio Ethiopia*. The title track was a ten-minute-long improvisation that became the centerpiece of the band's live sets. In January 1977, Patti was seriously injured when she fell twelve feet from a stage in Tampa, Florida. After she recovered, the PSG released *Easter*—a more melodic album that reached the Top Twenty and spun off the Top Ten single "Because the Night," co-written by Smith and Bruce Springsteen.

Wave followed in 1979 before Patti left the music business for life in the Detroit suburbs with her husband, former MC5 guitarist Fred "Sonic" Smith, and their two children. Fred Smith died in 1994, as did Patti's brother, Todd. About a year later she re-formed the PSG for limited touring with Lenny Kaye and Jay Dee Daugherty. Subsequent Patti Smith albums have ranged from the inward-looking *Peace and Noise* (1997), with its piano-based compositions, to the strident, socially conscious *Gung Ho* (2000).

A. S.

1. Patti Smith in *Cream* magazine, 1973; quoted by Clinton Heylin, *From The Velvets to The Voldoids* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 129.

Following her initial trio of Cale-aided albums, *Chelsea Girl*, *The Marble Index*, and *Desertshore*, Nico gradually retreated to rock's cultish margins, nursing a long-standing heroin addiction but maintaining enough notoriety and mystique to enable her to continue to record and tour until her death of a cerebral hemorrhage on July 18, 1988, in Ibiza, Spain. Although she'd been more of a vocal prop than a collaborator during her VU tenure, Nico's bleakly fascinating solo work saw her emerge as a distinctive songwriter—and as something of a spiritual godmother to the goth movement.

Reed, Cale, and Nico unexpectedly reunited in early 1972 to play a pair of concerts in London and Paris. The latter show was widely bootlegged, and in 2003 received an official release as *La Bataclan '72*.

Perhaps the most unlikely, and inspiring, Velvets-related solo career is the dark-horse reemergence of Moe Tucker. The drummer initially left music for motherhood, living quietly in Georgia and working a minimum wage job at a Wal-Mart. In the 1980s, she reemerged as an iconoclastic, guitar-playing singer/songwriter, recording a series of acclaimed indie releases that reflected her post-VU experiences, often painting stark, wry portraits of life on the economic margins of American society. Tucker's late-blooming solo work saw

her collaborating with a new generation of Velvets-influenced alternative rockers, including members of Half Japanese and Sonic Youth, as well as outsider troubadour Daniel Johnston.

The fact that Reed, Cale, Nico, and Tucker were able to find sizable audiences for their solo work was indicative of how much the Velvet Underground's stock had risen in the group's absence. By 1985, the band's posthumous fan base was substantial enough to inspire the release of *VU*, a collection of previously unreleased vintage studio tracks, most of them recorded for the unfinished fourth MGM/Verve LP. The collection was welcomed by fans and critics as a major addition to the Velvets canon, and was successful enough to merit a second outtakes collection, *Another View*, the following year.

In 1990, Reed and Cale defied expectations by renewing their working relationship to write and record *Songs for Drella*, a heartfelt song cycle that paid tribute to their old mentor Andy Warhol, who'd passed away three years earlier. The following year, the classic Velvet Underground lineup of Reed, Cale, Morrison, and Tucker reunited for an informal onstage performance at a reception for a Warhol retrospective in Paris. That appearance led to a full-blown European tour in the summer of 1993, climaxing with a three-night run at Paris's Olympia theater, which yielded the album *Live MCMXCIII*.

The reunion tour drew enthusiastic crowds and generated positive notices, leading to discussions about a U.S. tour, an *MTV Unplugged* broadcast, and even a possible new studio album. But old tensions soon arose again, and Reed's efforts to seize control of the once-democratic quartet helped to doom the resurgent quartet to break apart before it had a chance to play any U.S. dates.

Any speculation about further reunions became moot when Sterling Morrison died of non-Hodgkins lymphoma on August 30, 1995. Sadly, the guitarist's passing came a few weeks before the release of the career-spanning VU box set *Peel Slowly and See*, and just a few months before the band was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. At the induction ceremony, Reed, Cale, and Tucker performed a newly written song, "Last Night I Said Goodbye to My Friend," in tribute to their departed comrade.

Those landmarks made it clear how much the band's stature had increased in the nearly three decades since *The Velvet Underground and Nico* was unleashed upon a largely uncomprehending world. Today, the group looms larger than ever, and their precedent-setting vintage work retains its original power and beauty.

TIMELINE

July 12, 1965

Lou Reed, John Cale, and Sterling Morrison record the first Velvet Underground demos at Cale's Manhattan apartment.

December 11, 1965

The Velvet Underground play their first paying gig, in a high school gym in Summit, New Jersey. The performance features the band's new drummer Moe Tucker.

December 1965

Andy Warhol becomes the Velvet Underground's manager and patron. He also suggests that they add German singer/model Nico to their performances.

April 1966

The Exploding Plastic Inevitable, a Warhol-sponsored multi-media happening featuring the Velvet Underground, debuts in New York.

March 12, 1967

The band's first album, *The Velvet Underground and Nico*, is released.

January 30, 1968

The second Velvet Underground album, *White Light/White Heat*, is released.

September 28, 1968

John Cale plays his final show with the Velvet Underground at the Boston Tea Party.

March 1969

The Velvet Underground's self-titled third album is released.

October 15, 1969

The Velvet Underground perform a series of shows at a Dallas club called End of Cole Ave. Tapes from these shows will later appear on the live album *1969: Velvet Underground Live*, released five years later.

August 23, 1970

During an extended run of shows at Max's Kansas City in New York, Reed abruptly quits the band. A fan makes a cassette recording of the set, which will later be released as the album *Live at Max's Kansas City*.

September 19, 1970

Loaded, the fourth Velvet Underground album, is released. Although Reed has already departed and Morrison and Tucker will soon follow, *Loaded* proves to be the band's most commercially successful album.

June 1, 1993

Lou Reed, John Cale, Sterling Morrison, and Moe Tucker launch the Velvet Underground's twenty-fifth anniversary reunion tour in Edinburgh, Scotland. The band will break up again before they can play any American dates, but U.S. fans will get the live album *Live MCMXCIII*.

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The Velvet Underground and Nico, 1967

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The Velvet Underground, 1969

Loaded, 1970

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Courtesy of Photofest.

The Grateful Dead

Jesse Jarnow and Andy Schwartz

AMERICAN INSTITUTION

For decades, the scene repeats nearly every night. In the distance, on the arena stage, the band performs with intense concentration on their instruments while all around them, in all directions, joyful chaos reigns.

Hundreds of balloons in a rainbow of colors bounce above the audience. No one sits in an assigned seat—in fact, no one sits at all. As puffs of fragrant smoke billow, rise, and dissipate overhead, the fans dance and spin wildly in

the aisles, in the hallways, or standing on their seats. When they sing along, as they do on nearly every number, they are louder than the band. Everyone, it seems, is smiling.

Behind the sound mixer, a jungle of microphone stands rises thirty feet into the air while audience members operate tape decks below, capturing every note coming from the speakers. Nobody tries to stop them.

Onstage, the band stops singing as a guitar solo emerges from the mix. The guitar solo morphs into a group jam and the musicians keep their heads down, each contributing to the improvisation. The drummers pick up the tempo as the bassist changes keys. Suddenly, without ever having stopped playing, the band is performing an entirely different song. The crowd erupts, singing louder and dancing harder.

When the show ends, the roadies pack up the equipment and the band heads for the next city. The audience follows them.

There was *nothing* like a Grateful Dead concert.

For thirty years, the Grateful Dead reigned as an American musical institution embodying the unfettered spirit of the psychedelic 1960s. The iconic and articulate lead guitarist Jerry Garcia was the group's most popular figure, but the Dead proudly declared that they had no leader. First and foremost, they were a performing band: Their material was designed to be extended in improvisations employing the techniques of free jazz, electronic music, and Indian classical music. These real-time experiments sometimes failed badly, as the musicians cheerfully conceded. But their willingness to take chances enabled the Grateful Dead to amass a loyal following, known as the Deadheads, who supported the band's creative whims for three decades. The novelist Ken Kesey once tried to explain the appeal of the Grateful Dead: "When you see a magic trick, there's a crack in your mind," he said. "And kids will watch five hours of mediocre music to have that one click happen, because that puts them in touch with the invisible."¹

JERRY GARCIA: BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY

The Grateful Dead arose in the early 1960s from the Bohemian scene of the San Francisco Bay area. The music they made was rooted in their respective backgrounds and interests.

Jerome John Garcia was born August 1, 1942, in San Francisco. Garcia was named for Jerome Kern, his mother Ruth's favorite songwriter. Jerry's father Joe led and played clarinet in a swing band. When Garcia was five, a pair of traumas marred his childhood. First, while chopping wood with his older brother Tiff, Jerry severed most of the middle finger of his right hand. Months later, on a family vacation near Arcata, Joe Garcia drowned in a river while fishing.

As a teenager, “I was a fuckup,” Jerry later admitted. “A juvenile delinquent. My mom even moved me out of the city to get me out of trouble. It didn’t work. I was always getting caught for fighting and drinking. I failed school as a matter of defiance.”² Jerry absorbed rhythm and blues music from a local radio station; on his fifteenth birthday, he received an electric guitar as a gift from his mother. He played along with jukebox at Joe Garcia’s, the bar his mother owned, between stints of washing dishes and stocking cases of beer.

Garcia enrolled at the California School of the Fine Arts where he encountered a sympathetic mentor in the painter Wally Hedrick, who introduced him to Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*. This book, among others, steered Jerry toward the emergent beat culture of the Bay Area.

“I owe a lot of who I am and what I’ve been and what I’ve done to the beatniks from the fifties and to the poetry and art and music that I’ve come in contact with,” Garcia said in 1991. “I feel like I’m part of a continuous line of a certain thing in American culture, of a root.”³

Despite his aesthetic pursuits, Garcia continued to get into trouble and at age eighteen, he stole his mother’s car. Forced to choose between jail and military service, Jerry chose the army and was stationed at the Presidio army base in San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park. He began to frequent the folk clubs of North Beach and was discharged in January 1961 in the wake of a half-dozen AWOL incidents.

PHIL LESH AND RON “PIGPEN” MCKERNAN: PLAYING IN THE BAND

Born March 15, 1940, in Berkeley, future Grateful Dead bassist Phil Lesh was very young when his grandmother Bobbie discovered him with his ear pressed to the wall, listening to a broadcast of the New York Philharmonic. She invited him in to hear the next piece—Brahms’s powerful First Symphony—and Lesh was enthralled.

In his teens, Phil played violin in the Young People’s Symphony Orchestra and at sixteen took up the trumpet. His parents relocated back to Berkeley so that their son could attend Berkeley High School. While playing in the school’s jazz band, Phil discovered the phrase “ad lib” on a chart and realized that it meant to make something up. “I fumbled my way through the section on a wing and a prayer,” he later wrote, “but my life and my idea of music had changed forever: Play something that’s not written! Something that’s never been played before! Yow!”⁴

Like his future bandmates, Phil Lesh possessed an anti-authoritarian streak that propelled him through a series of schools. As a student at San Mateo Junior College, he got a job auditioning newly released albums for the school library and soon discovered new musical heroes in jazz saxophonist John Coltrane and experimental composer Charles Ives.

Phil transferred to the University of California at Berkeley but promptly dropped out; he spent the next several months reading James Joyce. In 1962, along with his roommate Tom Constanten, Lesh enrolled in a graduate-level composition course at Mills College taught by Luciano Berio, a pioneering Italian electronic composer. Along with classmates like Steve Reich (later a key figure in minimalist music), Lesh absorbed the latest experiments in electronic sound. He participated in a performance of “Gesang der Junglinge,” a five-channel tape composition by German composer Karlheinz Stockhausen.

Meanwhile, Jerry Garcia—a casual acquaintance of Lesh’s—was playing coffeehouse gigs with his friend Robert Hunter and other musicians. When he heard Jerry play at a party in Palo Alto, Phil was struck by the guitarist’s technical skill and his relaxed command of various folk idioms. He immediately asked to record Garcia for a folk music program on listener-sponsored radio station KPFA, where Lesh had taken an engineering job. During the drive to Berkeley to retrieve Tom Constanten’s tape recorder, Phil Lesh and Jerry Garcia forged a lifelong bond.

A stocky teenager named Ron McKernan was another regular on the Bay Area folk scene. Born September 8, 1945, McKernan was the son of Phil McKernan, a blues and R&B DJ on a radio station in Berkeley who went by the name “Cool Breeze.” Expelled from Palo Alto High School at fourteen, Ron took up piano and harmonica; he became a fixture at black clubs in the area, where he honed a gruff baritone. Garcia’s friends christened him “Pigpen,” after the grimy character from the *Peanuts* comic strip, and McKernan joined their ever-widening circle of musicians.

Garcia had taken up the banjo and quickly absorbed the lightning-fast bluegrass style created by Earl Scruggs. While teaching banjo and guitar at Dana Morgan’s Music Shop in downtown Palo Alto, Jerry played in a succession of ramshackle jug bands and bluegrass groups as well as a gigging rock ensemble. In the course of events, he also met the two musicians who complete the first lineup of the Grateful Dead.

BILL KREUTZMANN AND BOB WEIR: DRUMS AND GUITAR

The first was Bill Kreutzmann (born May 7, 1946 in Palo Alto), already married with one child when he met Jerry Garcia and Phil Lesh. Bill taught drums at Morgan’s and played in the Zodiacs, an occasional group that featured Garcia on bass and Pigpen on harmonica.

The fifth and youngest member of the nascent band, Bob Weir was born October 16, 1947 and adopted by Frederick and Eleanor Weir; he grew up in the affluent San Francisco suburb of Atherton. Highly intelligent but severely dyslexic (at a time when dyslexia was not yet a recognized disorder), Bob was considered a troublemaker. In 1962, his parents enrolled him in Fountain Valley, a Colorado boarding school for boys with behavioral problems. Weir quickly found a cohort in John Perry Barlow, the son of a Wyoming state senator.

Before the school year ended, their antics caused Fountain Valley administrators to decree that one but not both teenagers could return to class in the fall.

Weir spent the summer on the Barlow family ranch where he rode horses, herded cattle, and crashed several slow-rolling tractors in the bargain. Under the influence of Johnny Cash, he also wrote his first songs in an effort to impress the local girls. While John Perry Barlow returned to Fountain Valley, Weir went back to California and gravitated toward the folk music scene where he was enthralled by the music of Joan Baez, Reverend Gary Davis, and others.

On New Year's Eve 1963, Bob was wandering Palo Alto with some friends when he heard a banjo playing from inside Morgan's Music. There he found Jerry Garcia. "He was absolutely unmindful of the fact that it was New Year's Eve," Weir recalled, "so we acquainted him with that information."⁵ A jam session ensued, and Weir soon became a fixture at the music shop.

THE WARLOCKS MEET THE MERRY PRANKSTERS

Garcia, Pigpen, and Weir formed Mother McCree's Uptown Jug Champions, a shambolic acoustic band that earned a small following (including Bill Kreutzmann) and even a slot on "Live from the Top of the Tangent," a live radio show broadcast on KZSU. Garcia became increasingly absorbed in bluegrass and in the summer of 1964, while Weir subbed for him at Morgan's, Jerry drove cross-country in his 1961 Corvair to attend a number of music festivals in the Deep South and witness firsthand the performances of bluegrass legends like Bill Monroe and Jim and Jesse McReynolds. Back in Berkeley, Pigpen was working as a janitor at Morgan's Music and listening listened obsessively to the Rolling Stones. When Garcia returned to San Francisco, McKernan convinced him to form an electric band.

With Dana Morgan Jr. on bass, the new group practiced in the back of the music shop, working up a repertoire of songs by Buddy Holly, Willie Dixon, and Slim Harpo. Pigpen became the natural front man while Garcia took up the challenge of adapting his impressive banjo chops to the electric guitar. The result was an instantly clear, bell-like tone that would define Jerry's sound for the rest of his life.

They called themselves the Warlocks and made their debut on May 5, 1965, at Magoo's Pizza in Menlo Park. Phil Lesh showed up the following week after a prolonged absence from the scene. In 1963, he'd composed a piece titled "Foci" to be played simultaneously by four orchestras. He'd also worked briefly with Steve Reich as a sound designer for a radical theater company, the San Francisco Mime Troupe, and discovered the music of the Beatles and Bob Dylan. But by 1965 Lesh had largely given up composing and performing; he worked as a U.S. mail carrier until he was fired for having long hair.

Jerry Garcia became dissatisfied with Dana Morgan Jr.'s stiff bass playing and lack of commitment, and persuaded Lesh to replace him despite the fact

that Phil had never touched a bass. But he could play the violin, an instrument strung like a bass in reverse, and he seemed a natural creative partner. Phil began to develop a contrapuntal bass style that interacted with Jerry's guitar like a lead instrument.

The Warlocks continued to rehearse intently wherever they could. At the In Room in Belmont, they played five fifty-minute sets per night, with ten-minute breaks, six nights per week. The band's sound began to expand after Lesh and Garcia introduced Weir and Kreutzmann to the music of John Coltrane. Kreutzmann, in particular, fell under the spell of drummer Elvin Jones's sheets of shimmering cymbals.

"Cleo's Back," an instrumental by Motown saxophonist Junior Walker, became an object of intense study. "There was something about the way the instruments entered into it in a kind of free-for-all way," Garcia explained, "and there were little holes and these neat details in it. . . . We might have even played it for a while, but that wasn't the point—it was the conversational approach, the way the band worked, that really influenced us."⁶ The Warlocks were clicking but were still an ambitious bar band driven primarily by Pigpen's bouncy Farfisa organ.

Outside the confines of the In Room, the musicians were experimenting in other ways. Phil Lesh had first tried the then-legal drug LSD several years earlier. "At one point I found myself outside in the front yard on a beautiful starry night, conducting, with extravagant gestures, Mahler's great Tragic Symphony, which was blasting from the house,"⁷ he wrote. Jerry Garcia and the others had discovered acid too, via Robert Hunter. The future Grateful Dead lyricist had volunteered for a government-funded research program at the Menlo Park Veterans Hospital studying the effects of psychotropic drugs on human subjects.

Another participant in this program was a graduate student in creative writing at Stanford University named Ken Kesey, who was subsequently hired as a psychiatric aide at the Menlo Park hospital. Kesey's psychedelic capers on the job seemed to pass without adverse consequences. The writer recalled "mopping fervently whenever the nurse arrived so she wouldn't see my twelve-gauge pupils."⁸ Oddly, Kesey was also allowed to bring in his own typewriter—which he put to good use.

Ken Kesey's debut novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* was published in 1962. It was set in a psychiatric ward and shaped by the author's experiences at Menlo Park. The book became immensely popular; meanwhile, Kesey began to stage group experiments with LSD. A clique of enthusiasts began to congregate around his Stanford home; among them was Neal Cassady, the real-life inspiration for the fictional character Dean Moriarty—the larger-than-life hero of Kerouac's *On the Road*. Relocating to La Honda in the Santa Cruz Mountains, the group named itself the Merry Pranksters.

The Pranksters retrofitted a 1939 International Harvester school bus with observation turrets, sleeping quarters, sound systems, and a psychedelic paint

job and named the bus “Furthur.” They set out on a madcap cross-country trip to the 1964 World’s Fair in New York City. After returning to California, the group continued its collective LSD experiments—now dubbed the Acid Tests—at Kesey’s compound and at a series of parties. In the fall of 1965, the Pranksters met the Warlocks—but they weren’t the Warlocks anymore.

BORN AGAIN

While browsing at a record shop, Phil Lesh had discovered a single released by another band called the Warlocks. During a band meeting to discuss a new name, Garcia threw open a Funk and Wagnalls dictionary and found what they were looking for. “Everything else on the page went blank,” he said, “diffuse, just sorta *oozed* away, and there was GRATEFUL DEAD, *big* black letters *edged* all around in gold, man, blasting out at me, such a stunning combination.”⁹

Throughout late 1965 and early 1966, the Grateful Dead regularly played the Acid Tests under the influence of psychedelics (although Pigpen stuck to alcohol). Admission to these multimedia spectacles was \$1; everyone paid, including the band members, because everyone was an equal participant.

“Nothing was expected of us,” Garcia once laughed. “We weren’t *required* to perform. People came to Acid Tests for the Acid Test, not for us. . . . We could play whatever we wanted. So it was a chance to be completely freeform on every level. As a way to break out from an intensely formal kind of experience, it was just what we needed, because we were looking to break out.”¹⁰

For the rest of his life, Jerry Garcia remained outspoken about his experiences with LSD. “Psychedelics were probably the single most significant experience in my life,” he said in 1993. “Otherwise, I think I would be going along believing that this visible reality here is all that there is. Psychedelics didn’t give me any answers. What I have are a lot of questions.”¹¹

Through the Merry Pranksters, the band met Augustus Owsley Stanley III. Known as “Owsley” or “Bear,” he was the independently wealthy grandson of a former Kentucky senator and governor. He was also the manufacturer of the LSD that fueled the Acid Tests and flooded the Haight in 1965–66. Bear quickly became the benefactor of the Grateful Dead and, over the next decade, its leading technical mastermind in the design of sound systems and equipment. The band played their last Acid Test on March 12, 1966, in Los Angeles, but remained lifelong friends with Kesey and the Merry Pranksters, one of whom—Carolyn Adams, known as “Mountain Girl”—became Jerry Garcia’s lover and companion.

With Bear’s help, the musicians and their ever-expanding family moved into Olompali, an idyllic historic estate in Novato, and then to a former Girl Scout camp down the road. The psychedelic experiments continued as the Dead gigged relentlessly on the emerging San Francisco ballroom circuit. Eventually the band moved back to the city and into a former boarding house at 710 Ashbury Street, just

south of the Panhandle section of Golden Gate Park and across the way from the communal home of the Jefferson Airplane.

Jefferson Airplane: Somebody to Love

San Francisco was a site of cultural experimentation years before the media-hyped Summer of Love swept the city in 1967. From the mid-1950s onward, the Bay Area supported a beat literary movement, fringe theater groups, and active jazz and folk music scenes. It was also home to a small but steadily growing group of inner-space explorers who used marijuana, peyote, and later LSD in pursuit of higher consciousness and spiritual alternatives to the perceived repression and materialism of cold war America.

The Grateful Dead were one pillar of the psychedelic music scene that arose in 1965, soon followed by Jefferson Airplane—the most commercially successful *and* the most radical of the first wave of San Francisco rock bands. Founded by singer/songwriter Marty Balin in the spring of 1965, the Airplane's personnel stabilized in the fall of 1966 to include Balin (vocals), Grace Slick (vocals), Paul Kantner (vocals, guitar), Jack Casady (bass), Jorma Kaukonen (lead guitar), and Spencer Dryden (drums). The intertwining voices of Kantner and Balin with Slick's keening wail became the group's aural trademark.

Jefferson Airplane was the first San Francisco psychedelic band to release a major label debut (*Jefferson Airplane Takes Off* on RCA in September 1966) and to score Top Ten singles ("White Rabbit" and "Somebody to Love," both 1967). They appeared on national television, on the cover of *Life* magazine, and at the historic festivals of Monterey, Woodstock, and Altamont.

The Airplane were unapologetic about their use of marijuana and psychedelics. They spoke out against the Vietnam War and in support of the Black Panther Party and played numerous rallies and benefit concerts. The unmarried Grace Slick and Paul Kantner had a daughter in 1971, well before such non-traditional families became an accepted part of American society.

In the turbulent years 1966–72, all but one of Jefferson Airplane's nine albums reached the Top Twenty and five of these were certified gold or platinum. But the band began to splinter within a year after the release of the politically charged *Volunteers* in October 1969. Spencer Dryden departed, followed by Marty Balin; Jack Casady and Jorma Kaukonen remained but also formed their own electric folk-blues band, Hot Tuna.

Paul Kantner and Grace Slick continued to front the Airplane until 1974, when they formed Jefferson Starship. Marty Balin returned to write and sing on "Miracles," a Top Five single that propelled the Starship's *Red Octopus* album to double platinum sales and the top of the charts in 1975. In an unlikely second act for these former avatars of the American underground, Jefferson Starship released seven more best-selling albums of polished mainstream rock.

Andy Schwartz

At this stage, the Grateful Dead were still almost exclusively a cover band. Many electrified jug band tunes remained in the group's repertoire for the rest of its career including Jesse Fuller's "Beat it on Down the Line" and traditional folk songs like "Cold Rain and Snow," "Don't Ease Me In," and "I Know You Rider." In the spring of 1966, the Dead released a locally distributed single of "Stealin'" (backed with "Don't Ease Me In"); in the fall, the band signed with Warner Bros. Records.

LSD was criminalized in January 1967, and in that same month the Grateful Dead flew to Los Angeles to record their self-titled debut. Jerry Garcia, Phil Lesh, and Bill Kreutzmann were popping Ritalin as the band crammed an album's worth of recording into four days. The result was a hyperactive run through the Grateful Dead songbook differentiated by a pair of originals, "The Golden Road (To Unlimited Devotion)" and "Cream Puff War," and a long jam on Noah Lewis's "Viola Lee Blues." Released in March 1967, the album never made it higher than number seventy-three but remained on the *Billboard* chart for over six months and went gold by 1971.

Back in San Francisco, the scene in the band's Haight-Ashbury neighborhood was approaching a tipping point. After a *Time* cover story titled "Hippies: Philosophy of a Subculture" declared 1967 to be the Summer of Love, young people flocked to San Francisco. This influx gave rise to a wave of violent crime and the increasing use of hard drugs like heroin, PCP, and methamphetamine. These trends were deeply disturbing to Haight pioneers like the Dead; on Easter Sunday 1967, the band played a free show in Golden Gate Park to help avert a riot between police and hippies. But mostly, they were too busy to worry.

Janis Joplin: Get It While You Can

If Grace Slick represented the cool and even elegant side of the San Francisco rock scene, then Janis Joplin (1943–70) embodied its unfettered do-your-thing spirit of funky liberation. Often accused of mimicking the black singers whom she adored, Janis had her own kind of soul. Behind the colorful outfits and outrageous public behavior was a sensitive young woman whom the stage transformed into an electrifying performer with energy to burn.

Born in conservative Port Arthur, Texas, Janis began singing blues and folk songs as a University of Texas undergraduate in 1962. She dropped out after six months and hitchhiked to San Francisco in January 1963. After two years, she was addicted to methamphetamine and returned to Texas to regain her health. When Janis once again began performing around the state, she specialized in the classic blues songs of Bessie Smith.

In the spring of 1966, Joplin returned to San Francisco to audition for Big Brother and the Holding Company: Sam Andrew (guitar), James Gurley (guitar), Peter Albin (bass), and David Getz (drums). Loud, fast, and chemically fueled, Big Brother was an archetypal "freak-rock" band with "no musical knowledge

whatsoever," Sam Andrew cheerfully admitted. Janis's arrival reined in some but not all of the band's noisier, more free-form tendencies.

Big Brother's Columbia debut album *Cheap Thrills* was a studio recording to which producer John Simon added audience and room effects, giving it the live atmosphere of a rock ballroom. Released in August 1968, *Cheap Thrills* was number one for eight consecutive weeks and the single "Piece of My Heart" reached number twelve. Janis began to believe her own critics, some of whom hailed her as a brilliant performer who'd be better off without Big Brother. She quit the group and formed a new soul-style band complete with horn section but it broke up after releasing one album, the Top Five entry *I Got Dem Ol' Kozmic Blues Again Mama!*, in October 1969.

In the summer of 1970, Janis began work on a new album with her new Full Tilt Boogie Band. She recorded tough, exciting new versions of obscure soul songs like Howard Tate's "Get It While You Can" and expanded into country-rock with the Kris Kristofferson tune "Me and Bobby McGee." Toward the end of these sessions, she died on October 3, 1970, from an accidental overdose of too-pure heroin. Her posthumous album, *Pearl*, topped the chart for nine weeks, and "Me and Bobby McGee" became a number one single.

In 1999, Joplin biographer Alice Echols wrote that "Janis moved to San Francisco and decided to sing rock and roll. Risking ridicule, she took one gamble after another. Was she the girl who helped throw open the doors of rock and roll, or the girl who longed for the white picket fence?"

A. S.

READY FOR A BRAND NEW BEAT

Between gigs—which included the Dead's first national tour—Jerry Garcia became reacquainted with his old friend Robert Hunter, then living in New Mexico. Out of the blue, Hunter mailed Garcia the lyrics to three songs he'd been performing at parties: "Saint Stephen," "Alligator," and "China Cat Sunflower." In reply, Hunter received an invitation to join the band.

Hunter hitchhiked to San Francisco and was immediately assimilated into the band's creative orbit. Although he never appeared onstage with the Grateful Dead, Hunter was credited as a band member on subsequent albums. The first song Hunter wrote with the band was "Dark Star," a two-chord springboard that quickly became the Dead's signature number. Instead of having to play through a standard blues song just to get to a long jam, they could now go directly to it. Dozens of new songs followed.

A second new collaborator also arrived in September 1967. Mickey Hart was born September 11, 1943, the son of a world-class rudimental drummer named Lenny Hart. "From the age of ten until forty, all I did was drum,"¹² Mickey wrote in 1990. Following a stint in an air force band, Hart reunited with his father at Drum City, Lenny's Bay Area music store. There, Mickey

was introduced to Bill Kreutzmann and the two spent a night drinking and drumming on cars.

On September 29, 1967, Mickey Hart joined the band at the Straight Theater in San Francisco and the band jammed for two hours on two songs including Robert Hunter's "Alligator." "I remember the feeling of being whipped into a jetstream," Hart said. "Garcia told me that everyone had felt it when I finally synched up. Suddenly, with two drummers pounding away in the back, they had glimpsed the possibility of a groove so monstrous it would eat the audience."¹³ Mickey moved into a room under the stairs at 710 Ashbury.

In October, the house at 710 was busted and several band members and friends were detained on marijuana possession charges (later dropped). The Grateful Dead family began to disperse across the Golden Gate Bridge to Marin County while the band continued to rehearse at a former synagogue next door to the Fillmore Auditorium. There they practiced for upwards of six hours a day, mastering tricky time signatures and bringing forth what Hart called "a new rhythmic language." In the course of these epic jams, the musicians would allow themselves to lose "the one," the first beat of a rhythmic pattern and the central pulse of a song.

"Instead of struggling with the one, we would establish a new one,"¹⁴ Hart explained. It became a game, and a source of excitement within the improvisation. When Bob Weir's "The Other One" was fused to Jerry Garcia's "Cryptical Envelopment," the band created its first song suite. With these conceptual suites at the center of the live shows, the Dead continued to tour and to prepare for their second album.

During a trip to New York, at Phil Lesh's urging, the band took in a Carnegie Hall performance of Charles Ives's Fourth Symphony, in which "invisible bands march[ed] across the soundstage in two different directions at different speeds [and] a solo viola mutter[ed] an occult hymn-tune as the rest of the orchestra spray[ed] fireworks in all directions." Inspired, Lesh and Hart "right then and there . . . began trying to figure a way to do something similar with our music."¹⁵

In addition to extensive touring, the band spent much of 1968 in various studios recording their second and third albums, *Anthem of the Sun* and *Aoxomoxoa*. The musicians attempted to re-create the psychedelic madness of their live performances by using the studio itself as an improvisational instrument. To create "The Other One," the first track on *Anthem of the Sun*, the band phased multiple live recordings of the song on top of one another. Phil Lesh called upon his old roommate Tom Constanten, and together they gleefully added prepared piano to "New Potato Caboose" (Constanten even let a toy gyroscope loose on the piano's strings). On Weir's song "Born Cross-Eyed," Lesh played trumpet for the first time in almost a decade.

On *Anthem of the Sun*, Lesh wanted to re-create "the sound of a thousand-petal lotus, unfolding in constant renewal."¹⁶ *Aoxomoxoa* unfolded similarly even if most of its eight songs were less than five minutes long. "The mixdown

became a performance in its own right, with three or more pairs of hands on the soundboard, minding their cues,” Constanten wrote. “It was a good day when as many as three tunes got done.”¹⁷ As the compositions grew denser, Constanten joined the band on the road to help replicate the arrangements, playing keyboards alongside Pigpen.

Neither album sold very well. Released in July 1968, *Anthem of the Sun* peaked at number eighty-seven on the *Billboard* chart while *Aoxomoxoa*, which followed in June 1969, made it to number seventy-three. By the end of 1968, the Grateful Dead were deeply in debt to Warner Bros. Using new sound and recording equipment cobbled together by Bear, the band recorded a series of shows in San Francisco in January and February 1969. The centerpiece of what would become their fourth Warner album, *Live/Dead*, was a song suite that the Dead had played in various permutations over the past year but not yet attempted in the studio. “Dark Star,” “St. Stephen,” and “The Eleven” flowed into one another before Pigpen delivered his own extended showstopper, a high-powered version of Bobby “Blue” Bland’s “Turn on Your Lovelight.” A wave of feedback and an a cappella rendition of the gospel song “We Bid You Goodnight” closed out the double LP.

Released in November 1969, *Live/Dead* reached only number sixty-four on *Billboard* but was far less expensive to make than the Grateful Dead’s previous albums. Nonetheless, the Dead’s business troubles weren’t over. Mickey Hart’s father Lenny had come on board to manage the band but soon was caught embezzling group funds; in January 1970, he fled to Mexico. Bear was busted on LSD-related charges and sent to jail for two years.

In a musical reaction to these events and the widespread turbulence of the decade’s end, the Dead returned to pre-rock styles: blues, bluegrass, and early country music. The band had always played around with this sort of Americana; now the musicians began to assimilate the sounds more deeply into their original material.

Crosby, Stills, and Nash had spent time hanging out on Mickey Hart’s ranch, and under their influence the Dead’s front line (Jerry, Phil, and Bob) began to harmonize with more care. Garcia returned to the favor, adding pedal steel to CSN’s Top Twenty hit “Teach Your Children.” Tom Constanten, now a practicing Scientist, moved on and the band began to add acoustic sets to their performances. A country-rock band called the New Riders of the Purple Sage emerged from the extended Grateful Dead family. The repertoire of the New Riders—whose personnel often included Phil Lesh, Mickey Hart, and/or aspiring pedal steel guitarist Jerry Garcia—included contemporary country classics like Dave Dudley’s “Six Days on the Road” and Merle Haggard’s “Mama Tried.”

In seeking the calm after the psychedelic storm, Garcia and Hunter blossomed as songwriting partners on a pair of 1970 albums released in close succession: *Workingman’s Dead* in May and *American Beauty* in November. “Uncle John’s Band,” the opening track on *Workingman’s Dead*, hailed from

“a peculiar place where Appalachia met immigrant Scottish, English, Welsh, and Irish folk traditions,” Robert Hunter remembered, “to my mind the mythic territory of Fennario, where Sweet William courted ‘Pretty Peggy-O’ with such romantically disastrous consequences.”¹⁸

This move to simpler music proved to make good economic sense. Both *Workingman’s Dead* and *American Beauty* breached the *Billboard* Top Thirty; by 1974, both would be certified gold. “Uncle John’s Band” even made it to number sixty-nine on the Hot 100, although the song was relegated largely to FM radio for using the word “goddamn.” Two other potential singles, “Truckin’” and “Casey Jones,” were stricken from radio playlists for mentioning cocaine. But as a live attraction, the Grateful Dead began to draw more fans in more areas of the country. In San Francisco and New York, the band had played multi-night stands for the past three years; now they were able to do the same in other cities as a growing mass of “Deadheads” began to follow the band’s concert itinerary.

Santana: Everybody’s Everything

Carlos Santana, a fan of the Dead and the Airplane, soon became the leader of the most enduring and globally popular band to emerge from the “second wave” of San Francisco rock.

Born in Autlan, Mexico, in 1947, Carlos was already playing guitar when he moved to San Francisco in 1960, inspired by B.B. King and Chuck Berry. The first version of the group that bore his name combined Chicago blues with a conga sound still heard in parts of San Francisco, specifically from conga and flute players in Aquatic Park.

When the band’s lineup coalesced in the spring of 1969, it included seventeen-year-old drummer Michael Shrieve, bassist David Brown, and Latin percussionists Coke Escovedo, José “Chepito” Areas, and Mike Carabello. As the rhythm section churned beneath Carlos’s searing solos and crunching power chords, Santana created a sound that was as funky and danceable as the best Latin salsa but with the force and electricity of great rock and roll. Their explosive set was the surprise hit of the 1969 Woodstock festival and a highlight of the 1970 *Woodstock* documentary. The group’s self-titled Columbia debut, released in September, hung on the charts for over two years, peaking at number four. *Abraxas* (1970) and *Santana III* (1971) both topped the *Billboard* chart for weeks, with combined sales of over six million units.

By the end of 1972, some members of Santana were battling drug problems while others pushed for a more mainstream rock approach rather than the adventurous jazz-rock-Latin fusion of their leader’s dreams. Ultimately, the guitarist won this struggle for creative control. Over the next decade, he sought to balance commercial albums like *Moonflower* (1977, featuring the radio hit “She’s Not There”) with more personal projects like the roots-rocking *Havana Moon* (1983).

But by the late 1980s, Carlos Santana's commercial profile was in steep decline, and in 1991 his devoted manager Bill Graham died in a helicopter accident. In 1999, former Columbia Records president Clive Davis signed the guitarist to Arista Records and became the executive producer of his comeback album *Supernatural*.

With appearances by everyone from Eric Clapton to Lauryn Hill and Santana only co-writing five of thirteen tracks, there was a disconcerting sense that the guitarist had been reduced to playing genial guest host on his own album. Nonetheless, *Supernatural* sold over 15 million copies in the United States alone and spun off a pair of number one singles, "Smooth" and "Maria Maria." *Supernatural* went on to win nine Grammy Awards, including Album of the Year and Record of the Year (for "Smooth"). As the all-time best-selling album of Carlos Santana's thirty-year recording career, *Supernatural* more than lived up to its title.

A. S.

A LEANER BEAST

Following the first night of a six-night run at the Capitol Theater in Port Chester, New York, in February 1971, Mickey Hart left the Grateful Dead. Still tormented by his father's fiscal betrayal, Hart returned to California although the band kept him on its payroll and left the door open for his return. The Dead continued as a quintet that was nearly reduced to a foursome when Pigpen's heavy drinking began to undermine his performance. In September, the emaciated musician was hospitalized, diagnosed with hepatitis and a perforated ulcer.

Around this time, a woman approached Jerry Garcia at one of his solo gigs at a Berkeley bar called the Keystone Korner. "[My husband] is your new piano player," she announced, "so I'm gonna need your home phone number so we can keep in touch."¹⁹ Few knew that Pigpen was sick and a surprised Garcia gave his number to the woman, Donna Jean Godchaux (née Donna Thatcher). A few rehearsal jams later, her husband Keith Godchaux had joined the Grateful Dead.

Born July 19, 1948, Keith Godchaux was a Bay Area keyboardist of little previous renown. Donna Jean, on the other hand, had been a session singer at the famed Muscle Shoals recording studio in Alabama. In the 1960s, she'd recorded with Elvis Presley, the Rolling Stones, and Sam Cooke, and sung on Percy Sledge's 1966 Number One hit "When a Man Loves a Woman." While Keith's jazz-trained style pushed the Dead to new improvisational heights, Donna Jean's Southern-tinged harmonies perfectly complemented Garcia and Hunter's new songs. There were nearly a dozen of them in the repertoire by the time she joined the band for a spring 1972 tour of Europe.

“Sometimes I think, ‘Yeah, this is kind of like a record I once heard somewhere,’ but I never find ‘em,” Garcia laughed about the new tunes, including “Tennessee Jed,” “Sugaree,” and “Bertha.” “The rhythms come from my background in rhythm and blues music more than anything else. But they also come from a kind of rhythmically hip country and western style—like Jerry Reed and people like that. Memphis more than Nashville. Some of the old California country and western stuff—old Buck Owens—had some nifty rhythmic ideas in it, as opposed to the old 4/4 stuff.”²⁰

Bob Weir, too, had found a new songwriting partner in his old boarding school chum, John Perry Barlow. Barlow was an aspiring novelist but had never penned any song lyrics. Nonetheless, he and Weir established an immediate creative rapport during snowed-in work sessions at the Barlow family ranch, which John had taken over from his ailing father.

Most of these new Garcia and Weir songs never made it onto Grateful Dead studio albums. Some were relegated to the pair’s respective solo projects, but mostly they became part of the Dead’s live repertoire. Many were included on *Europe ’72*, a two-record live set recorded during a six-week, twenty-two-show trek across the continent. Pigpen came, too, for what would prove to be his last tour.

The band massaged the album into shape, adding crystalline overdubs in anticipation of a November 1972 release. *Europe ’72* became the Dead’s highest charting release to date, peaking at number twenty-four, but the musicians were sick of the studio. “Making a record is like building a ship in a bottle,” Garcia said. “Playing live is like being in a rowboat on the ocean.”²¹ Over the next three years, the Dead recorded another pair of studio albums: *Wake of the Flood*, released in November 1973, and *From the Mars Hotel*, released in June 1974. Though the albums sold well, rising to number eighteen and number sixteen, respectively, the Dead’s creative energies were elsewhere.

Ron “Pigpen” McKernan died from a gastrointestinal hemorrhage on March 8, 1973, at his home in Corte Madera, California.

With the launch of a new U.S. tour in the spring of 1973, the Grateful Dead moved from theaters to sports arenas. The jams grew longer and jazzier, more fusion than rock, with Godchaux providing connective tissue between Garcia and Lesh and Kreutzmann as the sole drummer. With each passing year, the music sounded more and more natural, the songs taking on both complexity and elegance. Garcia’s “Eyes of the World” was a mellifluous and harmonically tense jam that ended with an intricate 7/4 break while Weir’s three-part “Weather Report Suite” was his most mature work yet.

The Dead expanded in other areas, too, in an effort to develop and run their own affiliated businesses. In 1968, in cooperation with the Jefferson Airplane and the Quicksilver Messenger Service, the band had taken on co-ownership of the Carousel Ballroom in San Francisco. The failure of this venture didn’t deter them from other endeavors. Grateful Dead Records, run by a friend of Jerry Garcia named Ron Rakow, was founded in 1973 in

order to afford the band better quality control over the manufacture of their records.

For years, the Dead had used their own customized equipment. In 1968, Bear and others founded Alembic, a company dedicated to improving the quality of rock instruments and amplification. The luthier Doug Irwin was a key Alembic craftsman who built several of Garcia's guitars. "Our basses were great," Irwin recalled. "Before us, when you went to hear a band, you could feel the bass, but you couldn't hear it."²²

After Bear returned from prison in 1972, he and the Alembic crew set to work designing a brand new sound system suitable for larger venues; by 1974, it was ready. The "Wall of Sound," as it was known, stood three stories high with each instrument assigned its own enormous speaker stack. Instead of monitors, the band played directly in front of the Wall with each musician controlling his own voice and instrument in the mix. One result was incredible volume without distortion; another was incredible cost. In the band's newsletter, Robert Hunter compared the Grateful Dead's existence to Oroboros, the snake that eats its own tail.

By the summer of 1974, all parties were exhausted. "The most rewarding experience for me these days is to play in bars and not be Jerry Garcia of the Grateful Dead," Garcia said at the time. "I enjoy playing to fifty people. The bigger the audience gets, the harder it is to be light and spontaneous."²³ Cocaine was a problem as well, among band and crew members alike. Both factions had used it for years, but now Bob Weir complained that the latter were over-indulging.

From October 16 to 20, 1974, the Grateful Dead played five shows at Winterland Arena, a San Francisco ice skating rink that had become their home venue. With the Wall of Sound looming behind them and the phrase "The Last One" printed in red letters on tickets to the final night, a film crew recorded the band. On October 20, Mickey Hart returned for the Dead's final set. Although the band did not announce its breakup, there would be no shows for some time to come. The Wall of Sound was broken into components that were then sold off to several other bands.

HIATUS AND OSSIFICATION

The hiatus did not mean the end of the Grateful Dead. By February 1975, the musicians were playing daily at Ace's, Bob Weir's new home studio. Mickey Hart rejoined Bill Kreutzmann on dual drums as the band leisurely built new songs out of rambling jams. Some, like the instrumental "Slipknot," grew from themes that Jerry Garcia had been playing live for several years. Others were more ambitious, including a piece Garcia referred to as "the desert jam."

"We could either play a single note or an interval of a fifth," Garcia explained. "You could play them for as long as you wanted to, but any time

you heard a four-note chord vertically—see, the bass would be playing one note, Weir would be playing one note, then me and Keith—you could move your note so you'd change the harmonic structure of that chord. Nobody could hold a note more than two bars, or less than a whole tone, so that would guarantee the harmonic shifting. . . . It was almost a successful way to introduce the concept of almost no rules."²⁴

In a surprise appearance at a March 23 benefit show at San Francisco's Kezar Stadium, the Grateful Dead played nothing but this new music. "Blues for Allah," with lyrics by Robert Hunter, was the centerpiece of their album-in-progress, and soon became its title track. The band played only three more shows in 1975 but when *Blues for Allah* was released in September, it rose to number twelve. The Dead took some actual time off while Jerry Garcia recorded a solo album.

"As I was to discover, an idle mind is the devil's workshop," Lesh wrote in his autobiography. "I found myself spending more and more time propping up the bar at our local downtown Fairfax watering hole, a place called Nave's. I would drive down the hill to Nave's every night for dinner and a couple of beers. I had never been much of a drinker, scorning it as unworthy of my attention, but I rapidly settled into a routine of drinking all day, eating dinner and drinking until the bar closed. . . . Thus began my descent into alcoholism."²⁵ It wasn't long before Lesh "added cocaine to the mix."²⁶ From this time on, Lesh would be less of a musical force within the band.

Jerry Garcia was having troubles of his own. He had become the de facto director of the *Grateful Dead Movie* shot at Winterland prior to the hiatus. Jerry spent several months in the studio, helping to edit 125 hours of footage into a form he hoped would capture the Grateful Dead experience; he also commissioned a long animated sequence to open the movie. Expenses on the project mounted and the Grateful Dead were running out of money.

Grateful Dead Records closed in the fall of 1975 after label president Ron Rakow absconded with \$225,000 in company funds. A stressed-out Jerry Garcia turned to a new drug known as "Persian opium," actually a smokable form of heroin. "He had started using cocaine, which allowed him to keep burning the candle at both ends," Phil Lesh wrote, "but found Persian to be a tool that allowed him to check out whenever he wanted to."²⁷ Though the deleterious effects of the drug were not immediate, they proved decisive and Garcia's role in the group began to diminish.

The Grateful Dead were a radically different band when, in order to make ends meet, they returned to the road in 1976. With Mickey Hart rejoining Bill Kreutzmann at the drums, the band's music became more rhythmic and less inclined to fly off spontaneously in new directions. They jettisoned much of their experimental material, including old staples like "Dark Star" and even the recent "Blues for Allah." The band slowed down considerably while Mickey learned his way through the repertoire that had been created during his absence.

Bob Weir, a barely competent rhythm guitarist when the Dead began, now assumed a more active role. In 1968, Lesh and Garcia had even tried to oust Weir from the band because they didn't feel he was growing as a musician. But by the mid-1970s, as his mastery of strange chords expanded, Bob had found a musical space between Phil's contrapuntal bass leads and Jerry's guitar. His writing partnership with John Perry Barlow brought forth accomplished new songs like "Estimated Prophet," with its tricky reggae groove.

Jerry Garcia was not yet out of the picture. In "a single sitting in an unfurnished house with a picture window overlooking San Francisco Bay during a flamboyant lightning storm," Hunter wrote a new lyric. "I typed the first thing that came into my mind at the top of the page, the title: *Terrapin Station* . . . On the same day, driving to the city, Garcia was struck by a singular inspiration. He turned his car around and hurried home to set down some music that popped into his head, demanding immediate attention."²⁸ The sixteen-minute title song suite took up the second side of the Dead's new album. The band's first recording for Arista Records, *Terrapin Station* also included versions of Rev. Gary Davis's "Samson and Delilah" and of the Motown standard "Dancin' in the Streets" by Martha and the Vandellas. The album reached number twenty-eight on the *Billboard* chart soon after its release in August 1977.

Hampered by drug problems of their own, Keith and Donna Jean Godchaux left the Grateful Dead in 1979. They were replaced by Brent Mydland (born October 21, 1952), who'd previously played with Bill Kreutzmann in a Bay Area band called Go Ahead and now brought his spacey synthesizers and gruff yowl to the sound of the Grateful Dead.

The Dead continued to experiment albeit in less musically ambitious ways. In 1978, they traveled to Egypt to perform three shows at the foot of the Giza pyramids. The band jammed onstage with Egyptian master musicians including Hamza El-Din, but overall the shows were below par and plans for a live album were scrapped. In 1980, the Dead played acoustic sets for the first time since 1970 during fifteen shows at San Francisco's Warfield Theater, eight at Radio City Music Hall in New York, and two at the Saenger Theater in New Orleans.

In support of an organization of nearly thirty full-time employees, the Grateful Dead continued to tour year in and year out—trapped in the same wearying cycle that had caused the band to cease performing in 1974. Only Bob Weir and Brent Mydland consistently contributed new material, and the band's live shows began to (in Phil Lesh's word) "ossify." With few exceptions, such as the acoustic/electric shows of 1980 and their annual New Year's Eve performances, the Dead had followed a standard two-set format since their return to the road. Although they still played without song lists, a very specific pattern soon emerged.

The first set usually lasted for an hour. It alternated between numbers sung by Garcia and Weir and focused on shorter songs, including some old standbys (cf. "Beat It on Down the Line") dating back to the jug band days. Typically, the set would break into a brief jam and end with an upbeat closer. After an

intermission, the band played a longer second set that sometimes ran for as much as two hours. In this half, the songs stretched into long improvisations with lead vocals still alternating between Garcia and Weir.

Halfway through the second set, the other musicians left the stage while Mickey Hart and Bill Kreutzmann became what they called “the Rhythm Devils,” employing a variety of drums from Hart’s collection to create percussive landscapes. As the drummers finished and left the stage, the rest of the band returned to play the section known as “space,” an invocation of the free-form psychedelic jamming of earlier years. The show would conclude with several more songs, usually including a ballad by Garcia, a rocker led by Weir, and an encore cover such as the Rolling Stones’ “Satisfaction” or Van Morrison’s “Gloria.”

A TRAVELING CIRCUS

Dedicated Deadheads had been bootlegging concerts since the 1960s: “Once we’re done with it, it’s theirs,”²⁹ Jerry Garcia once said in defining the band’s laissez-faire taping policy. By 1984, Dead soundman Dan Healy could barely see the stage through the tall microphone stands erected nightly by the tapers. With a concert at the Berkeley Community Theater on October 27, the Grateful Dead began selling tickets for a special tapers’ section located behind the soundboard.

John Perry Barlow called this innovation “one of the most enlightened, practical, smart things that anybody ever did. I think it is probably the single most important reason that we have the popularity that we have. . . . [Tapes are the] article of currency for this economy, our psychic economy to say the least. . . . And by the proliferation of tapes, that formed the basis of a culture and something weirdly like a religion. . . . A lot of what we are selling is community. That is our main product, it’s not music.”³⁰

Deadheads followed the band wherever they went, setting up makeshift tent cities in the venue parking lots. Late in his life, famed anthropologist Joseph Campbell called the Deadheads “the most recently developed tribe on the planet.”³¹ The fans sang along with every lyric, cheering loudly when the band reached lines that seemed to reflect the Grateful Dead experience. Following a Grateful Dead tour became a summer rite of passage for many college students; for other fans, it was a year-round vocation. Magazines such as *The Golden Road* and *Relix* were founded to cover the band’s activities. Several religious cults including the Spinners and the Twelve Tribes were a consistent presence on the road with the Dead.

Although Jerry Garcia joked that “I’ll put up with it until they come to me with the cross and nails,”³² he continued to struggle with the pressures of fame. His heroin use grew worse, as did his performances. Between 1978 and 1982, Jerry’s hair turned gray and his weight ballooned. Meanwhile, Phil Lesh got sober; the bassist and his bandmates urged Jerry to do the same but

their concerns went unheeded. In January 1985, Garcia was arrested in his car in Golden Gate Park and charged with possession of heroin and cocaine. The guitarist began to clean up, but his health took a turn for the worse in July 1986 when he fell into a diabetic coma and nearly died.

Jerry survived, but then had to relearn to play guitar. "It was as though in my whole library of information, all the books had fallen off the shelves and all the pages had fallen out of the books,"³³ he explained. Miraculously, by October 1986, he was back on stage with the Jerry Garcia Band. On December 15, the Dead themselves returned to Oakland Coliseum. They opened the show with "Touch of Grey," one of the few new songs written by Garcia and Robert Hunter during the 1980s. With a chorus that affirmed "I will survive," it became the band's new anthem.

"Touch of Grey" also became a hit single as the lead track on 1987's *In the Dark*. Propelled by a video populated with singing skeletons, "Touch of Grey" reached number nine on the *Billboard* Hot 100 while *In the Dark* reached number six on the album chart. Suddenly, the Grateful Dead were more popular than ever as they spent part of 1987 on tour as the backing band for Bob Dylan. Although the concerts and the resultant live album, *Dylan and the Dead* (released January 1989), were far from either's best work, Dylan credited the Dead with rejuvenating him creatively. "I realized that they understood [my] songs better than I did at the time,"³⁴ he said.

Jerry Garcia was on the mend: writing new songs, forging new collaborations, and reestablishing old musical partnerships. In 1988, he co-produced *Virgin Beauty*, an album by free jazz saxophonist Ornette Coleman. The following year, Jerry reunited with mandolinist David Grisman, whom he'd first met at a bluegrass festival in North Carolina in 1964; the two had played together in Old and in the Way, Garcia's short-lived bluegrass band in 1973. In the half-decade that followed, the pair recorded often at Grisman's Dawg Studios.

Garcia began making visual art again, as well, both on canvas and on a computer. Some of his digital images were featured on the cover of *Infrared Roses*, a November 1991 collection of "space" segments including jams with jazz saxophonist Branford Marsalis. In 1989, the Dead had begun incorporating MIDI instruments that allowed Garcia to make his guitar sound like a flute, a trumpet, or almost anything else he desired. The MIDI technology encouraged musical experimentation. In October 1989, appearing at Hampton Coliseum in Virginia under the name Formerly the Warlocks, the band revived "Dark Star," a song they'd played just five times since 1974.

TROUBLE AHEAD, TROUBLE BEHIND

Outside each Grateful Dead show, the scene was getting out of hand. In 1988 and again in 1990, the band's representatives distributed flyers in and around

the venues asking fans not to sell drugs in the parking lot. “We’re not the police,” they wrote, “but if you care about this scene, you’ll end this type of behavior so the authorities will have no reason to shut us down. We’re in this together—so thanks.”³⁵

As Jerry Garcia’s health improved, Brent Mydland’s condition worsened. The band had played many of Mydland’s original compositions and even included four on 1989’s *Built to Last* (released in November 1989) yet the keyboardist still felt like a junior member. Fighting a violent temper and a lack of self-confidence, he was arrested several times on various charges including driving while intoxicated. On July 26, 1990, Brent Mydland overdosed on a “speedball”—a combination of cocaine and morphine—and died at home in California.

The Grateful Dead chose to replace him with not one but two additional musicians. Bruce Hornsby, already a pop star in his own right, had played in a Dead cover band at the University of Virginia and happily agreed to join the real thing for a limited time. (He remained with the Dead through March 1992.) Vince Welnick, formerly of Bay Area theatrical rockers the Tubes, joined on a more permanent basis and quickly forged a creative alliance with Bob Bralove, the Dead’s MIDI technician. In 1993, Jerry Garcia and Robert Hunter turned out a batch of new songs—including “Lazy River Road” and “The Days Between”—that comprised the pair’s strongest material since the 1970s. But the guitarist was quietly slipping back into old bad habits that precipitated his rapid decline.

A disastrous 1995 summer tour was marred by gate-crashing fans and a death threat to Garcia. The band issued a statement to the Deadheads: “Want to end the touring life of the Grateful Dead? Allow bottle-throwing gate-crashers to keep on thinking they’re cool anarchists instead of the creeps they are.”³⁶ On July 9, 1995, at Solider Field in Chicago, the Grateful Dead played their last show.

One week later, Garcia checked into the Betty Ford Clinic in California but left after a brief stay. On August 8 the guitarist tried again, this time at Serenity Knolls. (The facility was located a half-mile down the road from Camp Lagunitas, where the Dead had lived during the summer of 1966.) That night, one week after his fifty-third birthday, Jerry Garcia died in his sleep of heart failure.

“He is the very spirit personified of whatever is muddy river country at its core and screams up into the spheres,” Bob Dylan wrote. “He really had no equals. . . . There are a lot of spaces and advances between the Carter Family, Buddy Holly, and, say, Ornette Coleman, a lot of universes, but he filled them all without being a member of any school. His playing was moody, awesome, sophisticated, hypnotic, and subtle.”³⁷

On December 8, the band issued a statement: “The ‘long strange trip’ of the uniquely wonderful beast known as the Grateful Dead is over.”³⁸

LEGACY

The music of the Grateful Dead reflects a kaleidoscopic range of influences, from Appalachian bluegrass to Chicago blues, from Western swing to the European avant garde. In particular, the songs of Jerry Garcia and Robert Hunter are rife with symbols and images of a mythical pre-modern America. A creatively democratic attitude pervaded every aspect of the band's singular career. The Grateful Dead organization was a sprawling collective of friends and hangers on, all salaried and provided for, with even the band's equipment roadies getting full votes in business decisions. The Dead and their off-stage partners designed and built instruments, amplifiers, and entire sound systems. Although they enjoyed success on two different major labels, the Dead also founded and ran their own record company.

The Grateful Dead were reluctant symbols of the 1960s, suspicious of the traveling party that followed them on tour and unwilling to speak out politically. But the musicians were open about their individual use of psychedelics as a tool of artistic and personal liberation. The Dead also played countless benefits for anti-war groups and community organizations, especially during their first decade.

From an office in San Rafael, California, the group published a Deadhead newsletter and opened a mail order business, selling its own concert tickets and merchandise. They allowed fans to freely record and exchange performances of their concerts. The Deadheads formed an informal national network of fans linked by fanzines and word of mouth. Wherever the Dead went, the Deadheads followed, guaranteeing sold-out shows in the most remote corners of the country. By the early 1990s, according to an estimate by *Forbes*, the Grateful Dead were earning more than \$12.5 million annually. The band's popularity never diminished and was never dependent upon mainstream media exposure.

The Deadheads and their descendents created a vibrant subculture that continues to the present day. The band's musical legacy, meanwhile, has been preserved and extended on a continuing series of live releases from its extensive tape archive, not to mention a massive free database of fan-made recordings available on the Internet. With their unique musical vocabulary and way of interaction, the Dead's music was tantamount to a thirty-year-long conversation—one that has become entwined with the dialogue of American music.

In the years since the dissolution of the Grateful Dead, several of its surviving members have continued to make music both together and separately. Bob Weir has toured constantly with his band Ratdog. After a brief retirement and a liver transplant, Phil Lesh returned to the road with his rotating cast of Phil Lesh and Friends, a group that regularly channeled the experimental Dead sound of the early 1970s. Mickey Hart founded his own label to release a series of field recordings by traditional musicians from around the world; his 1991 album *Planet Drum* won the Grammy Award for Best World Music Album.

A new generation of jam bands arose in the wake of the Dead. Both Phish and Widespread Panic began in the 1980s as Grateful Dead cover acts before developing their own styles and becoming arena headliners in their own right. The Dead's influence runs throughout modern music, from experimental art rockers like Sonic Youth (whose guitarist Lee Ranaldo had followed the Dead on tour in the late 1970s) and Wilco (who covered "Ripple" in concert). The Dark Star Orchestra performs song-by-song renditions of vintage Dead shows to ecstatic audiences. Acoustic acts such as Yonder Mountain String Band draw inspiration from Jerry Garcia's short-lived band Old and in the Way—whose lone self-titled album, released in 1975, was for the next twenty-five years the best-selling bluegrass album of all time.

It is as Bob Weir and John Perry Barlow wrote in 1975: The music never stopped.

TIMELINE

December 31, 1963

Bob Weir hears Jerry Garcia playing banjo at the back of Dana Morgan's music store in Palo Alto, California, and introduces himself.

May 5, 1965

The Warlocks make their live debut at Magoo's Pizza in Menlo Park, California.

November 1965

The Warlocks change their name to the Grateful Dead after Phil Lesh discovers a single by another band called the Warlocks.

December 11, 1965

The Grateful Dead play their first Acid Test with novelist Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters at the Big Beat in Palo Alto.

March 1967

Warner Brothers Records releases *The Grateful Dead*.

September 29, 1967

Mickey Hart joins the band on stage at San Francisco's Straight Theater, and immediately becomes a permanent member.

January 1969

The Grateful Dead begin recording *Live/Dead* at San Francisco's Avalon Ballroom.

January 31, 1970

New Orleans police bust the band after a show at the Warehouse in New Orleans.

February 19, 1971

Mickey Hart leaves the Grateful Dead after his father, Lenny, is caught embezzling money from the band.

October 19, 1971

Pianist Keith Godchaux plays his first show with the Grateful Dead at Northrop Auditorium in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

March 8, 1973

Pigpen dies of gastrointestinal hemorrhage in Corte Madera, California.

October 20, 1974

After a performance at San Francisco's Winterland Arena, during which Mickey Hart joins them on drums, the Grateful Dead begin a year-and-a-half hiatus from touring.

June 3, 1976

The Grateful Dead return from their "retirement" at the Paramount in Portland, Oregon, with Mickey Hart reinstated as a member.

June 1, 1977

The Grateful Dead Movie, co-directed by Jerry Garcia, is released.

October 1978

The Dead travel to Egypt to perform at the foot of the pyramids at Giza.

April 22, 1979

Brent Mydland replaces Keith Godchaux on keyboards at Spartan Stadium in San Jose, California.

October 1980

The Dead take up extended residences at Manhattan's Radio City Music Hall and San Francisco's Warfield Theater.

July 1986

Jerry Garcia falls into a diabetic coma and nearly dies.

July 6, 1987

In the Dark reaches number six on the *Billboard* chart, while "Touch of Grey" reaches number nine Pop.

July 1987

The Grateful Dead tour as Bob Dylan's backing band.

July 26, 1990

Brent Mydland dies from an overdose of cocaine and morphine.

August 9, 1995

Jerry Garcia dies of heart failure at a drug rehabilitation clinic in California.

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Anthem of the Sun, 1968

Live/Dead, 1969

American Beauty, 1970

Europe '72, 1972

Grateful Dead Movie Soundtrack, 1974

One From the Vault, 1975

Reckoning, 1980

Infrared Roses, 1991

So Many Roads, 1999 (five-CD box set of live recordings and studio outtakes spanning the Grateful Dead's career)

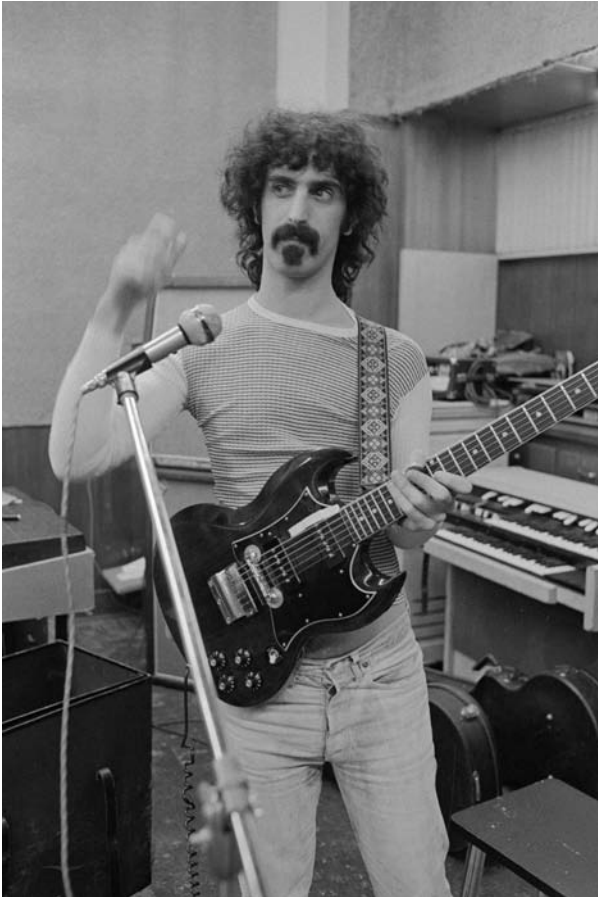
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7. Lesh, p. 45.
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Frank Zappa

Chris Crocker

AMERICAN ICONOCLAST

Of all the rock stars that emerged during the pop music revolution of the 1960s, Frank Zappa may be the most confusing and contradictory.

His long, unkempt hair and oddball outfits made him look like an archetypal hippie. Yet he mocked the flower-power generation as savagely as he lampooned the corporate conformity of its parents. His sexualized, scatological

songwriting turned some of his albums and stage shows into bawdy rock burlesque. Yet he also composed serious orchestral works that would be performed in concert halls throughout the world. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Zappa's sardonic, surrealistic storytelling and intense, harmonically inventive music were viewed as the trippiest of the trippy. Yet he shunned drugs and spoke out strongly against them. He lampooned politicians of every stripe. Yet he also encouraged his fans to get involved in their democracy by exhorting them to vote and conducting registration drives at his concerts.

Frank Zappa took full advantage of the creative freedom of the late 1960s rock scene to carve out a singular niche combining social satire and challenging instrumental music, and he did so with idiosyncratic verve. Steeped in rock and roll's early R&B roots, he had an innate feel for the rhythms that make people move. But upon that foundation, he blended elements of modern jazz, twentieth-century classical music and electronic cacophony. He grew up in the thrall of such blues guitar pioneers as Howlin' Wolf, Guitar Slim, and T-Bone Walker, but his improvisations only began as blues-based solos. When Zappa turned his imagination to an electric guitar, he drew from a wild tangle of harmonic ideas to create unique sound sculptures, from a sonic boom to an Indian raga to a crash-landing spaceship.

Zappa generally refused to write love songs, and those he did write tended to depict love as a desperate commercial transaction, with cheap sex its currency. Like many singer-songwriters of his era, he focused his acerbic wit on the hypocrisies of our society, taking aim at government, the educational system, and the family unit. But he also ridiculed the youth culture in which his own fans were immersed. He frequently took a break from his savage critiques to revel in sheer absurdism, creating a loony alternate universe where one might encounter a Godzilla-sized poodle, a Montana dental-floss farmer, or a mountain that gets drafted into military service.

Zappa's interweaving of musical and social themes spawned a large and varied body of work—a lifelong tapestry of artfully wrought musical motifs, surrealist imagery, and anarchic jokes. Although he never achieved massive sales figures, Zappa gained his own peculiar sort of rock stardom while maintaining a persona that suggested the illegitimate child of John Coltrane and Lenny Bruce, with Spike Jones and Big Mama Thornton standing by as midwives.

His mastery of recording technology gave Zappa's music an impressive sonic sheen, and his sidemen were distinguished by their top-notch musicianship. Zappa's bands were notoriously tight and well rehearsed, as they had to be in order to perform music that might turn on a dime from hard-rock wailing to free-jazz riffing to street-corner doo-wop harmonizing. His technically challenging compositions brought established jazzmen like George Duke and Jean-Luc Ponty into his band, which was also a proving ground for lengthy list of notable rock musicians, including Lowell George, Adrian Belew, and Steve Vai.

Despite his initial fame in the rock world, Zappa was eventually recognized widely as a serious American composer. While many rock artists have tried their hands at symphonic writing or “rock operas,” Zappa was one of the few who possessed the chops and the discipline to successfully execute such endeavors. His interest in, and knowledge of, modern classical music was nearly as deep-rooted as his love of doo-wop and blues. His youthful enthusiasm for the French modernist composer Edgard Varèse opened the door for an appreciation of Webern, Stravinsky, and others.

The fact that Zappa was a largely self-taught musician who attended no music schools—and educated himself only in the basics of musical structure—didn’t stop him from creating modern compositions of sweeping beauty and dizzying intricacy. Bedeviled by the logistics and expense of working with symphony orchestras, Zappa eventually found he could compose and perform simultaneously on the Synclavier, a massive computer synthesizer. Still, he never abandoned flesh-and-blood musicians. Late in his life, Zappa took delight in the German new music group Ensemble Modern, who could realize his most elaborate and offbeat musical ideas.

Unlike those rock artists who self-indulgently emphasized their artistic temperaments, Zappa always considered himself a businessman, if a reluctant one. First, he was the boss of his band, hiring, firing, and paying salaries. Second, his frustrations at working within the structures of the mainstream music business led him to form his own labels. An unapologetic capitalist, Zappa toured Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and sought to forge business ventures with peoples newly freed from the constraints of socialism. He was even offered a diplomatic post by the fledgling post-communist government of the Czech Republic—an offer that was rescinded at the request of a chagrined U.S. government.

The reason for that chagrin may have been what many considered Zappa’s most unusual performance, his testimony before Congress in 1985 in opposition to proposed laws to label record albums for their lyrical content. The musician who began as a flamboyant social critic emerged in the mid-1980s as a buttoned-down, but no less opinionated, public citizen.

By the time he died of prostate cancer in 1993 at the age of fifty-two, Zappa left a recorded legacy of over seventy albums, as well as various films, videos, and other media. Yet despite the wealth of his work that remains available to consumers, Frank Zappa is often as misunderstood today as he was in his heyday.

Frank Vincent Zappa was born in Baltimore, Maryland, on December 21, 1940, the child of the Sicilian-born Francis Vincent Zappa Jr. and American-born Rose Marie Colimore. He was the eldest child in what would become a family of six. His father worked as a meteorologist at Baltimore’s Edgewood Arsenal, where deadly mustard gas was manufactured. The staff’s families lived nearby, so in case of an accident, a gas mask was provided for each member of the family. A curious young Frank once took his gas mask apart,

breaking it. As a child, Frank suffered from asthma and sinus problems. He also developed an early enthusiasm for art.

By the time Frank was ten, his family had moved west, where his father worked in California's burgeoning defense industry. Although they first resided in northern California, the Zappas eventually moved south to the San Diego area. There, Frank continued his interest in art, and became fascinated by the beauty of the as-yet-unreadable notes on a sheet of music.

The young Zappa was intrigued by an article he read in *Look* magazine about *The Complete Works Of Edgard Varèse Volume 1*, an album by the contemporary French composer, who lived in New York at the time. Although he'd never heard any of its music, Frank became obsessed with the album and with Varèse. When he finally managed to find a copy of the LP, he realized that he didn't have enough money.

"I had searched for that album for over a year, and now . . . disaster," he later recounted. "I told the guy I only had \$3.80. He scratched his neck. 'We use that record to demonstrate the hi-fi with, but nobody ever buys one when we use it. . . . You can have it for \$3.80 if you want it that bad.'"¹

Zappa listened to the album on a primitive old Decca phonograph, although its dissonance caused his elders to restrict its playing to his bedroom. For his fifteenth birthday, his mother promised him \$5 to spend as he chose. He chose a long-distance phone call to Edgard Varèse. Incredibly, Varèse's phone number was found, and the great composer spoke to his enthralled young admirer, telling him of his new composition "Déserts."

Simultaneously with his discovery of Varèse, Zappa cultivated an interest in R&B and doo-wop, beginning with his first exposure to "Gee" by the Crows and "I" by the Velvets. By the age of fourteen, he was taking drum lessons and had joined a teenaged rhythm and blues combo called the Ramblers.

When the Zappa family moved to Lancaster, California, Frank attended Antelope Valley Joint Union High School and formed a band of his own, called the Black-Outs. Although based in a culturally conservative area, the band crossed several color lines, as it included Zappa and one other young man of Italian descent, plus two members of Mexican extraction and three African Americans. Some of the local townsfolk disliked the group's racial makeup as much as they disliked their music. Zappa initially played drums, but later switched to guitar, playing a cracked model his brother Carl had purchased for \$1.50.

One day, Zappa was hitchhiking around Lancaster and got a lift from a schoolmate, Don Van Vliet. The two weren't well acquainted, but soon discovered a mutual mania for music. Don had to drop out of school and take over his father's Helms Bread truck route after his father had a heart attack, but he and Zappa bonded over their shared musical interests.

Zappa always claimed that he was not particularly popular with his high school administration, an assertion seemingly borne out by the fact that he was allowed to graduate with fewer credits than were required. With ambitions of

becoming a composer like his hero Varèse, Zappa took a harmony course at Antelope Valley Junior College. When his family moved again, from Lancaster to Claremont, California, Frank didn't go with them. He later enrolled at Chaffee Junior College in Ontario, California, where he took another harmony course, and also sat in on a composition course at Pomona College. These would prove to be Frank Zappa's last efforts at formal education.

At Chaffee, Zappa met Kay Sherman, whom he soon married, and put his artistic talents to work in the silkscreen department at the Nile Running Greeting Card company. Around this time, he was approached by Don Ceveris, a supportive former high school English teacher who'd written a screenplay for a western called *Run Home Slow* and wanted Zappa to compose the film's score. He wrote and recorded the soundtrack music, but the film's producers were forced to temporarily shelve the project for lack of funding.

His continuing efforts to find work in the music business led Zappa become the guitarist for a lounge act called Joe Perrino and the Mellotones. After one too many nights of playing tired versions of "Green Dolphin Street" and "Anniversary Waltz" while clad in a white dinner jacket and bow tie, Zappa quit music altogether. He closed his guitar in its case and stowed it away behind a sofa, where it stayed for eight months.

FRAME UP, FREAK OUT

Zappa was then asked to compose the score for another low-budget film, this time for *The World's Greatest Sinner*, a bizarre religious/political/rock and roll satire shot on a shoestring by eccentric Hollywood character actor Timothy Carey, who directed and starred in it. The film featured some of Zappa's earliest recorded music, and includes themes and motifs that would re-emerge later in his career.

In another attempt to hear his orchestral music, Zappa paid \$300 in 1962 for musicians to perform his compositions at a concert at the nearby Mount St. Mary's College. In addition to the orchestral instruments, Zappa used electronic music on tape and simultaneously projected home movies, offering an early manifestation of the multi-media experimentation that would become more common later in the decade.

Ronnie Williams, a guitar-playing friend, introduced Zappa to Paul Buff, the owner and operator of the Pal Recording Studio in the southern California town of Cucamonga. Buff was an innovative recording engineer, and his studio boasted remarkably advanced equipment for a small-town operation, including a five-track recording apparatus. Zappa soon began working with Buff in the three-room studio, with the pair cutting a series of rock and roll tunes and licensing their recordings to such independent labels as Original Sound and Del-Fi, in hopes of scoring a hit record.

Billing themselves under various pseudonyms, Buff and Zappa recorded in a variety of styles. As the Masters, they cut a vigorous instrumental number called “Break Time,” backed with an instrumental cover of the Tennessee Ernie Ford hit “Sixteen Tons.” When Zappa and Buff turned themselves into the Hollywood Persuaders to cut the chugging, horn-driven boogie tune “Grunion Run,” the distinctive Zappa guitar sound was already evident in the track’s wiry, stinging riffs.

During this period, Zappa also wrote and produced tunes for other performers. Taking the opportunity to write for one of the doo-wop groups he loved as a teenager, Zappa, with vocalist friend Ray Collins, penned “Memories of El Monte” for the Penguins. The group was nearly a decade past its classic hit “Earth Angel,” and Zappa’s soulful melody seems to acknowledge the fact, offering a nostalgic pastiche of old vocal-group classics. The poignant R&B plaint “Everytime I See You,” by the teenage singing duo the Heartbreakers, features a splendidly sputtering, unquestionably Zappa-styled solo.

With fame still a few years away, the future underground icon made an unlikely national television appearance on *The Steve Allen Show*, hosted by the comedian/writer/musician whose cerebral sense of humor Zappa appreciated. Dressed in a suit and tie, the seemingly straight-laced guest tickled Allen’s love of the absurd when he brought along a pair of modified, overturned bicycles and demonstrated the different ways one could make music with them, dubiously dubbing the process “cyclophony.” After demonstrating the curious noises one could derive from a bicycle, Zappa coaxed Allen into “playing” it as well, prompting atonal counterpoint from Allen’s studio band, with taped electronic sounds switched on from the control room. Zappa puckishly titled the piece *Improvised Concerto for Two Bicycles, Prerecorded Tape and the Musicians in the Back*. The dissonant free-fire zone they produced became mainstream America’s first moment of Zappafied weirdness, with the young composer impudently turning a national TV variety show into a festival of noise.

Zappa’s next band was the Soots, whose lead singer was his old Lancaster buddy Don Van Vliet—now known by the name under which he would soon become an underground musical legend, Captain Beefheart. Yet the Soots’ recordings failed to generate any interest from record companies. Still seeking a suitable live unit, Zappa then formed a blistering electric trio, the Mothers, with bassist Paul Woods and drummer Les Papp. The band played mainly—and mostly unnoticed—at the Saints and Sinners, a go-go bar in Ontario, where the waitresses would dance onstage and where the band’s audience consisted mainly of Mexican laborers.

Back in Cucamonga, a debt-plagued Buff sold his studio to Zappa, who financed the purchase with his long-delayed payment for his *Run Home Slow* score. Zappa renamed the facility Studio Z and, with his marriage falling apart, moved into the studio. He was later joined there by old friend Jim

“Motorhead” Sherwood and various others needing a short-term place to stay.

Expanding his creative horizons, Zappa paid \$50 for some background sets from the F. K. Rockett Studios in Hollywood, and announced that he planned to make a film called *Captain Beefheart Meets the Grunt People* with his old friend Don Van Vliet. The local paper, the *Ontario Daily Report*, anointed Zappa “The Movie King of Cucamonga,” despite the fact that he’d made no movies yet.

Studio Z began to develop a reputation, mainly as a hangout for local weirdos. One day, Zappa was approached by a man claiming to be a used car salesman, and wondering if the Movie King of Cucamonga might want to produce a pornographic film for him. Although he needed the money, Zappa instead recorded a raunchy audio tape with Lorraine Belcher, one of the women living at the studio.

When Zappa met up with his client, the supposed used car salesman said he didn’t have the money to pay for the titillating tape. As Frank turned to walk away, he was arrested for conspiracy to commit pornography, as was his female cohort. Studio Z was raided and its tapes confiscated; the headline in the *Ontario Daily Report* screamed “2 a Go-Go to Jail.” Zappa’s father took out a bank loan to pay his son’s bail, and Frank in turn used some of his royalties from “Memories of El Monte” to bail out Belcher. The trial ended with Zappa being forced to serve ten days in Tank C of the San Bernardino County Jail—a bleak, overcrowded, insect-infested lockup that left a horrible, indelible impression on the young musician. Now officially a convicted felon, Zappa was put on probation for three years. (The song “San Ber’dino,” from 1975 album *One Size Fits All*, makes reference to that shattering sojourn.)

By 1964, Zappa had fallen behind in his rent and moved out of Studio Z, which itself was soon demolished to make way for a wider street. Ray Collins had been singing in a band called the Soul Giants, which had lost its guitar player after Collins reportedly slugged him. The Soul Giants also included bassist Roy Estrada, drummer Jimmy Carl Black, and saxophonist Dave Coronado. Zappa stepped in as guitarist, and would soon take over as the group’s leader.

Zappa soon grew tired of the band’s repertoire of cover tunes and suggested that they add some of his compositions to their set. He also convinced the group to rename themselves Captain Glasspack and His Magic Mufflers. The name change did little for the group, and Coronado quit. One day in the spring of 1964, Zappa decided to revert to a previous band name, with one vowel changed, and dubbed the group the Mothers.

The Mothers eventually moved to Los Angeles, which had become home to a burgeoning “freak” scene where the band seemed to fit right in. “The origins of hippies—as per San Francisco/flower power/Haight Ashbury—is quite a different evolution from the Los Angeles freak movement, of which I was a part,” Zappa later explained. “There was just a difference in the concept of it. I was never a hippie. I never bought the flower power ethic.”²

Local scene maker and counterculture guru Vito Paulekas originally brought his Freaks—a loose assemblage of dancers and assorted hangers on—to the Byrds' earliest shows. But the entourage soon attached themselves to the Mothers. As “Mother Superior,” the lanky, wisecracking Zappa cut a striking figure. He now sported long, stringy hair and a distinctive mustache-and-beard configuration that he copied from R&B bandleader Johnny Otis.

Los Angeles was not the peace-and-love utopia that San Francisco was being portrayed as. In L.A., there was a simmering tension between the freaks and the police—just another flashpoint in a town of jostling white, black, and Latino populations. When the freaks gathered at the rock clubs of the Sunset Strip, local business leaders saw them as a cultural eyesore, and leaned on the police to make things hot for them. The result was police harassment, with the cops periodically rounding up groups of young nonconformists with little legal justification.

Despite static from the cops, the Mothers became the rock and roll face of the L.A. freak scene, and as such were invited to perform at a party that was to be filmed for an exploitation flick called *Mondo Hollywood*. At the party, they met Herb Cohen, who had managed such folk artists as Theodore Bikel, Judy Henske, and the Modern Folk Quartet. Cohen saw potential in this loud, odd band and soon became their manager. No stranger to controversy himself, Cohen was once arrested for booking boundary-busting comedian Lenny Bruce into a San Francisco nightclub. (Zappa himself had had a passing acquaintance with Bruce, whose convention-challenging humor was a strong influence on him. Zappa was in New York when Bruce died in L.A. in 1966, but flew back west for the funeral.)

Under Herb Cohen's guidance, the Mothers began gigging at such L.A. hotspots as the Action, the Whisky A Go-Go and the Trip. During one Whisky show, Cohen convinced Tom Wilson, a respected producer and A&R man who'd recently been hired by Verve Records to shore up the label's rock roster, to take a look at the Mothers. Wilson walked in while the band was playing “Trouble Comin' Every Day,” a blues number that dissected the Watts race riots that had torn L.A. apart that year. Assuming the Mothers to be a white blues band that sang protest songs, he offered to sign the group to Verve.

The Mothers—Zappa, Ray Collins, Roy Estrada, and Jimmy Carl Black, plus temporary member Elliott Ingber on rhythm guitar—recorded their debut album *Freak Out!* in late 1965 and early 1966. In the engineer's booth, Tom Wilson was charmed by the sardonic pop hooks of “Any Way the Wind Blows,” but his mood changed when the band launched into the ominous, bovine moans and otherworldly vocals of “Who Are the Brain Police?” Wilson picked up the phone and warned Verve's New York headquarters that the Mothers may not be exactly what he thought they were.

Freak Out!—one of rock's first double albums—was an explosion of Zappa's pent-up creative energy, from angry rockers like “Hungry Freaks, Daddy” and “Trouble Comin' Every Day” to the 1950s doo-wop parody “Go Cry on

Somebody Else's Shoulder" to the avant-garde a cappella opus "It Can't Happen Here" to "The Chrome Plated Megaphone of Destiny," a grand finale of tape manipulation combined with, as the album notes explain, "what freaks sound like when you turn them loose in a recording studio at one o'clock in the morning on \$500 worth of percussion equipment."

The album also featured Zappa's artfully crafted orchestral arrangements, and its elaborate cover design included a massive list of influences, musical and otherwise, including Slim Harpo, Igor Stravinsky, Salvador Dalí, and Bram Stoker. The project cost Verve the then-unprecedented sum of nearly \$30,000.

Although it's now recognized as an innovative, visionary classic, *Freak Out!* sold poorly by the commercial standards of the day. Verve also had a bit of a problem with the group's name, insisting that they lengthen it by adding "Of Invention," since the word "Mothers" bore too much similarity to the abbreviation of a popular Oedipal epithet.

At the Whisky A Go-Go, a pretty blonde secretary named Adelaide Gail Sloatman had caught Frank's eye. The two were soon living together.

In the final weeks of 1966, the Mothers recorded their second album, *Absolutely Free*. Keen to head off another *Freak Out!*-sized expenditure, Verve imposed an \$11,000 spending cap on the album. By then, the group had expanded to include keyboardist Don Preston, reeds player Bunk Gardner, second drummer Billy Mundi, and Zappa's old friend Motorhead Sherwood on baritone saxophone.

With *Absolutely Free*, Zappa's social satire became far more cutting. The album featured pungent assaults on social conformity ("Plastic People," "Status Back Baby"), unfettered flights of dadaist humor ("The Duke of Prunes," "Call Any Vegetable") and a satirical rock oratorio ("Brown Shoes Don't Make It"). The album concluded with the alcohol-fueled mayhem of "America Drinks and Goes Home," an anarchic caricature of his lounge-band days with Joe Perrino.

Pere Ubu: The Modern Dance

Frank Zappa's complex music and corrosive satirical humor demonstrated that given time and effort, an "outsider" style of rock music might find its own audience. When Cleveland natives David Thomas and Peter Laughner founded Pere Ubu in 1975, Midwest rock was represented nationally by the power-pop of Cheap Trick and the Raspberries, the blue-collar balladry of Bob Seger, and the heavy metal guitar histrionics of Ted Nugent. But Thomas and Laughner were not inclined to pursue any of these styles, which neither reflected their diverse influences (from the early Kinks and the Velvet Underground to obscure British bands like Van Der Graaf Generator) nor captured the atmosphere of life in a declining industrial center. Pere Ubu wasn't going to spend years playing Top Forty covers in northeast Ohio bar rooms. Pere Ubu was going to be *different*.

The group made its intentions clear in 1976 with "Final Solution," one of its three self-released singles. The song had rock-solid rhythmic drive, Peter Laughner's snaking guitar riffs, and a memorable chorus. But Allen Ravenstine's synthesizer sputtered and gurgled like a steam locomotive with engine trouble while David Thomas (aka Crocus Behemoth) sang in multiple voices: an affectless monotone, a high-pitched yelp, an angry shout.

Released in 1977, the year of Peter Laughner's death from acute pancreatitis, Pere Ubu's debut album, *The Modern Dance*, sold only about 15,000 copies in the United States. But it put the band on the punk/new wave live circuit, where the rotund and conservatively dressed Thomas cut a singular figure. Ubu's second album in a year, *Dub Housing*, was a dark near-masterpiece of unnerving sonic atmospheres and half-absurd, half-foreboding lyrics (cf. "Caligari's Mirror").

When *New Picnic Time* (1979) saw no improvement in sales, Pere Ubu briefly disbanded but soon regrouped for a new album, *The Art of Walking*. Thomas took control of the band as other musicians came and went, some rejoining after long absences. Ubu's output was consistently inventive and true to its own legacy. At this writing, Pere Ubu has released twenty-plus albums on at least eight labels, including the raucous live anthology *390° of Simulated Stereo* (1981), the pop-oriented *Cloudland* (1989), and the latest "comeback" *Why I Hate Women* (2006). There's no end in sight for the band that David Thomas once described as "the longest-lasting, most disastrous commercial outfit to ever appear in rock and roll."

Andy Schwartz

Although the independent Zappa chafed against record company politics, he appreciated the continued support of producer Tom Wilson, who served as a crucial buffer between band and label, and whose patronage was crucial in the Mothers' ability to continue making records.

Although the Mothers of Invention were the new stars of the L.A. scene, the scene itself was imploding under the pressure of increased hostility from the authorities. The group temporarily relocated to New York, where they were to perform an extended nightly engagement—an elaborately staged presentation alternately titled *Pigs and Repugnant* or *Absolutely Free*—at the Garrick Theater in Greenwich Village.

Frank and Gail rented an apartment in the West Village, near the one where Edgard Varèse's widow Louise still lived, and prepared themselves for the birth of their first child, Moon Unit. One such preparation was to get married, which they did at New York's City Hall. The clerk asked Zappa if he had a wedding ring for his bride, but all Zappa had was the vending machine pen (bearing the inscription "Congratulations from Mayor Lindsay") with which he'd filled out the marriage license. "When we got married, I pinned a ballpoint pen on her dress," Zappa recalled, adding, "It was a maternity dress because she was nine months pregnant."³

While living in New York, Zappa's smarter-than-your-average-rock-star reputation earned him an opportunity to record a symphonic album. Titled *Lumpy Gravy* and credited to "Frank Zappa/Abnuceals Emuukha Electric Symphony Orchestra and Chorus," the project was a unique sonic collage of orchestral music, rock band snippets, electronic weirdness, and seemingly random voices engaged in surreal dialogues.

Although *Lumpy Gravy* was released later, it was recorded almost simultaneously with the Mothers of Invention's third release, *We're Only in It for the Money*. A masterful equal-opportunity takedown of both the establishment and the counterculture, the album attacked right-wing politics with "Concentration Moon," skewered hippie politics with "Who Needs the Peace Corps?," savaged sexual politics with "Harry You're a Beast," and eerily presaged the 1970 shootings of Vietnam War protesters at Kent State University with the stark ballad "Mom and Dad." Ending with an extended audio fever-dream haunted by electronic tape-manipulation, *We're Only in It for the Money* was more a continuous concept record than even the Beatles' landmark *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*—whose distinctive cover collage was cleverly parodied on *Money* by art director Cal Schenkel. Zappa reportedly phoned Paul McCartney for permission to spoof the Beatles artwork, but no conclusion was reached. Wary of legal action, Verve packaged *Money* with the outside cover on the inside and a less problematic photo of the band on the front.

We're Only in It for the Money's cover wasn't the only element to arouse concern from Verve. The company's list of complaints included a plea that one verse of "Mother People" be excised; Zappa cut the verse, but recorded it backward and inserted it at the end of side one under the title "Hot Poop."

By this point, Zappa had become the Mothers' principal producer, as Tom Wilson's increasing drug use was becoming an impediment. The prevalence of drugs in the rock world caused the sober, hard-working Zappa no small irritation, and many were shocked that such an outlandish-looking nonconformist could disdain them.

"People would do frightening things and think it was fantastic. Then they would discuss it endlessly with the next guy, who had taken the same drug," said Zappa. "I tried marijuana and waited for something to happen. I got a sore throat and it made me sleepy."⁴

By now, the ever-expanding Mothers lineup had been augmented by two new, classically trained members, reeds player Ian Underwood and vibraphonist/percussionist Art Tripp. But just as the decade was reaching its psychedelic apex, Zappa jabbed a finger in the eye of the Love Generation with *Cruising with Ruben and the Jets*, a left-field project that simultaneously honored and subverted the R&B songs he'd loved as a teenager. With elaborate, albeit slightly twisted, doo-wop arrangements, he reworked *Freak Out!*'s "Anyway the Wind Blows" and debuted "Love of My Life," a tune dating back to his Studio Z days.

Even by his own audience's broad-minded standards, *Cruising with Ruben and the Jets* was a deeply unconventional move. Some of Zappa's bandmates felt the same way. "Ray Collins and Roy Estrada knew about that kind of music and Jimmy Carl Black too," Zappa noted. "But it was not up Ian Underwood's alley, or Art Tripp's or Bunk Gardner's. They thought it was moron music."⁵

GUITAR HERO, BIZARRE HERO

With newborn Moon Unit in tow, Frank and Gail moved back to California, first to a log cabin-styled house in Laurel Canyon, then to their longtime residence in North Hollywood. As opposed to his Studio Z days, where he'd made his home in a recording studio, Zappa now had the luxury of putting a professional-quality recording studio in his home. With the Mothers' Verve contract reaching its bitter end, Herb Cohen cut a distribution deal with Warner Bros. Records that allowed Zappa to take charge of his own label, Bizarre Records.

Bizarre's debut release was the Mothers of Invention double album *Uncle Meat*. A dazzling, sprawling declaration of independence, *Uncle Meat* showcased Zappa's many facets, from the demented doo-wop of "Electric Aunt Jemima" and "The Air" to the sizzling instrumental "Ian Underwood Whips It Out" to the avant-garde meditation "Project X." The album also featured several instrumental themes that would become Zappa standards, including the enchantingly intricate "A Pound for a Brown on the Bus" and the masterfully jazzy "King Kong."

In addition to studio recordings, *Uncle Meat* included several live tracks, including a recasting of the garage-rock anthem "Louie Louie" using the grand pipe organ of London's Royal Albert Hall. That same London concert, on October 28, 1968, saw the Mothers joined on stage by fourteen members of the BBC Symphony for a groundbreaking rock-and-classical concert that would see release twenty-five years later as *Ahead of Their Time*. Ever the multi-media provocateur, Zappa also began shooting an *Uncle Meat* movie in late 1969, although it would remain unfinished for around twenty years.

Zappa was poised to create a Bizarre empire, with the record label at its core. He formed a sister imprint, Straight Records, which was launched with the 1969 release of the seminal Zappa-produced Captain Beefheart album *Trout Mask Replica*. Subsequent Bizarre and Straight releases came from future shock-rock star Alice Cooper, eccentric street singer Wild Man Fischer, former Mothers bassist Jeff Simmons, and the GTOs. The latter group was comprised of several prominent L.A. rock groupies, including Christine Frka, a babysitter for the Zappa kids, and Pamela Miller, later known as groupie memoirist Pamela Des Barres. Bizarre/Straight also released albums by esteemed

cult singer/songwriter Tim Buckley and a cappella group the Persuasions, as well as archival material from rebel comics Lenny Bruce and Lord Buckley. Cal Schenkel's Nifty, Tough and Bitchen art department gave all of Bizarre/Straight's releases a distinctive, slightly demented visual stamp.

Captain Beefheart and the Magic Band: My Human Gets Me Blues

Much rock music that once was considered harsh and "difficult" has become familiar and even broadly viable in the marketplace. Iggy and the Stooges' 1973 recording "Search and Destroy" has been transformed from a desperate cry at hard rock's outer limits into the soundtrack of a TV commercial for Nike. But the music of Captain Beefheart seems nearly as problematic for today's mass audience as it was in 1969 despite years of critical exegesis, CD reissues, and concert re-creations.

Born in 1941 in Glendale, California, Don Van Vliet was a promising art student who shared a passion for blues and R&B with his adolescent friend, Frank Zappa. With Zappa's encouragement, Don taught himself to play harmonica, guitar, piano, soprano saxophone, and bass clarinet in a rough but expressive style. He took the stage name Captain Beefheart and formed the first version of the Magic Band. Such early albums as *Safe as Milk* (1967) sounded like the work of an above-average Sunset Strip blues-rock band with a hooting, gravel-voiced lead singer, as Beefheart freely explored his four-and-a-half-octave vocal range.

Trout Mask Replica was something else entirely. Produced by Zappa and released on his Bizarre label in 1969, the sprawling two-disc set was recorded in just two days after eight months of tortuous Magic Band rehearsals. Beefheart often taught his songs to the group by whistling, drawing diagrams, or playing all the instrumental parts on the piano, then leaving it to percussionist John "Drumbo" French to translate his ideas for guitars, bass, and drums.

Nothing about the album seemed to have a clear precedent in rock music: the lurching, unpredictable shifts in time signatures, the squalling saxophone outbursts, the physically challenging but perfectly synchronized guitar parts of Zoot Horn Rollo (Bill Harkleroad) and Antennae Jimmy Semens (Jeff Cotton). Through twenty-eight songs, Beefheart groaned, shouted, and chortled his Dadaist lyrics.

A core of amazed listeners did indeed "get him." *Trout Mask Replica*, critic Lester Bangs later wrote, "was not even 'ahead' of its time in 1969. Then and now, it stands outside time, trends, fads, hypes . . . constituting a genre unto itself: truly, a musical Monolith if ever there was one" (pp. 188–89).¹

Captain Beefheart's later albums like *The Spotlight Kid* (1971), *Clear Spot* (1972), and *Doc at the Radar Station* (1980) were often inspired but proved scarcely more commercially viable than their illustrious predecessor. Not counting *Bongo Fury*, a one-off collaboration with Frank Zappa in 1975, he never placed an album in the *Billboard* Top 100. But Devo, Talking Heads, the

B-52s, and John Lydon of the Sex Pistols and Public Image Ltd. all have acknowledged the influence and impact of Beefheart's singular artistry.

In 1982 Captain Beefheart released his final album, *Ice Cream for Crow*, and then retired to the Mojave Desert to pursue painting. "Not many people seem to have things in common with me," he told Lester Bangs. "I guess what intrigues me the most is something like seeing somebody wash my windows—that's like a symphony" (p. 192).

A. S.

1. Lester Bangs, "Captain Beefheart Is Alive," reprinted in *Main Lines, Blood Feasts, and Bad Taste: A Lester Bangs Reader*, edit. John Morthland (New York: Anchor Press, 2003), 188–189.

Like Zappa's business, the Mothers were also growing—into a ten-piece band, with the addition of guitarist/vocalist Lowell George (who would later found Little Feat) and Bunk Gardner's trumpet-playing brother, Buzz. But only one Mother, Ian Underwood, played on Zappa's next project, *Hot Rats*. Beyond its arresting cover photograph of a mystical-looking Christine Frka rising out of an abandoned swimming pool, the album was ambitious tour de force that raucously cross-bred acid rock and electric jazz.

In place of the Mothers, Zappa tapped the talents of an assortment of notable jazz and R&B players, including bassists Max Bennett and Shuggie Otis (son of Johnny), drummer John Guerin. Zappa also tapped a pair of electric violinists, French jazzman Jean-Luc Ponty on one track and Don "Sugarcane" Harris (previously half of the 1950s R&B vocal duo Don and Dewey) on two others. A state-of-the-art sixteen-track recording board allowed Zappa to do massive amounts of overdubbing, resulting in the best-sounding album he'd ever made. *Hot Rats* was a primarily instrumental effort, with Captain Beefheart's rendition of "Willie the Pimp" as its sole vocal.

Hot Rats begins with "Peaches En Regalia," a majestic, ebullient theme with which Zappa would open his concerts for years thereafter. Zappa's guitar improvisations dominated the album on such tracks as "Willie the Pimp," "The Gumbo Variations," and "Son of Mr. Green Genes," his extended solos soared and screamed, beckoning listeners down harmonic pathways unimagined in psychedelia's wildest flights. If he hadn't been recognized as such before, *Hot Rats* marked Zappa's emergence as a bona fide guitar idol.

At a 1969 concert in Boston, legendary jazz saxophonist Rahsaan Roland Kirk joined the Mothers onstage for a wild jam session, which gave the show's promoter, veteran jazz impresario George Wein, an idea. Wein came up with the concept of a package tour matching the Mothers of Invention with Kirk, jazz vibraphonist Gary Burton, and the Duke Ellington Orchestra.

During the tour, Zappa saw Ellington, a bona fide living legend of American music, begging a promoter's aide for \$10. Worrying that his career future would be similarly bleak, he disbanded the Mothers of Invention (although he would retain the name for future lineups). "The jobs didn't pay well," Zappa

complained. “An average tour, like the 1969 tour, I had to take \$400 out of my bank account just to go on the tour. And at the end of the tour I was \$10,000 in debt. Everybody else had been paid—I had to guarantee them their salaries, they had their food paid, their hotel paid, their salary paid—they got a weekly check, whether they worked or not. It was the only way I could keep the band together.”⁶

Such financial considerations were no small thing for Zappa, who already had another mouth to feed when his son Dweezil was born in September 1969. (Another son, Ahmet, would arrive in 1974, followed by another daughter, Diva, in 1979.)

Although he'd broken up the group, Zappa still had hours of Mothers material in the can, and planned to release it in a giant, multi-album set. When such a magnum opus proved impractical, some of the material was packaged on individual albums, beginning with the 1970 LPs *Burnt Weeny Sandwich* and *Weasels Ripped My Flesh*. *Weasels* featured the fanciful teen-angst rocker “My Guitar Wants to Kill Your Mama,” a reworking of his old Ramblers tune “Directly from My Heart to You” featuring Sugarcane Harris, and a song whose title blended Claude Debussy with an image from his youth in Baltimore, “Prelude to the Afternoon of a Sexually Aroused Gas Mask.”

As the 1960s drew to a close, Zappa's music was beginning to gain widespread respect. For instance, Jean-Luc Ponty's *King Kong: Jean-Luc Ponty Plays the Music of Frank Zappa* was released in 1969. In addition to Zappa—who arranged all of the tracks, as well as playing guitar on one number and contributing a new twenty-minute orchestral composition—the album featured a host of West Coast jazzmen as well as Mothers Underwood and Tripp, plus versatile jazz pianist George Duke, who would soon become a Mother himself.

Zappa had continued his orchestral writing during various Mothers tours, and ultimately assembled it into “200 Motels,” an ambitious, Kafka-esque saga of a rock band on the road. He put together a new set of musicians equal to the task of performing his demanding compositions. The original Mothers lineup had grown out of a rock and roll/rhythm and blues bar band, and was comprised largely of musicians unfamiliar with the complex time signatures and demanding arrangements that Zappa favored. In contrast, he recruited his new musical cohorts—players who were up to the demands of their boss's ambitious compositions—from the top ranks of jazz and rock.

On May 15, 1970, Zappa presented “200 Motels” in concert at Los Angeles's Pauley Pavilion as an ambitious blend of rock and “serious” music, with Zappa and his new sidemen—including keyboardist George Duke and drummer Aynsley Dunbar—playing the rock portions, while conductor Zubin Mehta led the Los Angeles Philharmonic on the rest.

After the show, Zappa ran into singers Mark Volman and Howard Kaylan, whose band the Turtles had been reliable 1960s hit makers but had recently dissolved amidst some nasty business disputes with their record company. The pair soon joined up with Zappa's new Mothers lineup (which also included ex-Turtles bassist Jim Pons) as lead singers. Because they were still embroiled

in Turtles-related litigation that prevented them from working under their own names, Volman and Kaylan were cryptically rechristened the Phlorescent Leech (later shortened to Flo) and Eddie. When Zappa took “200 Motels” on the road, Flo and Eddie became an invaluable addition to the show, with their manic energy and comic sensibility enhancing his sardonic scenarios.

In early 1971, Zappa and the new Mothers joined with director Tony Palmer in London to create a motion picture version of *200 Motels*, which featured the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra as well as Theodore Bikel, Ringo Starr, and the Who’s drummer Keith Moon, plus old friends Motorhead Sherwood and Jimmy Carl Black, and members of the GTOs. To mark the end of the movie shoot, the Royal Philharmonic was scheduled to perform the orchestral “200 Motels” at London’s Royal Albert Hall on February 8. Instead, about 4,000 Zappa fans were turned away when the concert was canceled when the Royal Albert Hall’s management deemed the piece’s text to be unsuitable. A furious Zappa later initiated legal proceedings against the prestigious venue.

The *200 Motels* selection titled “Touring Can Make You Crazy” found no better expression than on Zappa’s 1971 European tour. During a December 4 concert at the Casino de Montreux in Geneva, a fire broke out, caused by either faulty wiring or a concertgoer setting off fireworks. The fire started during Don Preston’s “King Kong” synthesizer solo, and Zappa directed the audience to calmly leave. That proved difficult, as the hall’s management had chained shut some doors that were needed for evacuation. Although no lives were lost, the Mothers’ equipment was destroyed in the inferno, which burned the entire building down. (The incident became the subject of the classic hard rock hit “Smoke on the Water” by Deep Purple, whose members were present at the show.)

Zappa and the band decided to cancel most of the ten dates remaining on the tour, but wanted to end the tour at London’s Rainbow Theatre as originally planned. With rented gear, they played a pair of two-show nights at the Rainbow. During the encore of the first night’s early show, a concert attendee named Trevor Charles Howell ran up from the audience and pushed Zappa off the stage and onto the concrete floor of the orchestra pit fifteen feet below, leaving him seriously injured. Outside the concert hall, rumors spread that Zappa had been killed.

TOURING, TAUNTING, TESTIFYING

In his plunge from the Rainbow stage, Zappa suffered a multiple-fractured ankle, a broken rib, a hole in the back of his head, and a crushed larynx. The injury to his larynx resulted in his voice dropping in pitch by a third. His leg never healed correctly; doctors suggested the ankle be re-broken and re-set, but Zappa declined the offer. Thereafter, one of his legs was shorter than the other, causing him chronic back pain.

After a year-long recuperation, Zappa was finally able to tour again, but in the future he would make sure that there was always a bodyguard nearby. Fans would become familiar with bodyguard John Smothers, a bald, stocky African American man who stood on stage for the duration of every show, and who would come to figure extensively in Zappa lore.

While recuperating from his injuries, Zappa created two of his most bracing jazz-rock albums, *Waka/Jawaka* and *The Grand Wazoo*. Both were characterized by lavishly arranged horns and the electrifying keyboards of George Duke. At around the same time, Herb Cohen let the Bizarre label fade away, and launched DiscReet Records in its place.

Zappa's growing reputation as a master guitarist helped him to reach more of a mainstream audience with the rock-oriented early 1970s albums *Over-Nite Sensation* and *Apostrophe (')*. The former featured good-humored surrealism with the dental floss-farming scenario of "Montana," alongside the openly sexual narratives of "Dirty Love" and "Dinah-Moe Humm."

Zappa's often-adolescent attraction to sexual themes earned him scorn from music critics, and cost him many of his original fans. But the artist enjoyed nothing so much as sticking a sharp thumb in the eye of political correctness, even as political correctness was just becoming an American cultural trait.

Beyond what many saw as a puerile attachment to X-rated humor, Zappa was still reacting to his obscenity arrest ten years earlier. Ever since a harmlessly prurient audiotape had turned him into a convicted felon, Zappa insisted on continually testing the limits of free speech. He waved his dirty lyrics like a red flag before a bull, taunting American sensibilities to ensure that he would never again be submitted to the humiliation he endured at the hands of the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Office.

As he put it himself, "A person can only be offended by smuttiness if they believe in smut as a concept and believe in the concept of dirty words—which I don't. It's always seemed to be something that bothered rock writers more than anybody else."⁷

Apostrophe (') included the gospel-grounded George Duke collaboration "Uncle Remus," as well as power trio improvisations with ex-Cream bassist Jack Bruce and Derek and the Dominos drummer Jim Gordon. But the album's best-known song was "Don't Eat the Yellow Snow," based on an old winter-time joke. The song became an unexpected airplay hit after a Pittsburgh radio station cut the ten-minute track down to a more airplay-friendly three minutes. Zappa, on tour in Europe at the time, phoned L.A. and instructed his engineer to edit the track to conform to the Pittsburgh version, and the result became one of his most popular tunes.

Zappa maintained a frantic composing and performing pace between 1973 and 1977, and he collected the fruits of his labors into a projected four-LP boxed set called *Läther*. As complete a picture of Zappa's multifarious interests as one could imagine, *Läther* offered, among other things, orchestral

works large and small; more scatological storytelling; red-hot jazz-rock; paint-peeling guitar licks; and even an anthropomorphic mini-opera called “The Adventures of Gregory Peccary.”

In light of the cost and scale of *Läther*, Warner Bros. declined to release the massive package in its intended form. In December 1977, an irate Zappa brought a test pressing of the album to L.A. radio station KROQ and played it in its entirety, offering it for free to any listener who wanted to tape it. The *Läther* flap was later settled when Zappa re-packaged its tracks into four single LPs, *Zappa in New York*, *Studio Tan*, *Sleep Dirt*, and *Orchestral Favorites*. (The complete *Läther* would finally be issued as a three-CD set in 1996.)

Free of what he termed the “contractual bondage” of his Warner Bros. deal, Zappa launched a new label, Zappa Records, distributed by Phonogram. The label’s first release was 1979’s *Sheik Yerbouti*. Much like *Uncle Meat* before it, *Sheik Yerbouti* was a broad-ranging expression of creative freedom, with guitar instrumentals (the saber-toothed “Rat Tomago”), clever spoofs of disco and punk (the bouncy “Dancin’ Fool” and the shrieking “I’m So Cute,” respectively), as well sexually themed tunes as “Jones Crusher,” “Bobby Brown Goes Down,” and “Jewish Princess.” The latter raised an outcry from the Anti-Defamation League of the B’nai B’rith, but Zappa never apologized for his use of exaggerated stereotypes.

Sheik Yerbouti was followed by the epic concept effort *Joe’s Garage*, originally contained on three LPs divided between two separately released albums. *Joe’s Garage* consisted of a series of songs strung based around a narrative set in a dystopian world where music is outlawed. Zappa felt that his concept was no fantasy, as the newly minted Iranian theocracy had already declared rock and roll illegal within its borders, and subsequent developments in the United States bore out the concept’s prescience. While uneven, *Joe’s Garage*’s highlights included one of Zappa’s most heartbreaking guitar ballads, “Watermelon in Easter Hay”; a memorable remake of “Lucille Has Messed My Mind Up,” an R&B gem he originally wrote for Jeff Simmons; and “Catholic Girls,” a kind of carnal companion piece to “Jewish Princess.”

After another instance of what he saw as uncalled-for corporate interference, Zappa Records came to an end. This time, rather than anyone crying foul over a dirty joke, the flap was political. Phonogram balked at distributing his single “I Don’t Want to Get Drafted,” a visceral yet tuneful reaction to President Jimmy Carter’s reintroduction of the military draft. Thereafter, Zappa would release his music on a new label, Barking Pumpkin, which was initially distributed through CBS.

Nineteen eighty-one saw the first batch of Barking Pumpkin releases, including a three-LP set comprised entirely of guitar solos, with the self-deprecating title *Shut Up ’N Play Yer Guitar*. Offered to fans exclusively via mail order under the assumption that it would have limited commercial appeal, the package far outsold expectations, and remains a fan favorite.

Zappa's 1982 release *Ship Arriving Too Late to Save a Drowning Witch* spawned a surprise hit in "Valley Girl," a novelty tune built around daughter Moon's parody of the lingo-laden ramblings of spoiled southern Californian teens. When Moon played "Valley Girl" during an interview on Los Angeles's KROQ, the station's phones lit up. The combination of Frank's ravenous beat and Moon's self-involved twittering subsequently caught on at stations across the United States, making "Valley Girl" the only Zappa single to reach the Top Forty.

Despite his frequently voiced distaste for the pop music world, Zappa always seemed to harbor a yearning for a mainstream hit, dating back to his earliest recordings at Studio Z. So there was more than a little irony attached to the fact that his sole top hit single would be driven by a comic monologue from his daughter, who had only elbowed her way into the studio as a ploy to spend some extra time with her busy dad.

Nineteen eighty-three saw the release of the two-volume *London Symphony Orchestra*, consisting of several orchestral Zappa pieces conducted by noted classical musician Kent Nagano. The following year brought *Boulez Conducts Zappa: The Perfect Stranger*, a collaboration with the French modernist composer and conductor Pierre Boulez, whose name had been included on *Freak Out!*'s roster of influences.

Although he still made rock albums, Zappa continued to accumulate respect in the classical world. He even conducted some Edgard Varèse works at a concert honoring the composer's 100th birthday, and saw far wider interest in his own compositions than ever before.

A unique episode that brought the eighteenth and twentieth centuries into sync occurred after Gail Zappa heard about a baroque composer named, of all things, Francesco Zappa. The older Zappa's only surviving music was a set of string trios, which the younger Zappa arranged and recorded using his newest musical tool, the Synclavier.

For his own compositions, the Synclavier's computerized functions allowed Frank to create music of speed and intricacy well beyond human technical abilities. The instrument opened a new world of musical possibilities for Zappa. His intense Synclavier-realized 1986 effort *Jazz from Hell* won him his first Grammy Award, for Best Rock Instrumental Performance.

While Zappa continued to create adventurous, distinctive new music at a steady pace through the 1980s, he also found himself in a new, high-profile role as a media personality. In the mid-1980s, popular culture went through one of its periodic periods of consternation over the supposed ill effects of rock and pop lyrics dealing with sex, violence, drugs, and other hot-button topics. A group known as the Parents Resource Music Center—comprised largely of well-connected Washington, D.C., women, most of them wives of government officials and prominent businessmen—advocated a labeling system for music, much as had been created for movies twenty years before. Two principals in the group were Tipper Gore, wife of then-Senator and future

Vice President Al Gore; and Susan Baker, wife of Reagan Treasury Secretary James Baker.

The issues raised by the PMRC resulted in Capitol Hill hearings of the Senate Commerce, Technology and Transportation Committee on September 19, 1985. Various conservative critics of pop music testified to the corrosive effects of naughty song lyrics, but they were countered by testimony from Zappa, as well as Dee Snider, frontman of the pop-metal band Twisted Sister, and middle-of-the-road icon John Denver.

The PMRC proposed record labeling as a method for parents to exercise control over their children's musical choices. But Zappa viewed labeling as an artistic scarlet letter that set up a system of condemnatory classifications that would provide an excuse for radio stations not to play, and retailers not to sell, certain releases. Zappa saw the music business heading down a slippery slope toward censorship, and his testimony assailing the PMRC was front-page news across the country. His appearance on Capitol Hill shocked many who were unaccustomed to his caustic wit, while others were surprised that the scraggly wisecracker they remembered from the 1960s had metamorphosed into a serious, articulate spokesman in short hair and a business suit. Although the PMRC ultimately retreated and the record industry compromised by adopting the now-familiar black-and-white Parental Advisory label, Zappa had emerged as a passionate public advocate for free speech. In a sense, he was teaching a new generation what he'd learned back in San Bernardino County about the fragility of First Amendment rights.

Capitalizing on the issue, Zappa's next album was the pointedly titled *Frank Zappa vs. The Mothers of Prevention*. Its centerpiece was the extended track "Porn Wars," a nightmarish audio epic that combined Synclavier music with manipulated tapes of the hearings that featured the voices of Senators Al Gore, Fritz Hollings, Paula Hawkins, and Slade Gorton (plus never-before-heard snippets of dialogue from *Lumpy Gravy*).

The Fall: Prole Art Threat

Founded in 1976 by lead singer and lyricist Mark E. Smith (born 1957 in Manchester, England), the Fall are the longest-running band to emerge from the U.K. punk rock scene. By 2005, the group had released *seventy-eight* official albums, although only a handful of these have ever reached the U.K. chart (and no Fall album has ever reached the *Billboard* Top 200). Smith has often expressed his contempt for musicians as professional craftsmen—one reason why more than fifty players have passed through the Fall during the past three decades. Smith is a keen and eclectic listener, however, whose influences include 1960s garage rock, the early Velvet Underground, reggae, disco, and rockabilly. In addition to their hundreds of original compositions, the Fall have covered songs by the Kinks, Sister Sledge, Captain Beefheart, and Frank Zappa.

Fall lyrics, all penned by Smith, weave together rhymes, slogans, critical observations, and details of daily life in the north of England. He sings, mutters, chants, and shouts his words in a continuous verbal flow over instrumental backing that ranges from guitar-powered neo-rockabilly to synth-flavored dance-pop, all propelled by a powerful backbeat. In this mix, Smith's voice and lyrics are the most consistently abrasive and confrontational elements. They are also what make the Fall's best music so mysterious, gripping, and timeless.

Smith, declared one writer, "is the sort of artist whose lyrical content is, at times, closer in detail and delivery to writers like James Joyce and Philip Larkin: witty, bilious wordplay set amongst a backdrop of decaying brick and haunted corners. . . . [He] slices a rusty scalpel through life's sores, picking apart woolly liberalism, self-pity and corrupt hypocrisy, to name but a few of his pet hates."

A. S

AN AMERICAN COMPOSER

Having made two feature films (*200 Motels* and the 1979 concert movie *Baby Snakes*), Zappa entered the nascent home video market with the 1984 release *Does Humor Belong in Music?* Not surprisingly, its distributor Sony Video Software felt it deserved a warning sticker due to foul language and a brief moment of female toplessness. Faced with this attempt to slap a label on his work, Zappa changed distributors to MPI Home Video. Finding an ally in MPI, he signed a distribution deal with the company for his Honker Home Video label, which released a series of new and old Zappa titles, including *Baby Snakes*, *Uncle Meat*, *Video from Hell*, *The True Story of 200 Motels*, and *The Amazing Mr. Bickford*, the last of which was a showcase for the creations of clay animator Bruce Bickford. In other business ventures, Zappa achieved cottage-industry successes with his mail-order merchandise arm Barfko-Swill and the Los Angeles rehearsal space Joe's Garage.

After many years of often frustrating touring, Zappa resolved to return to the road in 1988 with a ten-piece band that had learned more than 100 of his songs. He even managed to bring along the monstrous Synclavier. Dubbed "Broadway the Hard Way," the tour ran from February through June 1988, although it was not originally intended to terminate that early. Zappa reportedly disbanded the enterprise prematurely due to tension between most of his band members and his bassist/musical lieutenant Scott Thunes.

Zappa claimed to have lost \$400,000 on the tour, and vowed never to go on the road again. Fortunately for his fans, the 1988 tour yielded the live albums *Broadway the Hard Way*, *The Best Band You Never Heard in Your Life*, and *Make a Jazz Noise Here*. Various performances from the tour also

appeared in the *You Can't Do That on Stage Anymore* series, six double CDs of previously unreleased live material dating back to 1965.

In 1989, Zappa published his autobiography *The Real Frank Zappa Book*. The volume debunked various Zappa-related myths and included personal anecdotes and touring stories, as well as discussions of his take on politics.

When the Soviet Union fell after generations of cold war tensions, Zappa was eager to release his long-banned recordings throughout the former Soviet bloc. After visiting Russia in 1989, he returned in 1990 under the aegis of cable TV channel the Financial News Network, to promote media coverage of business opportunities in the Eastern Europe.

On his way home, he stopped off in the newly formed Czech Republic, where he met with that country's new president, Vaclav Havel, a playwright and longtime Zappa fan. Havel proposed that Zappa take on a more formal role with the Czechs, representing them in matters of trade, tourism, and culture. But after hearing that Zappa made some unflattering comments to Havel about then-Vice President Dan Quayle, the U.S. government reportedly suggested that the Czechs disassociate themselves from Zappa. Zappa's role was downgraded to that of unofficial cultural emissary. Coincidentally or not, the U.S. Secretary of State at the time was James Baker, husband of PMRC founder Susan Baker.

In the former Czechoslovakia, one of the most popular underground bands was the Plastic People of the Universe, named after a Mothers song from *Absolutely Free*. While visiting there, Zappa was moved by the risks taken by his fans. He explained, "In a club in Prague, there were two guys who said that they had been grabbed by the secret police, and before they were beaten, the guy said, 'We are now going to beat the Zappa music out of you.' And nobody in the audience seemed too surprised about it."

In the spring of 1990, Zappa fell ill and was rushed to a hospital emergency room. There, doctors detected prostate cancer, which had been spreading for as long as ten years and had grown to inoperable levels. He attempted radiation treatments, with limited success. He kept his condition a secret until the fall of 1991, when he backed out of appearing at Zappa's Universe, a series of tribute concerts featuring various ex-Mothers, the Persuasions, the Orchestra of Our Time, and other Zappa-related performers. Aware that news organizations were poised to report Zappa's illness to the public, Moon and Dweezil Zappa held a press conference to explain their father's absence.

Despite the debilitating effects of his disease and the ravages of the drugs used to treat it, Zappa became involved with the German new music outfit the Ensemble Modern. The group decamped to Los Angeles, where they rehearsed Zappa material for a series of concerts in September 1992 in Berlin, Frankfurt, and Vienna. These concerts were the source of the 1993 album *The Yellow Shark*, which featured the simmering "Outrage at Valdez" and the breathless "None

of the Above,” as well as new arrangements of the Zappa classics “Uncle Meat,” “Pound for a Brown,” and “Dog Breath Variations.”

Zappa’s ill health made it impossible for him to attend the entire series of shows. One of his last efforts with the Ensemble Modern was to record new versions of the complete works of Edgard Varèse. Frank Zappa passed away at home, surrounded by his wife and children, just before 6 p.m. on December 4, 1993.

The first Frank Zappa album to be released after his death was *Civilization Phase III*, in which some listeners heard the artist composing his own elegy. The album was a two-disc odyssey that combined Zappa’s Synclavier work, the Ensemble Modern, and theater-of-the-absurd voices retrieved from the *Lumpy Gravy* sessions and augmented by new utterances from Moon, Dweezil, and others. Some of Zappa’s most intricate, delicate music can be heard on it, alongside passages of unremitting darkness—as though Zappa stared into the void of the eternal, and captured what he saw and heard there.

In 1995, Frank Zappa was posthumously inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, with a short speech delivered by Lou Reed. Fans couldn’t help but notice the irony, since Zappa and Reed had famously disliked each other ever since 1966, when the Mothers and Reed’s Velvet Underground were Verve labelmates/rivals.

As the rivalries and hostilities of the past faded in the wake of Zappa’s death, his music was finding new life, in concert halls and on record. The Ensemble Modern released two more albums of Zappa compositions, and discs comprised of Zappa material were released by the Persuasions, big-band leader Ed Palermo, and others.

In the years since, the Zappa Family Trust has released numerous albums of archival Zappa material, with an unknown number of potential releases still in the pipeline as of this writing. Zappa’s industrious work ethic insured that left behind an extensive backlog of unreleased music.

Frank Zappa was a composer, a musician, an activist, a satirist, a cynic, and an idealist. His life and his work were constantly evolving and endlessly intertwined. In a process he called “conceptual continuity,” a melody written in the early 1960s could metamorphose into an orchestral composition in the 1990s, or absurd jokes about prunes or ponchos or mudsharks could resurface where they were least expected. Every minute aspect of his art became part of a career-long jigsaw puzzle in which the pieces fit together, but which in its enormity, could never be completed. Even after his death, the universe Zappa created is still being explored.

“I hate to be a guy sitting around saying, ‘I’m misunderstood,’” Zappa once reflected. “But it’s not even a matter of being misunderstood. It’s a matter of being uncomprehended. I have a lot of different musical questions, and I’m looking for a lot of different musical answers, and if the audience is similarly disposed, then they can take the course with me.”⁸

TIMELINE

May 22, 1963

Frank Zappa opens Studio Z in Cucamonga, California.

June 30, 1964

Frank Zappa joins the Mothers.

February 26, 1965

Freak Out!, the debut LP by the renamed Mothers of Invention, is released.

June 26, 1967

The Mothers celebrate the Summer of Love by releasing the savagely satirical *Absolutely Free*.

March 4, 1968

Zappa and the Mothers release *We're Only in It for the Money*.

June 30, 1968

Zappa's symphonic album *Lumpy Gravy* is released.

June 16, 1969

Trout Mask Replica, the Zappa-produced avant-garde classic by Captain Beefheart and His Magic Band, is released on Zappa's Straight label.

March 30, 1970

Zappa's largely instrumental album *Hot Rats* reaches the British Top Ten.

May 15, 1970

The Mothers of Invention perform Zappa's *200 Motels* with the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Zubin Mehta.

June 5–6, 1971

The Mothers perform a two-night stand at New York's Fillmore East. The shows are recorded for the album *Fillmore East, June 1971*. On the second night, the Mothers jam with John Lennon and Yoko Ono; recordings from that show will be released on the Lennon album *Sometime in New York City*.

September 7, 1973

Zappa and the Mothers release *Over-nite Sensation*, one of Zappa's most popular albums.

March 22, 1974

Apostrophe (') is released. It will reach Number Ten in the United States, making it Zappa's highest-charting album, as well as his second consecutive gold album.

April 11, 1975

Zappa and the Mothers begin a six-week tour in support of the album *Bongo Fury*, with the band joined by Captain Beefheart on vocals.

August 9, 1976

Grand Funk Railroad's album *Good Singin', Good Playin'*, produced by Frank Zappa, is released.

October 21, 1978

Frank Zappa hosts *Saturday Night Live*.

March 3, 1979

Zappa releases *Sheik Yerbouti*, a double LP that contains the popular disco parody "Dancin' Fool."

September 3, 1979

Zappa releases *Joe's Garage Act I*, which will be followed in two months by *Joe's Garage, Acts II and III*.

September 4, 1982

"Valley Girl," a collaboration between Zappa and daughter Moon Unit, enters the Top Forty, where it will peak at number two.

September 18, 1985

Frank Zappa testifies before the State Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, rebutting efforts by the Parents Music Resource Center to place warning labels on rock albums containing controversial language.

March 2, 1988

Zappa wins a Grammy for Best Rock Instrumental for his album *Jazz from Hell*.

June 9, 1988

Zappa performs his final concert at the Palasport in Genoa, Italy.

December 4, 1993

Frank Zappa passes away.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Freak Out!, 1966

Absolutely Free, 1967

We're Only in It for the Money, 1968

Uncle Meat, 1969

Hot Rats, 1969

Weasels Ripped My Flesh, 1970

Frank Zappa's 200 Motels, 1971

The Grand Wazoo, 1972

One Size Fits All, 1975

Bongo Fury, 1975

Sheik Yerbouti, 1979

Shut Up 'N Play Yer Guitar, 1981

Jazz from Hell, 1986

The Yellow Shark, 1993

Läther, 1996

NOTES

1. Frank Zappa, "Edgard Varèse: The Idol of My Youth," *Stereo Review* (June 1971), p. 61.

2. Patrick and Barbara Salvo, "Frank Zappa Interview," *Melody Maker* (January 4, 1974), available online at home.online.no/~corneliu/melodymaker.htm.
3. David Sheff, "Frank Zappa: The Playboy Interview," *Playboy* (May 2, 1993), p. 60.
4. *Ibid*, p. 62.
5. David Fricke, "Cruising Down Memory Lane with Frank Zappa," *Trouser Press* (April 1979), p. 20.
6. Andy Gill, "Frank's Wild Years," *Q Magazine*, December 1989, available online at home.online.no/~corneliu/q_interview.htm.
7. Kurt Loder, "Frank Zappa Interview," *Rolling Stone* (1988) available online at home.online.no/~corneliu/rs88.htm.
8. Robert L. Doerschuk and Jim Aikin, "Jazz from Hell," *Keyboard* (February 1987).

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Courtesy of Photofest.

Led Zeppelin

Andy Schwartz

BUILDING A STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN

Guitarist Jimmy Page, singer Robert Plant, drummer John Bonham, and bassist John Paul Jones formed Led Zeppelin in August 1968. One year later, the group had broken through to audiences on both sides of the Atlantic and its self-titled debut album had reached the U.K. and U.S. Top Ten.

At its inception, Led Zeppelin was derided by some critics as an overbearing, overloud, and mindless “heavy metal” band. In fact, their music has little of the spiritual gloom and gothic atmosphere characteristic of metal bands like Black Sabbath and Iron Maiden. Zeppelin’s repertoire drew upon diverse influences and traditions including blues from Chicago and the Mississippi

Delta, folk songs of the British Isles, funk and soul, mid-1960s psychedelic rock, and strains of Indian and North African music.

Nonetheless, Led Zeppelin exponentially increased the sonic intensity and visual flash of rock music with dramatic results. The group was at the forefront of a “third wave” in British rock music following the breakthrough of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones in 1963–65 and a subsequent crop of blues-oriented bands like Cream and the early Fleetwood Mac in 1966–68. In the case of many English groups of the first wave, the musicians grew up in the same locale and the bands sometimes played out a good part of their careers within that region. But the musicians who formed Led Zeppelin hailed from two disparate regions (suburban London and the West Midlands) and came together as aspiring professionals rather than as friends who’d grown up playing together.

Zeppelin largely avoided face-to-face contact with the music press and eschewed certain standard industry practices. The band rarely performed on television and maintained a policy (at least in the United Kingdom) of not releasing singles from its albums. Rather than limiting its popularity, the band’s stance lent it an aura of principled musical artistry and a reputation for not giving in to pop trends or commercial pressures.

Led Zeppelin was an enormously popular “people’s band” that also personified the wealth, privilege, and arrogance of international rock stardom at its 1970s apex. Particularly in the United States, their music appealed to teenagers for whom the Beatles and Stones, even Cream and Jimi Hendrix, represented the musical tastes of older siblings. This new generation of rock fans embraced Zeppelin and flocked to its concerts in increasingly larger venues, from 400-capacity clubs to open-air sports stadiums. When its career came to a sudden and tragic end in 1980, Led Zeppelin was one of the most popular and influential rock bands of all time.

JIMMY PAGE (GUITAR)

Led Zeppelin was a collective musical effort from its inception but guitarist Jimmy Page was its instigator, record producer, and driving force. Born January 9, 1944, James Patrick Page grew up in the London suburbs of Heston and Epsom. He was largely self-taught on his instrument that he picked up at age twelve when he fell under the spell of guitarist Scotty Moore’s licks on Elvis Presley’s Sun recording of “Baby, Let’s Play House.” From the 1950s rock and roll of Elvis and Gene Vincent, Jimmy worked his way back to electric blues guitarists like B.B. King and Otis Rush and such pre-World War II country blues artists as Robert Johnson and Skip James. He was also a fan of British folk music and in particular the acoustic guitar players Davy Graham and Bert Jansch.

Page's formal education ended at age fifteen and he joined a beat group called Neil Christian and the Crusaders with whom he made his earliest studio recordings including the 1962 single, "The Road to Love," and a cover of Big Joe Turner's R&B standard, "Honey Hush." When a bout of glandular fever curtailed his touring career, Jimmy enrolled in art school to study painting while continuing to sit in on jam sessions at the Marquee club in London. Mike Leander, a staff producer for Decca Records, was impressed with Page's talent and began to employ him on numerous recording sessions beginning in early 1963 with "Diamonds" by Jet Harris and Tony Meehan, which became a number one hit in the United Kingdom.

Accompanying performers both celebrated (Donovan, Brenda Lee) and obscure (the Lancastrians, Gregory Phillips), Jimmy Page is estimated to have played on 50–60 percent of the hit records recorded in London in the years 1963–66. Studio life, although often tedious and mechanical, afforded Page the chance to play different styles of pop music with a wide array of arrangements and instrumentation. Working with the producers Mike Leander and Shel Talmy, he absorbed the finer points of overdubbing, mixing, tape editing, microphone placement, and other technical aspects of recording. Page later applied this knowledge as a staff producer for Immediate Records where he worked with British blues singer John Mayall and former Velvet Underground vocalist Nico.

In May 1966, Jimmy joined guitarist Jeff Beck (a friend since primary school) for a "super-session" that also included Keith Moon and John Entwistle of the Who and another London sessioneer, John Paul Jones. Although their raucous instrumental, "Beck's Bolero," would not be released for another two years, the creative camaraderie of the session gave rise to talk of a new group with Beck, Page, and the Who rhythm team. When Keith Moon jokingly predicted that the band would "go over like a lead balloon," John Entwistle chimed in, "more like a lead zeppelin."

A few weeks later, Page joined Jeff Beck in a new configuration of Beck's group, the Yardbirds (guitarist Chris Dreya switched to bass). Among the lineup's few recordings was a careening version of the Johnny Burnette rockabilly classic "The Train Kept A-Rollin'," made for the soundtrack of Michelangelo Antonioni's 1966 film *Blowup*. This track ranks with the Yardbirds' greatest studio performances and was a signpost on the road to Led Zeppelin: Two years later, "The Train Kept A-Rollin'" would be the very first song ever played together by the four members of the new group.

In October 1966, when Jeff Beck exited in the midst of an American tour, the Yardbirds were poised to disintegrate. But Jimmy Page, at last extricated from the London studio scene, was thrilled to be on the road in the birthplace of blues, R&B, and rock and roll. The Yardbirds' 1966–67 gigs at Bill Graham's Fillmore Auditorium in San Francisco were Jimmy's introduction to the nascent American rock ballroom scene and a far cry from the screaming teenyboppers that still made up a good part of the band's British audience.

The guitarist participated in the Yardbirds' final studio album, *Little Games*, but it failed to revive the band's fading fortunes and in July 1968 drummer Jim McCarty and lead singer Keith Relf called it quits. Jimmy Page and Yardbirds manager Peter Grant hastened to assemble a new band to fulfill the contractual obligation of a two-week tour of Scandinavia. When Chris Dreja left to pursue a career in photography, bassist John Paul Jones was the first to sign on.

JOHN PAUL JONES (BASS AND KEYBOARDS)

John Paul Jones was born John Baldwin to musician parents on January 3, 1946, in the London suburb of Sidcup, Kent. John went on to study music at boarding school where he was equally influenced by blues, modern jazz, and classical music. In 1960, while serving as the organist and choirmaster at a local church, he bought his first bass guitar; two years later he joined his first professional rock band, fronted by Jet Harris and Tony Meehan. On Meehan's recommendation, Jones began receiving regular offers of studio session work.

In the period from 1964–68, John played bass guitar and/or keyboards on hundreds of sessions. His credits include the Rolling Stones, Herman's Hermits, Cat Stevens, and Rod Stewart. Both Jones and Jimmy Page played on Donovan's "Sunshine Superman," a number one U.S./number two U.K. hit in 1966. It was not unusual for John to compose a score for horns and strings the night before, pass out the music at the next day's session, and then conduct the ensemble for the recording.

By 1968, Jones was burnt out from the grinding routine. "I was making a fortune but I wasn't enjoying it anymore," he told Dave Lewis in a 1997 interview. "It was my wife Mo who noticed an item in [English music paper] *Disc* saying that Jimmy was forming a new band out of the old Yardbirds. She prompted me to phone him up. It was the chance to do something different at last."

"I knew [Page] well from the session scene, of course, he was a very respected name. So I rang him up. He was just about to go up to Birmingham to see Robert."¹

ROBERT PLANT (VOCALS, HARMONICA)

Robert Plant was born August 20, 1948, in West Bromwich and grew up in Halesowen. Both towns are in the West Midlands region of Britain, near the city of Birmingham and close to the rural area known as "the Black Country." This name may have derived from the above-ground seams of coal that ran through the landscape or from the black smoke that poured from its factories

and mines in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, the forbidding region of Mordor is said to be based on the historic ambience of the Black Country. Despite its history of environmental degradation, the area also contains swaths of beautiful countryside that, along with Tolkien's trilogy, would later inspire some of Plant's pastoral fantasies as a songwriter.

Beginning in his mid-teens, Robert eschewed a career in accounting to sing with a succession of Birmingham-based bands whose styles reflected his eclectic musical tastes. The Crawling Kingsnakes played blues in emulation of Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf; Listen was a white-soul outfit that released a cover version of the Young Rascals' U.S. hit "You Better Run." Band of Joy, with John Bonham on drums, mixed original material with circa-1967 covers of psychedelic rock songs by Buffalo Springfield ("For What It's Worth") and the Jimi Hendrix Experience ("Hey Joe"). None of these groups achieved notable success beyond the Midlands but they gave Robert the chance to strengthen his naturally powerful voice and gain invaluable stage experience.

Plant was working with yet another Midlands band, Hobbstweedle, when Jimmy Page traveled to Birmingham to hear him. The guitarist's first thought was that Plant must have some fatal personality defect: Why else would a vocalist of his caliber still be toiling away in provincial obscurity? As it turned out, the two musicians got on famously from their first record listening session. "Babe I'm Gonna Leave You" by Joan Baez and "You Shook Me" by Muddy Waters were among the tracks that Jimmy played for Robert as examples of the kind of material he aspired to perform with his new band.

Jimmy Page remembers discussing with Plant "what the band's driving force should be, the acoustic and electric. Then I saw John Bonham playing with [American singer-songwriter] Tim Rose at a London club and I knew I didn't have to look any further."²

JOHN BONHAM (DRUMS)

John Henry Bonham was born May 31, 1948, in Redditch, Worcestershire, in the heart of the Black Country. By the age of five, he was banging incessantly on tin cans and empty boxes using forks and knives for drumsticks. His exasperated mother, Joan, bought the boy a snare drum when he was ten; at fifteen, Jack Bonham gave his son the gift of a cheap, badly rusted drum kit which was soon replaced by a professional-quality Premier set. John had been expected to follow his father into the building trades but now there was no turning back: "I was determined to be a drummer as soon as I left school. I was so keen [that] I would have played for nothing. In fact I did for a long time."³

Bonham was only seventeen when he married Patricia Phillips; when their first child, Jason, was born in 1966, the impoverished couple was living in a cramped fifteen-foot house trailer. But the power and precision of his drumming

with regional bands like the Blue Star Trio, the Senators, and Way of Life made “Bonzo” into a local legend in the West Midlands.

Bonham played so loudly that at least one club owner refused to hire any band that included him. But in tandem with his brute power there was a propulsive sense of swing. As in the big-band drumming of Buddy Rich and Gene Krupa, two of his percussive idols, this element of John’s playing *lifted* Led Zeppelin’s music rather than simply nailing it to the floor—and he could swing whether playing with sticks or brushes or even his bare hands. Bonham was one of the first “name” drummers in rock to utilize a smaller kit with very large diameter shells (including his trademark oversized twenty-six-inch bass drum) but many observers agreed that he could produce his huge sound on almost any drum set.

“The Band of Joy had been the real schooling for Bonzo and myself for taking material and stretching it, breaking down the general order of the pop song,” Plant later recalled. “So meeting Jimmy and Jonesy was like a gathering of souls, because Jimmy had been doing that with the Yardbirds in a different form.”⁴

On August 19, 1968, the four musicians gathered for the first time in a small rehearsal room at 22 Gerrard Street in London. Since no one had any original material at hand, they ended up playing the Yardbirds’ arrangement of “The Train Kept A-Rollin’” along with some other blues and rockabilly numbers. John Paul Jones later described this inaugural jam as “quite a stunning experience—wonderful, very exhilarating.”⁵

As “The Yardbirds featuring Jimmy Page,” the quartet commenced a two-week tour of Scandinavia that began with their first public performance on September 7 in Copenhagen. On October 15, they made their live debut as Led Zeppelin at Surrey University. With an eye already cast in the direction of the United States, Jimmy Page and band manager Peter Grant had decided to drop the “a” from “lead” in the belief that Americans would mistakenly pronounce it “leed.”

Peter Grant (born November 1, 1935) had worked around the edges of British show business in the 1950s as a talent booker, bouncer, semi-professional wrestler, and film actor. In 1963, he went to work for pop music promoter Don Arden as a tour manager accompanying visiting American rockers including Gene Vincent, Bo Diddley, and the Everly Brothers. Grant took over management of the Yardbirds in late 1966 after Jimmy Page had joined the band and later hired Richard Cole as the band’s road manager for its final American tour in 1968. Both men would play key roles in the Led Zeppelin story.

Standing approximately six feet, six inches and weighing more than 300 pounds, Peter Grant was an imposing figure—and an extremely intimidating one whenever he chose to be. He was completely and unceasingly devoted to Led Zeppelin: Its four members placed their careers, their fortunes, and sometimes their very lives in his meaty hands. It is emblematic of the faith and trust they shared that no written contract ever existed between Peter Grant and Led Zeppelin.

LED ZEPPELIN (DEBUT)

On September 27, 1968, Led Zeppelin entered Olympic Studios in London. Less than two weeks later, in roughly thirty-five hours of actual studio time, the self-titled debut album, *Led Zeppelin*, was completed. Financed by Peter Grant and Jimmy Page, *Led Zeppelin* was safely “in the can” when Atlantic Records executive Jerry Wexler—acting on a tip from British pop singer Dusty Springfield—signed the group to a one-year contract with four one-year options for an advance of £110,000 (at the time, about U.S. \$210,000). Although the next generation of superstars would command multi-million-dollar advances, in 1968 this was an unprecedented amount of money for a record company to pay for a rock band. Most important, Led Zeppelin was guaranteed creative control over the content and packaging of its recordings.

Olympic Studios possessed only a four-track recorder but it had a superior “room sound.” Combining this natural ambience with the judicious use of echo and careful microphone placement, album producer Page and engineer Glyn Johns created a recording of unusual depth and spaciousness—a sort of supercharged version of the atmospheric Sun Records sound that had captivated Page in his adolescence. Even on the heaviest tracks, each instrument was clearly distinguishable and carefully balanced within the mix.

As a guitarist, Page was more strident than Eric Clapton and less exploratory than Jimi Hendrix. But with his keen ear for recorded sound, he carefully positioned each chord or single-note line within a particular arrangement. Robert Plant, still a work in progress, made up for his lack of subtlety with a palpable air of excitement and enough lung power to match Page blow for blow. John Paul Jones added sturdy bass lines, occasional keyboard touches, and practiced arranging skills; John Bonham was John Bonham, with his huge sound and unerring “in the pocket” time.

The material was assembled hastily but captured the band’s range and eclecticism. The album included two Chicago blues standards (“I Can’t Quit You Baby” and “You Shook Me”), a rearranged holdover from the Yardbirds’ stage show (the intense, doomy “Dazed and Confused”), a pair of folk-based tracks (“Babe I’m Gonna Leave You” and Page’s acoustic showpiece “Black Mountain Side”), and some furious hard rock riffs hitched to catchy pop choruses (“Good Times, Bad Times,” “Communication Breakdown”).

Led Zeppelin set another pattern for the band’s future output in that several songs had been “borrowed” from their original sources without proper credit. “Dazed and Confused” was credited to Jimmy Page when in fact it had been composed by the American singer-songwriter Jake Holmes and released on his 1967 album *The Above-Ground Sound of Jake Holmes*. “Babe, I’m Gonna Leave You,” the Joan Baez recording that Jimmy had played for Robert in their first meeting, somehow became a Page/Plant composition when it appeared on *Led Zeppelin*. (The name of Anne Bredon was added to the credits on later pressings.)

Critical response in Britain was largely favorable. Writing in the counter-culture magazine *Oz*, Felix Dennis likened the disc's impact to that of the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper* and the Byrds' *Younger Than Yesterday*: "Very occasionally a long-playing record is released that defies immediate classification or description, simply because it's so obviously a turning point in rock music that only time proves capable of shifting it into eventual perspective. . . . This Led Zeppelin album is like that."⁶ Chris Welch of the U.K. music weekly *Melody Maker* was another influential journalist who championed the band from the beginning.

But so far as Peter Grant was concerned, the United States was *the* key market for his band—and there press reaction was decidedly cool, even caustic. In *Rolling Stone*—by far the most influential American rock magazine—reviewer John Mendelsohn dismissed Jimmy Page as "a very limited producer and a writer of weak, unimaginative songs" and derided Robert Plant for his "strained and unconvincing shouting."⁷ The group was deeply wounded by this harsh critique and for years thereafter Led Zeppelin declined any and all interview requests from *Rolling Stone*. Page, especially, became suspicious and cynical in his attitude toward the press.

When Atlantic released *Led Zeppelin* on January 12, 1969, the band was already two weeks into its first U.S. tour, which began December 26, 1968, in Denver, Colorado. On most dates, Led Zeppelin supported the American band Vanilla Fudge but in January 1969 they headlined the Whisky A Go Go in Los Angeles for a reputation-making multi-night stand. At Bill Graham's Fillmore West in San Francisco, appearing on the bottom of the bill, Led Zeppelin blew away both blues singer Taj Mahal and hometown favorites Country Joe and the Fish. To close out a four-night stand (January 23–26) at the Boston Tea Party in Boston, Massachusetts, the band played for more than four hours—performing the Zeppelin set list twice before joyfully improvising on songs by the Who, the Beatles, and the Rolling Stones.

At a time when much live rock music was performed in the rambling jam style of the Grateful Dead and Jefferson Airplane, Led Zeppelin played with almost overwhelming intensity and expertly controlled dynamics. Their set lists were plotted for maximum impact while allowing for extensive improvisation as the group ranged through intense electric songs and gentle acoustic numbers. Zeppelin had a matched pair of charismatic front men in Jimmy Page and Robert Plant, the guitarist's dark, somewhat forbidding charisma and dancing attack contrasting with the singer's blonde sensuality and statuesque physique.

As author and academic Susan Fast later noted:

The "theatricality" of the performances, their physicality (including the intense depth and volume of the sound), their enormous length, the sometimes meandering improvisations, and even Page's "sloppy" playing—moments during which he is clearly more interested in creating a particular emotional landscape

than in getting all the notes right—were all pressed into the service of celebrating an ecstatic loss of control. . . . [Led Zeppelin] represents spirit of carnivalesque laughter, with its “vulgar, ‘earthy’ quality” and its ability to revive.⁸

In the summer of 1969, Led Zeppelin appeared at several major American rock festivals including the Atlanta International Pop Festival (July 5), the Seattle Pop Festival (July 27), and the Texas International Pop Festival (August 31); in October the band sold out Carnegie Hall in New York. *Led Zeppelin* sold nearly 500,000 copies in its first six months of U.S. release; in July it was certified gold by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA). The album spent a total of ninety-five weeks on the *Billboard* chart, peaking at number ten in the United States and at number six in the United Kingdom. The band achieved these feats largely through the feverish word of mouth created by its live performances, supplemented by increasing if sometimes grudging exposure on FM rock radio (a format then barely three years old).

In Great Britain, album sales were more closely tied to pop radio airplay—which was rarely given to songs of more than three minutes’ duration. That the band refused to allow Atlantic’s U.K. affiliate to edit or release any tracks as singles made the Top Ten breakthrough of *Led Zeppelin* all the more remarkable.

LED ZEPPELIN II

Today it would be unthinkable for a band of Zeppelin’s stature to release two full albums within a single year. *Led Zeppelin II*, however, was released in November 1969—the product of sessions in New York, Los Angeles, and Memphis booked whenever the tour schedule permitted. Many rock performers have created stellar debut albums only to fall short on their sophomore outings. *Led Zeppelin II* maintained the overall quality level of its predecessor while taking the band’s sound in some new directions.

“Thank You,” a majestic mid-tempo song, featured John Paul Jones’s churchy organ, a neat Jimmy Page break on acoustic twelve-string, and a surprisingly tender vocal by Robert Plant (who’d written the lyric for his wife, Maureen). “Heartbreaker” was a cavernous stomper with a furious extended solo by Page. Howlin’ Wolf’s “Killing Floor” provided both the main lyric and guitar riff of “The Lemon Song” before Zeppelin turned it into a jazzy blues jam powered by Jones’s fluid bass lines and some adept rhythmic shifts. “Moby Dick” showcased an abbreviated five-minute version of the John Bonham drum feature that would run for fifteen minutes or more in live performance.

The album’s opening track would become one of Led Zeppelin’s signature songs. “You Need Love” was an obscure Muddy Waters blues number later covered by a British band, the Small Faces. Zeppelin powered up the Faces’ main riff, inserted a noisy, almost avant-garde “freak out” in mid-song, and

created the orgasmic “Whole Lotta Love”—credited to Page/Plant/Jones/Bonham. (Blues songwriter Willie Dixon, the composer of “You Need Love,” won a substantial out-of-court settlement years later.)

Led Zeppelin II shot to number one in Great Britain and—despite another sarcastic thumbs-down from John Mendelsohn in *Rolling Stone*—topped the *Billboard* album chart for seven straight weeks. (The album was certified by the RIAA in November 1999 for sales of over 12 million copies.) Contrary to the group’s stated wishes, Atlantic executives edited and released a U.S. single of “Whole Lotta Love.” It reached number four on the Hot 100, sold over one million copies, and likely sparked sales of several hundred thousand albums. Nevertheless, Peter Grant was livid.

On January 9, 1970—Jimmy Page’s twenty-sixth birthday—Led Zeppelin gave a triumphant performance at the Royal Albert Hall in London. Filmed for the BBC and later issued as disc one of a double DVD set, it captures the band in a peak early performance. Without the laser light shows and pyrotechnic displays of its later years, Led Zeppelin projects enough sound, energy, and bravado to fill a stadium while maintaining a close-knit, even intimate collective stage presence.

From December 28, 1968, through April 18, 1970, Led Zeppelin played over 150 shows. It was a fast-paced and sometimes grueling regimen with peaks of frenzied excitement dropping off sharply into boredom, restlessness, and longing for home and family. (Plant, Jones, and Bonham all had wives and young children back in England.) Richard Cole’s best-selling tell-all, *Stairway to Heaven: Led Zeppelin Uncensored*, goes into extensive detail about his charges’ notorious exploits: the wholesale destruction of hotel rooms, practical “jokes” both revolting and frightening, and some truly Olympian drinking bouts usually led by John Bonham. (In hindsight, the drummer seems to have suffered chronic, debilitating anxiety caused by the fear of flying and the lengthy separations from his family.) At one post-concert celebration in Frankfurt, Germany, the four musicians along with Cole and Peter Grant “ordered and consumed . . . a total of 280 drinks among the six of us” in four hours.⁹

LED ZEPPELIN III

During a much-needed break in May 1970, Robert Plant and Jimmy Page retreated to a rented cottage in rural Wales called Bron-Yr-Aur (pronounced “Bron-raar”). Without the distraction of friends and family (or even running water), they began to compose new acoustic-based material for a third album. In June, the band commenced recording at Headley Grange—a large, drafty country estate built in 1795—using the Rolling Stones’ mobile unit. “Immigrant Song” and “Out on the Tiles” were potent heavy rock numbers but acoustic songs like “That’s the Way” and “Bron-Yr-Aur Stomp” predominated. Page came

up with a fresh arrangement of the traditional folk ballad “Gallows Pole” while “Hats off to (Roy) Harper” was an extended slide guitar workout built upon Bukka White’s classic Delta blues “Shake ‘Em on Down.”

June 28 found Led Zeppelin back in Britain to headline the Bath Festival of Blues and Progressive Music before an audience of over 200,000. A watershed night in the band’s history, it began at sunset with the opening blast of “Immigrant Song,” one of several numbers performed from the as-yet-unreleased *Led Zeppelin III*, progressed through a newly developed acoustic mini-set, and ended with five encores—the last a frenetic medley of rock and roll classics by Little Richard, Chuck Berry, and Elvis Presley. The Bath Festival cemented Zeppelin’s reputation in Britain as a superstar band on a par with the Who and the Stones.

Led Zeppelin would not perform again in the United Kingdom for nearly nine months. Instead, the band went back to the recording studio to complete basic tracks for the album and then returned to North America in mid-August. On September 19, 1970, nearly eighteen months of touring ended with sold-out early and late shows at New York’s Madison Square Garden for a total box office take in excess of \$200,000.

Led Zeppelin III promptly topped the American and British charts when it was released in October. Yet the album was considered a commercial disappointment when it remained on the *Billboard* list for a mere forty-two weeks, less than half as long as its predecessors. Critical response to the acoustic songs was lukewarm; Led Zeppelin was even accused of copying Crosby, Stills, and Nash. *Rolling Stone* reviewer Lester Bangs wrote that “my main impression was the consistent anonymity of most of the songs” while singling out “That’s the Way” as “the first song they’ve done that has truly moved me. Son of a gun, it’s beautiful.”¹⁰

Robert Plant’s lyrics to “That’s the Way” depict two boyhood friends and the feelings of loss and regret as they grow apart. Some fans and critics have interpreted the song as a metaphor for the band’s relationship with America. The country that had rushed to embrace Led Zeppelin’s music and made the band’s fortune was also teeming with racial tension, police brutality, and gun violence. (Neither Plant nor John Bonham had ever seen an armed policeman until they came to the United States.) In *Stairway to Heaven*, Richard Cole writes of a biker who tried to stab him in a Greenwich Village bar and an irate Memphis concert promoter who pulled a pistol on Peter Grant.

UNTITLED (LED ZEPPELIN IV)

In September 1970, the band returned home to England where Jimmy Page and Robert Plant spent another week working together at Bron-Yr-Aur. Recording sessions began at Island Studios in London but by the New Year, the band was back at Headley Grange where chief engineer Andy Johns once

again manned the Rolling Stones mobile unit. With its gardens and fireplaces, the relaxed atmosphere of the rambling old house encouraged spontaneous sonic experimentation: Bonham setting up his drums in a hallway, Page placing guitar amps in cupboards and closets.

Here the band created the untitled album sometimes known as *Zoso* (for one of the four runic symbols that appear on the disc label) or *Four Symbols* but more often as simply *Led Zeppelin IV*. Regardless, it is *the* all-time classic Zeppelin album: a pinnacle of recorded rock music that flows like one long song, a seamless blend of electric and acoustic music with all of the “light and shade” that Jimmy Page had envisioned in the sound of his dream band.

John Paul Jones brought in a long, complicated blues line that took many hours for the musicians to master. In one section, the instrumentalists are playing entirely different time signatures: Page (guitar) and Jones (bass) in 9/8 and then 5/4, Bonham (drums) in straight 4/4. This challenging riff evolved into “Black Dog,” which Barney Hoskyns calls “one of the most fiendishly intricate songs in all of rock and roll” as well as “one of most diabolically powerful tracks in the Led Zeppelin catalog.”¹¹ On another day, the band had made numerous attempts to record another song (the Indian-influenced “Four Sticks”) when suddenly a frustrated John Bonham hammered out the drum intro to Little Richard’s “Keep A-Knockin’” and Page burst into an infectious Chuck Berry-inspired riff. Simply titled “Rock and Roll,” the new tune was quickly completed and then recorded in just three takes with Rolling Stones road manager Ian Stewart on boogie-woogie piano.

The drumless “Battle of Evermore,” with John Paul Jones on mandolin, is one of several songs in the Zeppelin catalog in which Robert Plant makes oblique or explicit lyrical references to characters from the works of Tolkien (in this case, *The Return of the King*). Robert performed the song as a soaring duet with Sandy Denny—the golden voice of British folk-rock and the only non-member ever to sing on a Led Zeppelin recording. The album’s closing track, “When the Levee Breaks,” was a mournful, droning blues masterpiece propelled by the rolling thunder of Bonham’s drums and Page’s shimmering slide guitar. The members of Zeppelin shared composer credits with country blues singer Memphis Minnie (Minnie Lawler), who wrote and recorded the song two years after the 1927 Mississippi River flood that displaced close to one million people.

In April 1970, Jimmy Page had begun working on a long multi-part song that finally came together at Headley Grange. There, Page and Jones painstakingly worked out the instrumental sections, from the delicate, almost medieval opening (with Jimmy’s acoustic guitar and three recorder parts played by JP) to the majestic, fully electric finish. During the first full rehearsal of the track, Plant dashed off most of the lyrics including the title phrase: “Stairway to Heaven.” The eight-minute track was recorded in February 1971 in London, made its live debut on March 5 at a show in Belfast, and soon became a cornerstone of the band’s live show.

“Stairway to Heaven” seemed to resonate with its listeners as no other Zeppelin song before or after: as a lyrical fable of false materialism and spiritual transcendence, a dramatic showcase for Page’s towering guitar architecture, a very catchy tune, or some combination of all these and more. Decades of saturation radio airplay have turned “Stairway to Heaven” into a cliché of progressive rock and 1970s pop culture. In 1988, the Texas post-punk band Butthole Surfers released an album titled *Hairway to Steven*; in January 1990, a Florida radio station played “Stairway to Heaven” for twenty-four hours to introduce its short-lived all-Led Zeppelin format. In 1993, the Australian singer Rolf Harris had a number seven hit in the United Kingdom with a cover of the song; country superstar Dolly Parton recorded a bluegrass “Stairway” on her 2002 album *Halos & Horns*.

Led Zeppelin IV was released in the United States on November 8, 1971, and in the United Kingdom on November 19; after one week, it was certified gold by the RIAA for U.S. sales of over 500,000 copies. The album shot to number one in Britain; it peaked at number two in the United States, locked out of the top spot by Carole King’s *Tapestry* (a number one album for fifteen weeks). The band’s continual touring sustained the disc’s chart performance: *Led Zeppelin IV* remained in the Top Sixty for three and half years and ultimately logged 259 weeks on the *Billboard* chart.

Even *Rolling Stone* seemed to grasp that the band had reached a new creative peak. In his review, Lenny Kaye hailed *Led Zeppelin IV* as “an album which is remarkable for its low-keyed and tasteful subtlety. . . . What’s been saved is the pumping adrenaline drive that held the key to such classics as ‘Communication Breakdown’ and ‘Whole Lotta Love,’ the incredibly sharp and precise vocal dynamism of Robert Plant, and some of the tightest arranging and producing Jimmy Page has yet seen his way toward doing.”¹² Robert Christgau of *The Village Voice* called the disc “the definitive Led Zeppelin and hence heavy metal album” and singled out “When the Levee Breaks” as a “triumph.”¹³

Black Sabbath: Electric Funeral

The high-volume performances of Jimi Hendrix and Cream in the late 1960s raised the ante for rock music in terms of power, amplification, and instrumental virtuosity. Beginning with the Rolling Stones’ North American tour of 1969, the most popular rock performers began to migrate from the Fillmore-type ballrooms to sports arenas with a capacity of 10,000 and more.

These conditions set the stage for the rise of heavy metal. The phrase first appeared in William Burroughs’s 1962 novel *The Soft Machine* (“the Heavy Metal Kid”) and was used by Steppenwolf in the 1968 hit “Born to be Wild.” The term “heavy metal” became a catchall name applied across the board to image-conscious L.A. bands like Mötley Crüe and Poison, the high-powered

Texas boogie-blues of ZZ Top, and the complex futurist epics of Canadian power trio Rush.

Black Sabbath was one of the most influential heavy metal bands of all time. John “Ozzy” Osbourne (lead vocals), Tony Iommi (guitar), Terence “Geezer” Butler (bass), and Bill Ward (drums) all came from working-class families in the northern English city of Birmingham. This once-thriving industrial region was already in decline by 1970 when the band released its self-titled debut album, which may partly explain the dank, despairing atmosphere of Black Sabbath songs like “Paranoid” and “Children of the Grave.”

Sabbath was never a critical or industry favorite and never had a U.S. Top Forty single. But the group’s lumbering power trio sound and lyrical themes of despair, madness, and the occult resonated with white working-class listeners on both sides of the Atlantic, while countless aspiring rock guitarists absorbed Tony Iommi’s simple but indelible riffs. Each of Black Sabbath’s first five LPs reached the U.S. Top Thirty and quickly sold in excess of one million copies.

In 1979, Ozzy Osbourne left the group to establish a thriving solo career. His 1979 album *Diary of a Madman*, a heavy metal classic featuring the late guitarist Randy Rhoads, was certified triple platinum and reached the U.S. Top Ten. In 1996, Ozzy and his wife/manager Sharon Osbourne created Ozzfest, a touring festival of hard rock and metal bands. It became a hugely successful (and profitable) annual event for which the original Black Sabbath united on several occasions. Ozzy himself gradually metamorphosed from a widely denounced parental nightmare in the tradition of the early Rolling Stones or Alice Cooper into the damaged but loving and witty father figure of his MTV reality show, *The Osbournes*, one of the most successful series in the network’s history.

Andy Schwartz

Led Zeppelin IV hit the street as the band began a sixteen-date tour of the United Kingdom. (In September the group had made its first foray to the Far East with five hugely successful shows in Japan; Page and Plant aspired to perform in every country in the world.) Although most shows on this and subsequent tours went off without major incident, there was always the chance that a Led Zeppelin concert could get dangerously out of control. A melee could be touched off by ticket-less fans seeking entry to the show, by the actions of overly aggressive police and security, or by the sheer pandemonium-inducing power of the band’s performance.

On July 5, 1971, a show at the Vigorelli Velodromo in Milan, Italy, had ended after just forty minutes when police fired teargas inside the overcrowded stadium. The band members barricaded themselves in a small room backstage while their equipment was trashed; several Zeppelin roadies were among the dozens injured and the group never again appeared in Italy. On August 19, 1971—Robert Plant’s twenty-third birthday—at the Pacific Coliseum in Vancouver, British Columbia, some 3,000 fans showed up without tickets.

In the ensuing fracas with police, thirty-five people were injured; damage to the venue led Vancouver city officials, the following year, to deny the band a performing license for an already sold-out show (which then was moved to the Seattle Coliseum in Washington State).

AC/DC: Highway to Hell

If Black Sabbath represented the gloom-and-doom side of heavy metal, AC/DC was pure party music—that is, if the party involved superhuman alcohol consumption, cartoonishly exaggerated sexual activity, and a general atmosphere of non-stop “rocking out” to songs like “Highway to Hell” and “You Shook Me All Night Long.”

Like Sabbath, AC/DC evolved as a “people’s band” that never had a U.S. Top Twenty single and was largely overlooked by the rock press. The group’s lasting popularity may be attributed in large part to the single-minded consistency of its sound, with its histrionic vocals, thunderous 4/4 drumming, and manic Chuck Berry–inspired guitar solos. Fans also delight in certain unchanging aspects of AC/DC’s legendary live shows, such as the short-pants schoolboy’s outfit still worn by guitarist Angus Young (who turned fifty in 2005).

Brothers Malcolm Young (rhythm guitar) and Angus Young (lead guitar) founded AC/DC in 1973 in Sydney, Australia. Their older brother, George Young, and his partner, Harry Vanda, have co-produced the majority of AC/DC’s twenty-plus albums. The brothers Young later recruited Bon Scott as lead singer and eventually settled on the rhythm section of Mark Evans (bass) and Phil Rudd (drums). Evans departed in 1977 and was replaced by Cliff Williams; Rudd left in 1982 but returned—twelve years later—after overcoming drug and alcohol problems.

Highway to Hell, a U.S. Top Twenty hit in 1979, was the product of five years of relentless touring and increasing support from rock radio programmers. Bon Scott died February 20, 1980, after an all-night drinking binge and was soon replaced by Brian Johnson. Angus, Malcolm, and their new vocalist quickly composed ten songs for a new album that was released in July 1980.

That album was *Back in Black*, which today is widely believed to be the second best-selling album of all time after *Thriller* by Michael Jackson. *Back in Black* is RIAA-certified for U.S. sales of over 21 million with estimated worldwide sales of more than 40 million. After a decline in album (though not concert ticket) sales in the latter half of the 1980s, the group made a strong comeback in the 1990s with three albums that reached the U.S. Top Ten: *The Razor’s Edge* (1990), *Ballbreaker* (1995), and *Stiff Upper Lip* (2000).

AC/DC has done one thing longer and better than anyone else, and that is to blithely span the musical distance between heavy metal and the original rock and roll of the 1950s. For this singular achievement, it is a legitimate contender for the title of “the world’s greatest rock and roll band.”

A. S.

HOUSES OF THE HOLY

Recording sessions for a fifth studio album began in earnest in the early spring of 1972 after the band's return to England from a February tour of Australia and New Zealand. *Led Zeppelin IV* would have been a difficult act for anyone to follow and by comparison *Houses of the Holy* was a scattershot collection. "No Quarter" and "The Ocean" were new classics that ranked with the band's best; another strong track, "Over the Hills and Far Away," dated back three years to the first Page/Plant writing session at Bron-Yr-Aur. But neither an odd-metered James Brown parody called "The Crunge" nor the heavy-handed reggae-cum-doo-wop song "D'Yer Maker" represented Led Zeppelin at its best. The American rock critic Metal Mike Saunders called the album "awful," a set of "nondescript" songs and arrangements "nowhere near dynamic enough to rescue the material."¹⁴

Predictably, the fans paid no mind and elevated *Houses of the Holy* to number one soon after its release on March 28, 1973. The album spent ninety-nine weeks on the chart; in November 1999, *Houses* was certified for sales of 11 million units by the RIAA.

Beginning in early May and continuing through late July, Led Zeppelin's 1973 U.S. tour was an arduous trek of nearly four months—and an unprecedented harvest of wealth. Most rock acts of the period worked for a guaranteed fee versus 60 percent of gross ticket sales but now Peter Grant was in a position to demand a straight 90 percent of the gross from local promoters. A night's work by his client could bring in \$80–90,000 after expenses with the manager and the musicians sharing equally in the proceeds. Led Zeppelin had started in clubs, moved to theaters, and then to indoor arenas; now the band was headlining some of the largest sports stadiums in America. A May 5 performance at Tampa Stadium in Florida drew 56,800 fans and broke an attendance record set by the Beatles at Shea Stadium in 1965.

Metallica: Ride the Lightning

By 1983, Black Sabbath was a spent force, AC/DC was coming down from the career high of *Back in Black*, and the L.A. glam-metal wave was just approaching the California coastline. Into this temporary gap marched Metallica, whose 1983 debut album *Kill 'Em All* introduced listeners to what would become the most popular and influential American metal band of the next two decades.

There was some of hard-core punk's aggression and venom in Metallica's "thrash metal" music. But the music closest to the hearts of founding members James Hetfield (vocals, guitar) and Lars Ulrich (drums) was the so-called New Wave of British Heavy Metal such as Judas Priest, Diamond Head, and the deeply obscure Vardis. On *Kill 'Em All*, Metallica—now including lead guitarist Kirk Hammett and bassist Cliff Burton—matched their high-volume, rapid-fire riffs with impressive songwriting skills. *Ride the Lightning* (1984) was a virtual

concept album about death: by suicide (“Fade to Black”), in warfare (“For Whom the Bell Tolls”), and by execution (“Ride the Lightning”).

In 1986, *Master of Puppets* marked the creative pinnacle of this first phase of Metallica’s development, and their final outing as a support band was that year’s tour with Ozzy Osbourne. The former Black Sabbath front man shuffled around the stage wearing a frosted bouffant and a silver lamé suit. By contrast, Metallica played with unrestrained ferocity: clad in jeans and T-shirts, the four musicians looked as though they’d climbed out of the fourth row to commandeer the show. Tragically, Cliff Burton was killed in September 1986 when Metallica’s bus went off the road during a Scandinavian tour. He was replaced by Jason Newsted, who remained with the group until 2003 when he left and was replaced in turn by ex-Suicidal Tendencies and Ozzy Osbourne bassist Robert Trujillo.

Combining genuine talent with canny marketing strategies, Metallica have attained a dual status that is almost unique in rock and roll history. In the years since their number one album *Metallica* (1991), with its shorter and more radio-friendly songs, they have become one of the world’s most popular rock bands with total career sales of more than 57 million albums in the United States alone. At the same time, the group has retained the respect of the rock press and, more important, that of their core metal fandom. On the front of a T-shirt or the back of a leather jacket, the name “Metallica” still connotes something of the anti-social anger and musical raw power that gave rise to a rock and roll legend.

A. S.

By the end of the tour, Grant and Richard Cole had leased a customized forty-seat Boeing 720B jet dubbed “The Starship” for the exclusive use of Led Zeppelin. The band hired an independent publicist, a savvy New Yorker named Danny Goldberg, and relations with the press began to improve. Journalists began to notice that—on the charts and on tour—Led Zeppelin were outselling those longtime critical favorites, the Rolling Stones.

The 1973 tour closed with three sold-out nights at Madison Square Garden; as it turned out, these would be the band’s last live shows for many months. English director Joe Massot was hired to film the performances as the basis for a concert documentary titled *The Song Remains the Same*. Most of the live footage used in the film was from the first concert; it was, Jimmy Page admitted, “not one of the magic nights”¹⁵ for the road-weary foursome.

The gaps between stage numbers were filled with footage of the individual musicians in various real and imagined settings—John Bonham driving a tractor on his Black Country farm, for example, or Page in an eerie sequence inspired by his passionate interest in the occult. The guitarist had become a devoted acolyte of the occult author and “black arts” experimenter Aleister Crowley, who had died in 1947. Page amassed one of the world’s largest

collections of Crowley manuscripts and memorabilia, purchased Crowley's former home on Loch Ness in Scotland, and in 1975 opened a London bookshop called Equinox that specialized in occult works.

Jimmy later described the completion of *The Song Remains the Same* as “an incredible uphill struggle. . . . The director was very stubborn and it would have been a lot easier had he just done what he'd been asked to do.”¹⁶ (Massot was replaced by Peter Clifton before the film's completion.)

“It was a massive compromise,” John Paul Jones recalled. “We never knew what was happening. When we first had the idea, it was a relatively simple one—to film some shows and then release it as a film. Little did we know how difficult it would all become.”¹⁷ Three years would pass before *The Song Remains the Same* was finally released to theaters.

During the Madison Square Garden run, the band took up residence at the Drake Hotel in Manhattan where Richard Cole rented a hotel safe deposit box to secure credit cards, passports, and money. Hours before the third and final show on July 29, the road manager opened the safe and found it emptied of \$203,000 in cash—an amount equal to about half the gross income from the New York concerts. Cole, who was supposed to have the only key, swore he hadn't taken the money and had no idea who did. The theft made the front pages of the New York tabloids but police made no arrests; later the band filed suit against the hotel and collected a substantial settlement.

PHYSICAL GRAFFITI

In January 1974, Peter Grant and Led Zeppelin hosted a series of gala receptions in London, New York, and Los Angeles to announce the release of a new Led Zeppelin double album, *Physical Graffiti*, on the band's own Swan Song Records and the installation of Danny Goldberg as president of the label. (Zeppelin's original Atlantic contract had expired but Atlantic would distribute the new imprint worldwide.) Swan Song's first signing, the British hard rock band Bad Company, topped the *Billboard* chart with its self-titled Swan Song debut (five million sold) and released three more platinum or multi-platinum albums on the label. Other Swan Song artists—including 1960s survivors the Pretty Things, Scottish rock-soul singer Maggie Bell, and roots-rocker Dave Edmunds—never approached Bad Company's level of commercial success but enjoyed artistic control of their output as well as substantial promotion budgets.

Physical Graffiti was a fifteen-track set comprised of eight new tracks recorded at Headley Grange and seven songs culled from sessions for earlier albums. The first disc was much the stronger of the two, beginning with “Custard Pie”—a harmonica-laced electric blues based on Sleepy John Estes's “Drop Down Mama” from 1935. Page's shivering slide guitar and Bonham's furious drumming propelled the intense eleven-minute gospel-blues “In My

Time of Dying” while “Houses of the Holy” and “Trampled Under Foot” were tightly constructed, even danceable hard rock tunes. The closing track, “Kashmir,” was a dramatic 8:30 opus built on a series of orchestral crescendos, its lyrics and musical ambience inspired by Robert Plant’s travels in Morocco—not, as the title implies, on the Indian subcontinent. Plant later said that he considered “Kashmir” rather than “Stairway to Heaven” to be the definitive Led Zeppelin song.

On the uneven second disc, Zeppelin meandered from country-rock flavor of “Down by the Seaside” to the 1960s soul ambience of “Night Flight.” There was also two-minute Jimmy Page acoustic instrumental (“Bron-Y-Aur”), a pair of good-natured but lightweight blues jams (“Boogie with Stu” and “Black Country Woman”), and the sub-par rock tune “Sick Again” that closed the album.

The release of *Physical Graffiti* on February 24, 1975, ignited a new wave of Zep mania. The album held the U.S. number one position for six weeks (it was a U.K. number one as well) while *all* of Led Zeppelin’s previous releases re-entered the *Billboard* Top 200 chart. Meanwhile the band had played its first live gig in eighteen months on January 11 in Rotterdam, the Netherlands; one week later, Zeppelin’s next North American tour began in Minneapolis, Minnesota—a state-of-the-art production bolstered by a 70,000-watt sound system and a massive custom-built lighting rig.

Approximately 700,000 tickets were sold for these thirty-nine dates and yet the demand seemed infinite. In Greensboro, North Carolina, on January 29, some 500 fans were excluded from the sold-out show. They attempted to storm the rear entrance of the arena and badly damaged three of the band’s five rented limos with a cascade of bottles, stones, and pieces of scaffolding. A February 4 concert at Boston Garden in Massachusetts was canceled by city officials when the restive crowd that gathered hours before show time caused \$30,000 worth of damage to the facility. Much to the band’s relief, the U.S. tour concluded with three ecstatically received performances at the Forum in Los Angeles.

Back in London, tickets for three concerts in May at the 19,000-capacity Earl’s Court Exhibition Centre sold out in five hours; two added dates also sold out instantly for a total attendance of 85,000. The band mounted its full U.S. stage production and projected the action throughout the hall via a 20-foot by 30-foot video screen—one of the earliest uses of video projection in an indoor rock concert. The Earl’s Court performances became legendary as among the finest shows of Led Zeppelin’s career—as well as some of the longest, featuring electric and acoustic songs from every phase of the band’s history.

DARKENING SKIES

Following this triumphant homecoming, the band members took a break before the start of a relatively short U.S. tour set to begin in late August. Robert Plant,

his wife Maureen, and their two young children took an extended trip through North Africa and were joined on the Greek island of Rhodes by Jimmy Page, his paramour Charlotte Martin, and their daughter Scarlet. On August 4, while Jimmy was on a side trip to Sicily, Maureen Plant was driving her husband and the three children (with Charlotte and Scarlet following in a second car) when suddenly she lost control and the vehicle struck a tree. Robert shattered his right ankle and right elbow and his right leg was broken in several places; his son Karac and daughter Carmen also suffered broken limbs. Maureen was the most seriously injured with a broken leg and fractures of the skull and pelvis; her face was badly cut and she lost a dangerously large amount of blood. (Scarlet Martin escaped the crash with only minor injuries.)

Richard Cole chartered a private jet and flew to Rhodes to bring the family home. Robert's leg was placed in a cast from hip to toe; initially doctors thought he might never again walk unaided. The singer made slow progress while residing as a tax exile on Jersey in the Channel Islands. Led Zeppelin's U.S. tour was canceled and American concert promoters suffered sizable losses. Bill Graham, who'd sold \$1 million worth of tickets for two shows at Kezar Stadium, lost the funds he'd laid out for facility deposits, promotion, and advertising along with \$130,000 in ticket service charges.

In early September, still confined to a wheelchair, Robert Plant was flown to Los Angeles while Maureen and the children stayed behind. Fighting depression and disillusionment, he joined Jimmy Page in a rented house in Malibu for several weeks of intensive songwriting before John Bonham and John Paul Jones arrived for the first rehearsals. These new songs were imbued with deep blues feeling and a sense of barely controlled desperation.

PRESENCE

The band moved from L.A. to Munich where Led Zeppelin's seventh album, *Presence*, was recorded in just eighteen days in November. Plant sang of his Third World travels (and, obliquely, of his accident) in the storming "Achilles Last Stand" and poignantly expressed his longing for home and family in "Tea for One." A version of Blind Willie Johnson's "Nobody's Fault But Mine" played like a heavy-metal confessional, all mournful wails and sinuous slide guitar. On the lighter side, there was the amped-up rockabilly of "Candy Store Rock" with its rollicking band track and Robert's vocal homage to the Elvis sound-alike singer Ral Donner.

Dispensing with organs, mellotrons, and recorders, Zeppelin was once again the world's greatest instrumental power trio: Jimmy Page laid down all of his guitar solos and overdubs in one marathon fourteen-hour session. "All our pent-up energy and passion went into making it," he explained. "That's why there was no acoustic material there. The mechanism was perfectly oiled. We started screaming in rehearsals and never stopped."¹⁸

In a 2006 retrospective for *Rolling Stone*, Mikal Gilmore called *Presence* “the forgotten album; its feelings are too hard, too intense, and probably too insular to stay close to for very long.” Although the album became Zeppelin’s fifth U.S. number one, *Presence* spent less time (thirty weeks) on the *Billboard* chart than any of its predecessors. But for its potent emotion and the resurgent brilliance of Jimmy Page’s guitar work, and for capturing a do-or-die moment in Zeppelin’s history, Gilmore avers that *Presence* is “likely the best album the band ever made.”¹⁹

While *Presence* was in progress, the long-delayed film *The Song Remains the Same* had its world premier on October 20, 1976, in New York. The theater’s sound system shortchanged the band’s live sound (a problem that would undermine many future screenings) and critical response was muted at best. The *New York Daily News*, for example, gave the movie no stars out of a possible five. Still, even a second-rate Led Zeppelin performance was guaranteed to capture some stunning music such as the film’s twenty-six-minute version of “Dazed and Confused” with its Jimmy Page violin-bow guitar solo. A double-disc soundtrack, rushed out in time for the holiday shopping season, quickly sold two million copies while ascending to number two in the United States and number one in the United Kingdom. In November, Led Zeppelin made its first appearance on American television, performing “Black Dog” on the ABC series *Don Kirshner’s Rock Concert*.

A U.S. tour scheduled to begin in February 1977 was canceled when Robert Plant contracted tonsillitis. The singer was still in recurring pain from his leg injuries on April 1, 1977, when Led Zeppelin played its first concert in nearly a year at Memorial Auditorium in Dallas, Texas. On April 30, the band set a new world attendance record for a solo indoor attraction when 76,229 fans filled the Pontiac Silverdome in suburban Detroit.

Most gigs passed without serious incident including multi-night runs at Madison Square Garden; The Forum in Inglewood, California; and the Capitol Center in Landover, Maryland. But on April 19 in Cincinnati, Ohio, police made 100 arrests when an estimated 1,000 fans tried to crash the first of two shows at the Riverfront Coliseum. A fan rampage following Zeppelin’s May 21 show at the Summit in Houston, Texas, damaged the facility and resulted in forty arrests, mostly for drug possession and disorderly conduct. When rain forced the band to cancel a June 3 show at Tampa Stadium in Florida, “the concert turned into a full-fledged riot . . . Sixty fans ended up in the hospital. So did a dozen cops.”²⁰

An atmosphere of unchecked power and physical intimidation had grown up around Led Zeppelin. It was fueled by alcohol and hard drug use, and by Richard Cole’s hiring of John Bindon, a notorious London gangster, as the band’s security coordinator. On July 23, following the first of two day-long festival shows promoted by Bill Graham Productions (BGP), this seething undercurrent erupted backstage at the Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum in Oakland, California.

A BGP stagehand named Jim Matzorkis noticed a boy in the backstage area removing the wooden artist nameplates from the doors of the trailers that served as dressing rooms. Matzorkis remonstrated with him and calmly but firmly took back the signs. The boy turned out to be Peter Grant's son and John Bonham had witnessed the incident. He and Grant confronted Matzorkis and Bonham kicked the stagehand, who then fled to another trailer nearby. Bill Graham arrived on the scene and accompanied Peter Grant to the trailer, ostensibly so the manager could speak with Jim Matzorkis.

"I opened the trailer and went in first," Graham later wrote. "Jim was sitting in the cubbyhole. Peter Grant went in . . . [and] in one move, I was behind Grant. He just grabbed Jim's hand, pulled him toward him . . . and smashed Jim in the face, knocking him back into his seat. I lunged at Grant. He picked me up like I was a fly and handed me to the guy by the door. That guy shoved me out. He threw me down the steps and shut the door . . . I heard Jim saying, '*Bill! Help me! Bill!*' And a lot of noise."²¹

As John Bindon held the stagehand from behind, Peter Grant "just started working me all over, punching me in the face with his fist and kicking me in the balls. He knocked a tooth out . . . It was really horrifying because there was no way out and here was this 300-pound guy just having his way with me."²² Outside the trailer, meanwhile, Richard Cole was swinging an aluminum pole at BGP employee Bob Barsotti. Finally Jim Matzorkis managed to escape and was driven to a hospital.

Bill Graham states that in a phone conversation a few hours later, an attorney for Led Zeppelin implied to him that the band "would find it difficult to play"²³ the second show unless Bill Graham signed a waiver indemnifying Led Zeppelin, along with Peter Grant and his employees, against any and all legal action that might arise from Jim Matzorkis's beating. The promoter reluctantly agreed: He was certain that this document, signed under duress, would have no standing and he feared that a last-minute cancellation might cause a riot. The Sunday concert went on amid high tension backstage but without incident; when Robert Plant attempted to reconcile, Graham refused to speak to him. Jimmy Page, angry and disheartened by the violence, played sitting down for most of the show.

Robert Plant later stated: "Instead of it being the two big wheels [Grant and Graham] moving away and talking about it quietly . . . it was just a slagging match. I had to sing ["Stairway to Heaven"] in the shadow of the fact that the artillery we carried with us was prowling around backstage with a *hell* of an attitude. I mean, it was this coming together of these two dark forces which had nothing to do with the songs that Page and I were trying to churn out."²⁴

On the morning of July 25, Oakland police arrested Peter Grant, John Bindon, John Bonham, and Richard Cole, who were charged with assault and released on bail. The defendants later pleaded no contest to the charges; they received suspended sentences and were placed on probation. "They cut a deal with the judge," Jim Matzorkis recalled bitterly. He filed a \$2 million civil suit which

“went for a year and a half. They settled for fifty thousand or something like that.”²⁵

Bill Graham admired Led Zeppelin as musicians and performers; he disdained what he felt they stood for in popular culture. “I didn’t like their influence on society or their power. . . . They surrounded themselves with physical might. The element around them was oppressive. They were ready to kill at the slightest provocation.”²⁶ In one case, at least, the promoter proved a prescient judge of character: In 1978, John Bindon stabbed one John Darke nine times in a fight outside a club in Fulham, London. Indicted for murder, Bindon was acquitted in a jury trial in November 1979. He died in 1993 of AIDS-related illness.

For Plant, the worst was yet to come. On July 26, 1977, the Zeppelin entourage flew to New Orleans, which served as the band’s home base for the tour. During check-in at the hotel, the singer received a phone call from his wife Maureen in England informing him that their six-year-old son Karac was seriously ill with a respiratory infection. Two hours later, she called again: Karac was dead.

IN THROUGH THE OUT DOOR

Robert Plant retreated to home and family for the next year. Rumors flew of a Led Zeppelin breakup as the singer pondered the risks and rewards of being in the world’s biggest rock and roll band: “After losing my son, I found that the excesses that surrounded Led Zeppelin were such that nobody knew where the actual axis of all this stuff was. Everybody was insular, developing their own world. The band had gone through two or three really big—huge—changes: changes that actually wrecked it before it was born again. The whole beauty and lightness of 1970 had turned into a sort of neurosis.”²⁷

In July 1978 the singer tentatively re-emerged for some unannounced club gigs, singing blues and rock and roll covers with a local band called the Turd Burglars. He still harbored strong doubts about rejoining Led Zeppelin and at one point applied for a teaching position at a Rudolph Steiner school in Sussex. Plant’s wariness was only partially dispelled by a band meeting that John Bonham persuaded the singer to attend in September. By mid-November, the band had begun work on its eighth studio album at Polar Studios in Stockholm. In the making of *In Through the Out Door*, much of the workload fell to Robert Plant and John Paul Jones—the two members not deeply involved with either heroin and/or alcohol.

“There were two distinct camps by then and we were in the relatively clean one,” Jones later admitted. “We’d turn up first, Bonzo would turn up later, and Page might turn up a couple of days later. . . . When that situation occurs you either sit around waiting or get down to some playing. So that’s what we did in the studio.”²⁸

In Through the Out Door is not an album held in high esteem even by many diehard fans. Jones's keyboard motifs predominated and were not balanced out by any classic Led Zeppelin blues grooves; Plant's lyrics were below par save for "All My Love," his moving elegy for Karac. The soaring, over-reaching spirit that had characterized Jimmy Page's best guitar work was almost entirely absent.

In the summer of 1979, Led Zeppelin returned to live action a few weeks prior to the album's release. After two warm-up shows in Copenhagen, the band headlined the Knebworth Festival in Hertfordshire, England, on August 4 and August 11. The performances were a commercial and critical triumph with over 250,000 tickets sold in just two days. In film footage later released on the *Led Zeppelin* DVD, Robert Plant's performance betrays none of his inner tension while a jubilant Jimmy Page plays with the flair and fury that made him a rock guitar legend.

"Robert didn't want to do it," John Paul Jones later recalled, "and I could understand why. But *we* really did, and we thought he would enjoy it if we could just get him back out there. And I think he *did* enjoy Knebworth. On the DVD he *looks* like he's enjoying it!"²⁹

Plant himself "knew how good we had been, and we were so nervous. And yet within it all, my old pal Bonzo was right down in a pocket. . . . After it was over, I don't know if I was breathing a sigh of relief because we'd got to the end of the show in one piece or whether we'd actually bought some more time to keep going."³⁰

In September 1979, the new LP was issued in six different sleeves using alternate angles from the same photo session. It became the first album by a rock band to debut at number one on the *Billboard* album chart and also topped the U.K. list. *In Through the Out Door* stayed at number one in the United States for seven weeks—the band's best chart performance since *Led Zeppelin II*—and sold over five million copies. The single "Fool in the Rain" reached number twenty-one on the Hot 100 despite its lurching rhythm track and Plant's off-key vocal. *In Through the Out Door* spent forty-one weeks on the *Billboard* chart, during which time Zeppelin played not a single public performance.

Maureen Plant gave birth to a son, Logan Romero Plant, in January 1979 and Robert balked at the prospect of another months-long American tour. In a compromise with Peter Grant and the other band members, he agreed to three weeks of European concerts. With little advance publicity, the tour kicked off on June 17 in Dortmund, Germany—the first song of the night was "The Train Kept A-Rollin'."

Ten days later in Nuremberg, during the third number of Zeppelin's set, John Bonham collapsed on stage. He was hospitalized briefly and released, and the band moved on to shows in Zurich, Frankfurt, Mannheim, and Munich. After the last concert, on July 7 in Berlin, Bonzo told Dave Lewis: "Overall everyone was dead chuffed [pleased] with the way the tour went.

There were so many things that could have gone wrong. We want to keep working and of course we want to do England.”³¹

On September 24, Led Zeppelin gathered at Jimmy Page’s home in Windsor to begin rehearsals for a North American tour set to begin in Montreal on October 17. John Bonham drank vodka steadily throughout the day and evening until the rehearsal ground to a halt. The drummer may have consumed as many as forty vodka drinks before midnight, when he passed out and was moved to a spare bedroom by a crew member.

When John Paul Jones and Zeppelin road manager Benji LeFevre (who’d replaced Richard Cole) went to look in on him the next morning, John Bonham was dead. A coroner’s inquest held on October 8 ruled his death an accident attributable to consumption of alcohol: Bonzo had died in his sleep from the inhalation of vomit. He was thirty-two years old.

Although the formal announcement of Led Zeppelin’s dissolution would not be made for several months, the decision was nearly instantaneous. “It was impossible to continue, really,” Jimmy Page later explained to Cameron Crowe. “Especially in light of what we’d done live, stretching and moving the songs this way and that. At that point in time especially, in the early eighties, there was no way one wanted to even consider taking on another drummer. For someone to ‘learn’ the things Bonham had done . . . it just wouldn’t have been honest. We had a great respect for each other, and that needed to continue . . . in life or death.”³²

On December 4, 1980, the surviving members and Peter Grant informed the media: “We wish it to be known that the loss of our dear friend and the deep sense of undivided harmony felt by ourselves and our manager have led us to decide that we could not continue as we were.”

One more “new” Led Zeppelin album was issued in late 1982. *Coda* included several outtakes from the 1978 Stockholm sessions as well as as 1970 soundcheck recording of “I Can’t Quit You Baby” and an extended drum feature titled “Bonzo’s Montreux.” To many fans and critics, *Coda* seemed like a cash-in release unworthy of the band’s catalog. The album spent a mere sixteen weeks on the *Billboard* chart (peaking at number six) and sales tapered off rapidly after the first million copies.

Since John Bonham’s death, Plant, Page, and Jones have performed together on only a handful of occasions. With drummers Tony Thompson and Phil Collins, they played an under-rehearsed three-song set at the Live Aid concert at JFK Stadium in Philadelphia on July 13, 1985. In May 1988, the trio—this time with Bonham’s son Jason on drums—closed the Atlantic Records Fortieth Anniversary celebration at Madison Square Garden. In 1989 the three musicians played together at the twenty-first birthday party of Robert Plant’s daughter Carmen and in 1990 they performed at Jason Bonham’s wedding (he played drums on both occasions).

Jimmy Page took charge of the Led Zeppelin catalog with input and approval from Jones and Plant. In 1990, the guitarist compiled a four-CD box

set titled simply *Led Zeppelin* that included numerous photos plus essays by Cameron Crowe and Robert Palmer. Although it contained only four tracks not previously issued on album, this expensive package cracked the *Billboard* Top Twenty and sold over one million copies.

Page and Plant reunited in 1994 for an MTV *Unplugged* performance filmed in Wales, London, and Morocco. Much to his annoyance and dismay, John Paul Jones was not asked to participate even though the resulting live album, *No Quarter*, took its title from a song largely composed by him (ten of the thirteen tracks were Led Zeppelin songs). *No Quarter* sold over one million copies and reached number four on the *Billboard* chart. Its success led to a world tour on which Page and Plant were backed by the unusual combination of a standard rock band and a North African orchestra. They later wrote and recorded a new album of original material, *Walking into Clarksdale*, released in 1998.

As a solo artist, Robert Plant released six albums between 1982 and 1993, each one certified gold (for 500,000 sales) and/or platinum (for 1,000,000 sales). John Paul Jones composed music for several films and produced albums for Foo Fighters and Butthole Surfers. In 1994 he collaborated with avant-garde vocalist Diamanda Galas on an album *This Sporting Life*, and a subsequent tour.

On January 12, 1995, Led Zeppelin was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame by award presenters Steven Tyler and Joe Perry of Aerosmith. In November 1997, Atlantic released a two-disc set, *BBC Sessions*, containing Led Zeppelin performances from three different sessions for the BBC in 1969 as well as most of an April 1971 concert at the Paris Theater in London. Six years later, the band enjoyed another unexpected resurgence in popularity with two more archival releases.

Released in May 2003, the two-disc *Led Zeppelin* DVD had a running time of nearly five and a half hours. It included an entire Royal Albert Hall concert from January 1970 as well as footage from Madison Square Garden (1973), Earl's Court (1975), and Knebworth (1979)—all brought up to a remarkable standard of visual and sonic clarity through the application of digital technology. The set sold more than 500,000 copies and was among the year's top-selling DVD titles. *How the West Was Won* was a double live album plus DVD that captured June 1972 performances at the Forum in Los Angeles and the Long Beach Arena. This set entered the *Billboard* Top 200 at number one—the first Led Zeppelin album to top the chart since *In Through the Out Door* in 1979.

In 2005, the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (NARAS) presented Led Zeppelin with a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award—the band's first official recognition by the Recording Academy, twenty-five years after its dissolution. In July 2006, the RIAA credited Led Zeppelin with U.S. sales of over 109.5 million albums and ranked the band at number four on its all-time best-seller list after the Beatles, Elvis Presley, and Garth Brooks. International sales may be roughly equivalent to the U.S. figure, meaning that

over 200 million Led Zeppelin albums have been sold worldwide. *Led Zeppelin IV* has sold over 23 million units in the United States alone.

Led Zeppelin has influenced virtually every hard rock and metal band that followed in its wake including Mötley Crüe, Def Leppard, Guns N' Roses, and Rage Against the Machine. Pearl Jam bassist Jeff Ament told *Rolling Stone* that Led Zeppelin was “the band we always looked toward.”³³ Even hip-hop fans have been exposed to Zeppelin’s music through sampling: John Bonham’s drum track on “When the Levee Breaks” has been sampled for songs by the Beastie Boys, Ice-T, and Dr. Dre.

The best of Led Zeppelin’s recorded work still sounds clear, expansive, and hugely powerful. The same four musicians created virtually all the sounds on each album, with a bare minimum of guest performers, and the band made no overt effort to embrace new trends such as punk or electronic music. For these reasons, Led Zeppelin’s album catalog projects a sense of creative cohesion, growth, and integrity almost unmatched in rock music. Despite the overwhelming familiarity of such key songs as “Whole Lotta Love” and “Stairway to Heaven,” Led Zeppelin’s music is still capable of not just blowing away new generations of listeners but of enchanting them.

In his essay for the *Led Zeppelin* box set, the late Robert Palmer appraised the group’s singular contribution to popular music. “Perhaps Zeppelin’s greatest legacy,” he wrote,

is a quality that is now in short supply: they showed that four individuals, from varied backgrounds and with diverse personalities and imaginations, could chart their own adventurous musical course, make their own records just the way they wanted to without intrusion from corporate execs hoping for a hit single, innovate with every album, and *keep on doing it*, long after many another band would have grown creatively slack from the excesses that come with fame and fortune. Luckily for us, they persevered.³⁴

TIMELINE

January 9, 1944

James Patrick (Jimmy) Page born in Heston, Middlesex, England.

June 3, 1946

John Baldwin aka John Paul Jones born in Sidcup, Kent, England.

May 31, 1948

John Henry Bonham (“Bonzo”) born in Bromwich, England.

August 20, 1948

Robert Plant born in West Bromwich, England.

July 7, 1968

The Yardbirds featuring guitarist Jimmy Page disband after playing their final show in Luton, Bedfordshire, England. To fulfill outstanding contractual commitments, Page recruits a new lineup with Jones, Bonham, and Plant.

August 19, 1968

First rehearsal of the new quartet at 22 Gerrard Street in London.

September 7, 1968

The band makes its live debut in Copenhagen, billed as “New Yardbirds” or “Yardbirds featuring Jimmy Page.”

September 27, 1968

The band begins recording its debut album at Olympic Studios in London, produced by Jimmy Page and engineered by Glyn Johns.

October 15, 1968

By the time of its first U.K. performance, at Surrey University, the band has taken the name Led Zeppelin.

November 13, 1968

Atlantic executive Jerry Wexler signs Led Zeppelin to Atlantic Records for an advance of £110,000 (approximately U.S. \$210,000).

December 26, 1968

Led Zeppelin begins its inaugural U.S. tour, supporting Vanilla Fudge in Denver.

January 12, 1969

The self-titled debut album, *Led Zeppelin*, is released on Atlantic.

February 15, 1969

Led Zeppelin enters the *Billboard* Top Pop Albums chart, ultimately reaching number ten in the United States and number six in the United Kingdom.

April 24, 1969

The band begins a five-week headlining U.S. tour at Fillmore West in San Francisco.

July 5, 1969

Led Zeppelin performs at the Atlanta International Pop Festival in Atlanta, Georgia.

October 17, 1969

The band plays the first rock concert at New York’s Carnegie Hall since the Rolling Stones’ appearance in 1965.

December 6, 1969

Led Zeppelin enters the Top Forty with “Whole Lotta Love.” It peaks at number four, the highest-charting U.S. single of the band’s career.

December 27, 1969

Led Zeppelin II tops the *Billboard* chart and stays at number one for seven weeks. In February 1970, the album hits number one in the United Kingdom.

June 1970

At Headley Grange, the band begins work on its third album using the Rolling Stones’ mobile studio.

June 28, 1970

Led Zeppelin headline the Bath Festival of Blues and Progressive Music in England before a crowd of over 200,000.

October 31, 1970

Led Zeppelin III becomes the band’s second U.S. number one album.

January 30, 1971

“Immigrant Song,” a single from *Led Zeppelin III*, reaches number fifteen on the Hot 100.

March 5, 1971

During a show in Belfast, Led Zeppelin performs the classic “Stairway to Heaven” for the first time in public.

November 8, 1971

Led Zeppelin’s untitled fourth album (commonly referred to as *Led Zeppelin IV*) is released in the United States and after one week is certified gold. The album remains on the chart for 259 weeks but never goes to number one.

February 12, 1972

Led Zeppelin hits number fifteen with “Black Dog,” a single from *Led Zeppelin IV*.

May 5, 1973

56,800 fans attend a Led Zeppelin concert at Tampa Stadium in Florida breaking the attendance record set by the Beatles at Shea Stadium in 1965.

May 12, 1973

Led Zeppelin’s fifth album, *Houses of the Holy* (released March 28), becomes their third U.S. LP to reach number one. The album remains on the chart for ninety-nine weeks and is later certified for sales of eleven million units.

December 29, 1973

Led Zeppelin hits number twenty with “D’yer Mak’er,” a single from *Houses of the Holy*.

January 1975

Led Zeppelin launches the Swan Song label and previews its forthcoming album at gala press parties in New York and Los Angeles. Distributed by Atlantic Records, Swan Song releases the band’s own albums and others by Bad Company, Dave Edmunds, and the Pretty Things.

January 11, 1975

Led Zeppelin plays its first live show in 18 months in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. A major U.S. tour begins January 18 in Minneapolis.

February 24, 1975

Led Zeppelin’s double album, *Physical Graffiti*, is released. It reaches number one in both the United States and United Kingdom and tops the *Billboard* chart for a total of six weeks.

March 29, 1975

Led Zeppelin becomes the first band in history to place six albums at once on the *Billboard* chart: *Physical Graffiti* (number one), *Led Zeppelin IV*, *Houses of the Holy*, *Led Zeppelin II*, *Led Zeppelin*, and *Led Zeppelin III*.

August 4, 1975

Robert Plant, his wife Maureen, and their children Karac and Carmen are seriously injured in a car crash while vacationing in Greece.

November, 1975

Led Zeppelin’s new album, *Presence*, is recorded in just eighteen days in Los Angeles.

March 31, 1976

Presence is released and quickly becomes the band's fifth U.S. number one album, spending thirty weeks on the *Billboard* chart.

October 20, 1976

Led Zeppelin's concert documentary, *The Song Remains the Same*, premieres in New York. A double-disc soundtrack reaches number two in the United States and number one in the United Kingdom.

April 1, 1977

The band begins a new U.S. tour at Memorial Auditorium in Dallas.

April 30, 1977

Led Zeppelin sets a new world attendance record for a solo indoor attraction with an appearance at the Pontiac Silverdome in Detroit attended by 76,229 fans.

August 1979

Led Zeppelin headlines the Knebworth Festival in Hertfordshire, England, with performances on 8/4 and 8/11.

August 15, 1979

Led Zeppelin's final studio album, *In Through the Out Door*, is released. Recorded in November–December 1978 at Polar Studios in Stockholm, Sweden, *In Through the Out Door* becomes the first album by a rock band to debut at number one on the *Billboard* chart and retains the top spot for seven weeks.

July 7, 1980

At the conclusion of a two-week European tour, Led Zeppelin plays its final live performance at Eissporthalle in Berlin.

September 25, 1980

After a day and night of heavy drinking, Led Zeppelin drummer John Bonham dies of asphyxiation in his sleep.

December 4, 1980

Led Zeppelin releases a statement announcing that it is disbanding in the wake of drummer John Bonham's death.

September 7, 1990

Led Zeppelin, a four-CD and six-LP box set, is released and reaches number eighteen on the *Billboard* chart. With sales of over one million units, it is the best-selling box set in rock history.

January 12, 1995

Steven Tyler and Joe Perry of Aerosmith induct Led Zeppelin into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame during a ceremony at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York.

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Led Zeppelin II, 1969

Led Zeppelin III, 1970

Untitled (aka *Led Zeppelin IV*), 1971

Houses of the Holy, 1973

Physical Graffiti, 1975

Presence, 1976

Boxset, 1990

BBC Sessions, 1997

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Courtesy of Photofest.

Joni Mitchell

Scott Schinder

WOMAN OF HEART AND MIND

The archetype of the confessional female singer-songwriter is so deeply ingrained in the contemporary musical consciousness that modern listeners can be forgiven for not realizing that not long ago, the idea of an intelligent, independent woman documenting her inner life in song was a risky concept, one with no precedent in a popular music industry that limited female performers to a limited range of narrowly defined roles. No artist was more influential in altering that situation than Joni Mitchell.

When Mitchell rose to fame during the folk music boom of the 1960s, she was not the first female artist to write her own songs. But the poetic intimacy of her songs and the seamless honesty of her performances established the Canadian singer/guitarist as a role model for generations of artists who would follow in her footsteps.

Mitchell's consistent refusal to compromise her artistic integrity, her willingness to defy the expectations of her audience and the music industry, and

her drive to continually redefine her musical persona permanently altered expectations of what a female artist could achieve.

Early in her performing career, Mitchell diverged from the folk scene's emphasis on traditional material and sociopolitical commentary to write deeply personal songs drawn from her own experience. As the social and political upheavals of the 1960s gave way to soul-searching introspection in the early 1970s, Mitchell's example was followed by a massive wave of writer/performers of both genders, who turned inward for inspiration. Some, like Carole King and James Taylor, outsold Mitchell, but none bested her artistry or originality.

Mitchell achieved substantial commercial success of her own, but her restless creative instincts quickly took precedence over careerist concerns. Not long after scoring her first major hit single, she demonstrated her willingness to risk alienating her fans by embracing jazz as an outlet for her muse. In the decades since, she has continued to make music on her own terms, regardless of commercial consequences.

Roberta Joan Anderson was born on November 7, 1943, in Fort Macleod, in the Canadian prairie province of Alberta, and at the age of nine moved with her family to the larger city of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. She developed an affinity for classical music during early childhood, and prevailed upon her parents to pay for piano lessons when she was just seven years old. But her initial efforts at formal music training proved frustrating when her piano teacher discouraged her from attempting to play the melodies that she heard in her head. She also showed an early talent for drawing and painting, interests that she would continue to pursue as her musical career progressed.

When she was nine, Joni was stricken with polio. She recovered from the potentially fatal disease after an extended convalescence at a children's hospital. It was also during her hospital stay that she felt the urge to perform, singing Christmas carols to the other patients. She would later credit her experience with the illness for helping her to develop her artistic sensitivity. Soon after her recovery, she took up cigarette smoking, a lifelong activity which would be reflected in the evolution of her singing voice.

When Joni was in the seventh grade, a favorite English teacher, Mr. Kratzman, encouraged her to express herself through poetry, and to write from her own experiences. His influence would prove so significant that Mitchell would later thank him on the cover of her first album.

During her teenage years Joni's musical interests were energized by the rock and roll she'd hear on the radio and on local jukeboxes. Initially unable to afford a guitar, she bought herself a \$36 ukulele and taught herself to play. Once she'd acquired an actual guitar, she began performing informally at parties, and playing folk songs at coffeehouses in Saskatoon, Edmonton, and Calgary.

She made an effort to pursue a career as a painter, enrolling at the Alberta College of Art in Calgary, but her attendance there lasted only a year. Feeling stifled

by courses that she considered to be overly rigid, she found more fulfillment in music. As Joni Anderson, she began performing regularly on the regional folk scene that had developed around Alberta, initially playing traditional folk standards, many of them learned from the albums of Judy Collins. Joni wrote her first song, "Day by Day," while en route to the Mariposa Folk Festival in Toronto.

A few months after leaving college in June 1964, Joni moved to Toronto, which had become the home to a burgeoning folk scene. But she couldn't afford to join the local musicians' union, which initially limited her opportunities to perform professionally. Instead, she played for tips in coffeehouses and busked on the streets.

By now, Joni was writing her own songs, eschewing the standard folkie repertoire of traditional and topical numbers in favor of her own originals. She also demonstrated a highly individual vocal style, as well as a distinctive guitar technique that set her apart from her folk-scene contemporaries.

As Mitchell later noted, "I looked like a folksinger, even though the moment I began to write, my music was not folk music. It was something else that had elements of romantic classicism to it."¹

Mitchell's idiosyncratic approach was partially determined by circumstance and necessity. Early on, she began playing guitar in unconventional open tunings, to compensate for the fact her left hand had been left weakened by her battle with polio. That approach resulted in her chord structures often bearing a stronger resemblance to jazz than folk or rock. Her playing style would evolve from the intricate picking heard on her early albums to the more rhythmic, percussive style that she would employ as she explored more overt jazz influences. In 2003, *Rolling Stone* would rank Mitchell as the highest-placing female in its list of the greatest guitarists of all time.

Shortly before moving to Toronto, Joni learned that she was pregnant. On February 19, 1965, she gave birth to a baby girl, Kelly Dale Anderson. Single and broke in an unfamiliar town, she soon wed folk singer Chuck Mitchell, hoping that marriage would ease her transition into motherhood. But after a few weeks of marriage, she had a change of heart, and gave her daughter up for adoption.

Mitchell would keep the matter private for many years to come, although she would make reference to it in several songs, most notably "Little Green," on her 1971 album *Blue*. In adulthood, Mitchell's daughter, now named Kilauren Gibb, would search for her birth mother, and the two would be reunited in the late 1990s.

In the summer of 1965, Joni and Chuck Mitchell moved across the U.S. border to Detroit, where they performed as a duo in that city's folk clubs. The couple would eventually separate after a year and a half of marriage, but Joni would retain her ex-husband's surname in her solo career.

By summer 1966, Mitchell's growing reputation had won her an invitation to perform at the prestigious Newport Folk Festival, alongside many of the folk

world's biggest names. Although she was still a virtual unknown, her short set—which included such future Mitchell standards as “Michael from Mountains,” “Chelsea Morning,” and “The Circle Game”—won a rapturous response from a mesmerized audience.

Early in 1967, Mitchell moved to New York, where she met manager Elliot Roberts, who became an enthusiastic supporter and would continue to direct her career for decades to come. She performed locally and toured folk clubs up and down the East Coast, developing a reputation as a compelling live performer.

While playing in a club in Florida, Mitchell was seen by ex-Byrds member David Crosby, who was so taken with her talents that he brought her to Los Angeles. There, Mitchell moved in with Crosby and became a prominent presence on that city's musical community.

Crosby became a tireless champion on Mitchell's behalf, using his music business connections to spread word of her talents. The buzz resulted in a recording deal with Warner Bros. Records' Reprise label. Crosby signed on as producer of her first album, using his influence to get the company to allow her to record in a spare, acoustic style, without the ornate folk-rock arrangements that were common on singer/songwriters' albums at the time.

Meanwhile, Mitchell's songs had begun to attract substantial attention in the form of cover versions by more established artists. Noted folkie Tom Rush had met Mitchell in Toronto, and was impressed enough to bring her “Urge for Going”—a vivid evocation of changing seasons and life's passages—to the attention of Judy Collins. When Collins passed, Rush recorded the tune himself. It would appear on his 1968 album *The Circle Game*, whose title track was another Mitchell composition. After country star George Hamilton IV heard Rush's version of “Urge for Going,” he cut his own version and scored a country hit with it, marking the first chart appearance of a Joni Mitchell song.

Other prominent folk artists to record Mitchell material early on included Ian and Sylvia, Buffy Sainte Marie, and Dave Van Ronk, as well as seminal British folk-rockers Fairport Convention, who recorded two of her songs on their 1967 debut album and another on their second LP the following year.

COMING OF AGE IN CALIFORNIA

Mitchell had already become something of a cause celebre among other artists by the time her first LP was released in early 1968. With mentor Crosby producing, the album—officially titled *Joni Mitchell*, but commonly referred to as *Song to a Seagull*, in recognition of the message spelled out by a flock of airborne birds in its front cover painting—was a remarkably accomplished debut.

With its sides subtitled “I Came to the City” and “Out of the City and Down to the Seaside,” the debut disc was informally divided between songs featuring urban imagery and others suggesting a more pastoral atmosphere. Whatever their settings, there was no mistaking the poetic insights and subtle melodic sophistication of her artfully detailed love songs (“Michael from Mountains,” “Marcie”) and pensive character studies (“I Had a King,” “Nathan la Freneer”).

While *Joni Mitchell's* visionary songcraft was celebrated by an in-the-know core of musicians, critics, and hipsters, the album's sales were relatively modest. The artist toured widely, making high-profile appearances at the Miami Pop Festival and London's Royal Festival Hall. Mitchell's commercial stock received a substantial boost when her early idol Judy Collins scored a Top Ten single with Mitchell's “Both Sides, Now” in late 1968.

The Collins hit helped to build anticipation for the April 1969 release of Mitchell's second LP, *Clouds*, which contained her own version of the “Both Sides, Now.” In addition to raising her commercial profile, the sophomore effort marked a substantial artistic leap. Beyond her confident, expressive performances, *Clouds* benefited from spare arrangements based around Mitchell's distinctive guitar work; the only other musician on the album was Stephen Stills of Buffalo Springfield/Crosby, Stills, and Nash fame, who contributed understated guitar and bass.

In addition to Mitchell's own vibrant versions of “Both Sides, Now,” “Chelsea Morning,” and “Tin Angel,” all of which had already been heard in other artists' cover versions, *Clouds* boasted several remarkable new songs that further established Mitchell as a prominent new voice. She affectingly addressed the insecurities of new love (“I Don't Know Where I Stand”), young adulthood's loss of innocence (“Songs to Aging Children Come,” which would be featured prominently in the 1970 film version of Arlo Guthrie's *Alice's Restaurant*) and the dehumanizing effects of war (the a cappella “The Fiddle and the Drum”). *Clouds* also won Mitchell her first Grammy award, in the Best Folk Performance category.

As Mitchell toured in support of *Clouds*, Warner Bros. recorded a concert at New York's Carnegie Hall and another in Berkeley, California, with an eye toward releasing the results as a live album. Instead, her third LP, 1970's *Ladies of the Canyon*, would be another collection of new studio recordings. It would further broaden Mitchell's public appeal, thanks in large part to “Big Yellow Taxi,” a playful environmental anthem that became her first Top Forty single.

Ladies of the Canyon's title referred to Laurel Canyon, the L.A. hipster enclave where Mitchell now resided with David Crosby's musical partner Graham Nash, in a home that Nash would immortalize in the Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young hit “Our House.” The album found her moving in unexpected new directions, introducing new thematic and stylistic elements that

would manifest themselves more prominently on future releases, such as the emotional desolation of “The Arrangement,” the imaginative use of piano, cello, saxophone, clarinet, and flute throughout, and the extended instrumental passages that graced several tracks.

Both in sound and substance, *Ladies of the Canyon* was infused with the sunny, free-spirited vibe of late 1960s California life, with “Conversation,” “Willy,” and the title song offering a near-mythical evocation of the Golden State. Other highlights included the bucolic small-town vignette “Morning Morgantown” and the poignant “For Free,” on which the artist contrasted her own vocation with that of a humble street performer. “For Free” was the first of several songs on which Mitchell would examine the benefits and drawbacks of stardom.

Ladies of the Canyon also included “Woodstock,” a starry-eyed ode to the historic 1969 rock festival, which celebrated the event as a mystical milestone in the awakening of human consciousness. Although many listeners assumed that Mitchell was present at Woodstock, she was actually inspired to write the song while in New York City and watching news reports about the event. She had been scheduled to perform on the festival’s final day, but was advised by her management to cancel when the clogged highways caused by attendees threatened her chances of getting back to Manhattan in time for a scheduled appearance on Dick Cavett’s TV talk show.

“Woodstock” became a major U.S. hit when it was covered by Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young, who did perform at the festival. In Britain, it hit the pop charts in a version by Matthews’s Southern Comfort, a band led by former Fairport Convention singer Ian Matthews. While the better-known Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young version of “Woodstock” emphasized the song’s anthemic elements, Mitchell’s reading is thoughtful and meditative, with a haunting electric piano arrangement that accentuated the song’s spiritual elements.

Ladies of the Canyon received substantial airplay on FM radio, resulting in higher sales that earned Mitchell her first gold album award. Her new fans took pleasure speculating about the real people and relationships who had inspired Mitchell’s lyrics.

While *Ladies of the Canyon* raised her profile substantially, her growing fame became a source of some discomfort for Mitchell. Rather than working to capitalize upon her expanding audience, she decided to take a year off from touring in order to concentrate on writing, painting, and travel. On an extended trip through Europe, she spent time in France, Spain, and Greece. During an extended retreat to the Greek island of Crete, she learned to play dulcimer and wrote a series of starkly reflective new songs inspired by her travels.

During this period, Mitchell limited her live appearances to a few festival dates during the summer of 1970, including a performance at the massive Isle of Wight festival in August. Although one of the best-known and most star-studded of the era’s rock extravaganzas, the 1970 Isle of Wight fest—the third

and last in a series of annual events—turned out to be a financial and logistical debacle, as well as a somewhat traumatic event for Mitchell.

At one point during her Isle of Wight set, an acquaintance of Mitchell's jumped on stage, grabbed her microphone, and launched into a less-than-coherent diatribe criticizing the festival, before being dragged off the stage by security personnel. When audience members protested the interloper's removal, a shaken Mitchell responded by urging that the crowd treat the performers with more respect.

The songs that Mitchell wrote during her European sojourn formed the core of her next album, *Blue*, released in June 1971. *Blue* was a major creative watershed for Mitchell, stripping away whatever had been flowery or twee in her previous work and focusing on raw emotional insight. While its lyrics delivered unflinching emotional truths, *Blue* replaced the relatively conventional acoustic folk stylings of her prior releases with more intricate arrangements that prominently featured dulcimer and piano (a reflection of Mitchell's admiration for the piano-based work of Laura Nyro).

Blue offered a sublimely expressive song cycle that explored romantic loss and disillusionment with such disarming honesty that it came to be widely regarded as the quintessential 1970s singer-songwriter album. "This Flight Tonight," "A Case of You," "Little Green," and the title track (reportedly inspired by fellow troubadour James Taylor) exemplified the album's raw resonance, while even the more upbeat material, such as "Carey," "All I Want," and "My Old Man," carried an unmistakable undercurrent of sadness. The desolate, bittersweetly beautiful "River" would, ironically, become a staple of Christmas-season radio programming, as well as one of Mitchell's most-covered compositions.

Although *Blue* would become so deeply ingrained in the public consciousness that it's now hard to imagine it any different, the album actually underwent some revisions just prior to its release. The LP had already been sequenced and mastered, before being altered at the last minute by Mitchell, who deleted the much-covered "Urge for Going" and the little-known "Hunter (The Good Samaritan)," replacing those with "All I Want" and "The Last Time I Saw Richard," both of which would emerge among *Blue*'s best-loved songs.

Blue was a nearly instant critical and commercial hit, sealing Mitchell's status as one of the new decade's cultural icons. That perception was supported by her concurrent guest appearances on albums by two of her most prominent peers, James Taylor's *Mud Slide Slim and the Blue Horizon* and Carole King's massively popular *Tapestry*.

In the wake of *Blue*'s success, Mitchell returned to touring. Her live performances during that period—including some benefit concerts for anti-war Democratic presidential candidate George McGovern—introduced many of the new songs that would appear on her next album, *For the Roses*. The 1972 release marked her move to Asylum Records, a new imprint run by influential young rock mogul David Geffen, who would continue to play a

prominent role in Mitchell's career. Asylum, which had been acquired by Warner Communications and merged with the hip rock label Elektra, would quickly emerge as a key outlet for many of the major exponents of 1970s West Coast rock, including Jackson Browne and the Eagles.

Jackson Browne: For Everyman

Born October 9, 1948, in Heidelberg, Germany (where his father was stationed with the U.S. military), Jackson Browne grew up in Orange County, California. He moved to New York City at age nineteen, shortly after two of his original songs ("Melissa" and "Holding") were included on the debut album by the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, but later returned west to Los Angeles. Other early Browne compositions such as "These Days" gained critical attention when covered by folksinger Tom Rush and ex-Velvet Underground chanteuse Nico.

Browne was not yet twenty-one when he wrote "These Days," in which the narrator expresses a mournful hindsight and the sense that he's already seen too much of life and its disappointments. The boyishly handsome Browne's gift for memorable melodies complemented his poetic talents in other early songs such as "Rock Me on the Water" and "Jamaica, Say You Will." His best songs depict a young American searching for love, security, and a purposeful life within the materialism, superficiality, and shifting emotional landscapes of contemporary society. Beyond his own success, Browne's sound and style exerted a profound influence on the southern California rock scene of the 1970s. Linda Ronstadt recorded several of his compositions and other L.A.-based singer/songwriters such as J.D. Souther and Warren Zevon followed in the wake of his career.

In March 1972, Jackson Browne released his debut album, *Saturate Before Using*, which spun off the Top Ten Pop hit "Doctor My Eyes." That same year, the Eagles scored a breakthrough hit with his composition "Take It Easy," which reached number twelve. Browne's second album, *For Everyman*, was issued in November 1973. Like its predecessor, the disc was only a mid-chart success but earned strongly favorable reviews and sold steadily over time. *For Everyman* became the first of Browne's five successive million-sellers including the ambitious *Late for the Sky* (1974, number fourteen) and *The Pretender* (1976, number five). During the making of the latter album, the singer's wife Phyllis Major committed suicide. This tragedy seems to have moved Browne toward an even more unflinching introspection with such songs as "Here Come Those Tears Again" and "Sleep's Dark and Silent Gate."

Running on Empty (1978, number three) and the number one album *Hold Out* (1980) became Jackson Browne's best-selling recordings. He reached his Hot 100 peak in 1982 with "Somebody's Baby" (number seven), which was popularized by its inclusion on the soundtrack of the movie *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*. Albums from the Reagan years like *Lawyers in Love* (1983)

found the singer turning from the personal to the broadly political, and throughout the 1980s Browne sharpened his leftist-humanist critique. *Lives in the Balance* (1986) remained on the *Billboard* chart for nearly eight months and was certified gold.

While his profile as a recording artist gradually diminished over the next decade, the singer's tours were always well received. In 2004, Jackson Browne was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and in 2005 he revisited his impressive song catalog on the independently released album *Solo Acoustic Vol. I*.

Andy Schwartz

For the Roses was a transitional effort that found Mitchell continuing to expand her sound. While some tracks stuck to the spare, folk-based approach of her earlier releases, others marked the initial stirrings of the overt jazz influences and extended instrumental passages that would soon become prominent in her work. Along with old friends Graham Nash and Stephen Stills and legendary rockabilly guitarist James Burton, the album's supporting cast included noted jazz-fusion bassist Wilton Felder and saxophone/reeds player Tom Scott, who would emerge as a key Mitchell collaborator.

The album also featured some of Mitchell's most artful and eloquent writing yet, continuing in the unsparingly insightful vein of *Blue*. Her talent for documenting the dynamics of troubled relationships is featured on "Woman of Heart and Mind," "Lesson in Survival," and "See You Sometime," while "Baran grill" and "Cold Blue Steel and Sweet Fire" demonstrated her knack for lyrical scene-setting.

For the Roses continued Mitchell's upward sales trend, spawning her biggest single to date in the buoyant pop gem "You Turn Me On (I'm a Radio)." The song's central double entendre proved irresistible to disc jockeys, sending it to number twenty-five on the *Billboard* pop chart in early 1973.

Having attained sufficient commercial success to wield control over her artistic direction, Mitchell next followed her muse into new territory. Ironically, her explorations produced 1974's *Court and Spark*, the most commercially successful album of her career. Her efforts to find musicians sympathetic to her songs' quirky chord patterns and unconventional rhythms led her to forge a productive working relationship with saxist Tom Scott's jazz-fusion outfit, the L.A. Express—whose membership included such stellar players as guitarist Larry Carlton, bassist Max Bennett, keyboardist Joe Sample, and drummer John Guerin, who was also Mitchell's boyfriend at the time—who provided most of the backup on the album. A few months earlier, Mitchell had contributed a guest vocal to "Love Poem" on the L.A. Express album *Tom Cat*.

Court and Spark's seamlessly accessible pop/folk/jazz blend struck a responsive chord with fans, spending four weeks in the number two slot on *Billboard*'s

album chart. It also produced a trio of successful singles in the breezy “Help Me,” Mitchell’s first and only Top Ten single; the witty “Free Man in Paris,” a character portrait whose stressed-out protagonist was reportedly inspired by David Geffen; and the sly-humored singles-bar scenario “Raised on Robbery.”

Court and Spark has been described as a concept album examining the need for honesty and trust in relationships, and Mitchell’s customary level of lyrical insight was prominent on “Down to You,” “People’s Parties,” and “The Same Situation,” which wrestled with insecurity and self-doubt—feelings which were somehow complemented by the music’s smooth, effortless swing.

In addition to the members of L.A. Express, *Court and Spark* featured guest appearances by David Crosby, Graham Nash, Latin-pop hit maker Jose Feliciano, The Band’s Robbie Robertson, and even popular stoner comedy duo Cheech and Chong, who added their patented patter to Mitchell’s lighthearted reading of “Twisted,” a satirical jazz tune originated by the noted vocal trio of Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross.

Although *Court and Spark* would mark her commercial apex, Mitchell continued to balance musical experimentation with mass appeal on her next few albums, maintaining her dual positions as an influential artist and popular star.

Mitchell’s high profile was demonstrated when *Court and Spark* was nominated for four Grammy awards. But the mainstream triumphed when she was beaten in the Best Female Pop Vocal and Record of the Year categories by Olivia Newton-John’s drippy “I Honestly Love You.” Mitchell and Tom Scott did win one Grammy, for Best Arrangement Accompanying Vocals.

To support *Court and Spark*, Mitchell mounted a lengthy tour, with the L.A. Express as her backup band. That trek saw her rise to the occasion while playing in some massive venues, including a series of summer stadium shows with Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young.

The tour spawned the two-LP *Miles of Aisles*, most of which was recorded during a trio of August shows at L.A.’s Universal Amphitheater. The live album found Mitchell and company reinterpreting songs from her first five albums, along with the new compositions “Love or Money” and “Jericho.” In addition to giving her the opportunity to rework familiar material, the live collection also served as a handy introduction for the new fans that she’d won in the wake of *Court and Spark*’s crossover success.

Mitchell continued to challenge her new listeners with 1975’s *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*. Recorded with many of the same musicians as *Court and Spark*, the album marked her bravest artistic leap yet. Her new songs radically redefined the boundaries of her style, trading the conventional song forms of her prior work for a mix of pop and jazz elements that had no precedent in mainstream popular music, along with exotic rhythms that presaged the multicultural consciousness that would take another decade to become commonplace in rock.

Her new lyrics were equally adventurous, largely abandoning the relentless self-examination of her prior work. Instead, she turned her observational

skills upon the outside world, resulting in richly cinematic vignettes that offered colorful tales of mobsters (“Edith and the Kingpin”) and the idle wealthy (the title track).

The album’s most striking departure was “The Jungle Line,” an insistently rhythmic epic that incorporated wailing synthesizer, unconventional vocal harmonies, and the forceful tribal drumming style of the Royal Drummers of the African nation of Burundi. Mitchell is generally regarded as the first Western musician to incorporate Burundi rhythms; they would later be utilized by many other white acts, including 1980s British new-wavers Adam and the Ants and Bow Wow Wow.

The Hissing of Summer Lawns is now widely considered to be a visionary classic, revered by fans, critics and a broad array of musicians. But the album received less than glowing reviews at the time, with many critics expressing discomfort with Mitchell’s ostensible abandonment of her confessional focus. One particularly scathing review appeared in *Rolling Stone*, which would maintain a volatile love/hate relationship with Mitchell over the years.

Whatever the reservations of critics, *The Hissing of Summer Lawns* was a solid seller, peaking at number four in *Billboard*. But it would be Mitchell’s last Top Ten album, and the first of a string of uncompromising releases that would alienate a substantial chunk of her audience while sealing her status as one of rock’s most influential innovators.

In the fall of 1975, Mitchell joined up with Bob Dylan’s all-star touring ensemble the Rolling Thunder Revue, for the last four shows of the now-legendary road show’s first leg, before starting 1976 to tour with the L.A. Express in support of *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*.

During America’s bicentennial summer of 1976, Mitchell, who had recently broken up with John Guerin, accompanied two friends on a cross-country drive from California to Maine, before driving home to California on her own, via Florida and the Southwestern states. During the trip, Mitchell’s observations of American landscape inspired her to write six songs for her next album, *Hejira*.

The spacious, moody album, whose title is an Arabic word signifying a break from one’s past, was Mitchell’s most overtly jazz-based effort to date, largely maintaining a subdued, reflective mood, with relatively spare arrangements built around Mitchell’s and Larry Carlton’s guitars. *Hejira*’s songs featured evocative, metaphorical lyrics and sweeping melodic lines that often provided a complementary contrast to the tracks’ fluid jazz rhythms.

Rather than concentrate on first-person soul-searching, many of *Hejira*’s road-inspired material—rife with images of highways and small towns—delivered their insights via incisive character portraits. “Song to Sharon” finds its title character wrestling with conflicting desires for marriage and independence, while “Furry Sings the Blues” (with Neil Young on harmonica) was inspired by an encounter with elderly Delta bluesman Furry Lewis). “Amelia,” ostensibly an ode to doomed aviatrix Amelia Earhart, carried a haunting

personal resonance. While the languid late-night vibe of “Blue Motel Room” reflected *Hejira*’s overall mood, “Coyote” and “Black Crow” offered upbeat songcraft that indicated that Mitchell hadn’t lost her playful streak.

Much of *Hejira* was already in the can when Mitchell decided that the recordings lacked a certain quality that she’d been looking for. At around the same time, she heard about a fretless bassist, Jaco Pastorius, whose melodic, inventive playing had begun to cause a stir in the jazz world. Mitchell went to see the twenty-three-year-old prodigy play, and immediately connected with his distinctive style, in which she recognized elements of her own unconventional approach to guitar. She decided that Pastorius was the element that her new music had been missing, and brought him in to overdub new bass parts on four *Hejira* tracks.

Mitchell and Pastorius first performed together publicly on November 20, 1976, two days before *Hejira*’s release, at a Save the Whales benefit concert in Sacramento, California. Three days later, she was part of a star-studded roster of guest performers, including Bob Dylan, Eric Clapton, Van Morrison, and Neil Young, appearing at The Band’s farewell extravaganza at San Francisco’s Winterland ballroom. The show was filmed by director Martin Scorsese and released in 1978 as the acclaimed concert film *The Last Waltz*, which featured Mitchell and The Band’s memorable performance of “Coyote,” one of three songs she’d played at the show.

Unlike *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*, *Hejira* was praised by most critics, who embraced Mitchell’s return to more personal songwriting. The album sold well enough to attain gold sales status three weeks after its release. But it received limited airplay on FM rock stations, which undoubtedly put a dent into its sales.

URGE FOR GROWING

In the summer of 1977, Mitchell began working on *Don Juan’s Reckless Daughter*, a double LP of loose, abstract pieces that would be her most unconventional effort to date. The album found Mitchell embracing the freedom of the jazz aesthetic more strongly than ever, with much of the music constructed through spontaneous improvisation with a supporting cast that included Carlton, Guerin, percussionist Don Alias, and seminal saxophonist Wayne Shorter, as well as an assortment of Latin percussionists. Also participating in the sessions were guest vocalists Chaka Khan, J.D. Souther, and Eagles member Glenn Frey.

The opening “Overture” featured six simultaneous guitars playing together in multiple tunings. The satirical fantasia “Dreamland” was comprised entirely of percussion and vocals. The seven-minute instrumental “The Tenth World” emphasized Latin percussion. The album’s centerpiece was the sixteen-minute,

side-long “Paprika Plains,” which featured a full orchestra and Mitchell’s improvised piano passages.

Released in December 1977, *Don Juan’s Reckless Daughter* met with mixed reviews, with some critics hailing it as a brave masterpiece and others dismissing it as overwrought and unfocused. Although it sold well enough to go gold and reach number twenty-five on the *Billboard* chart, the album’s obscure lyrics and general lack of memorable melodies alienated a sizable portion of the longtime fans who’d stuck with Mitchell through *The Hissing of Summer Lawns* and *Hejira*. The package also raised eyebrows with its fanciful cover photographs, which featured Mitchell in male drag as a black pimp character she named Art Nouveau.

One of those who did admire *Don Juan’s Reckless Daughter* was pioneering bebop bassist and composer Charles Mingus, who was so impressed that he invited Mitchell to collaborate with him on a planned musical interpretation of poet T.S. Eliot’s “Four Quartets.”

Mingus had proposed that he write a score for bass, guitar, and orchestra around the Eliot pieces, with Mitchell editing Eliot’s verses into lyrics and singing the results. Although Mitchell was intrigued by the prospect of working with the revered jazz giant, she found the prospect of condensing Eliot’s work to be daunting. A few weeks after Mitchell declined, Mingus called to tell her that he’d written six original pieces for her to write lyrics to.

Judging this to be a more practical assignment, Mitchell accepted, and in the spring of 1978 spent several weeks with Mingus in New York, working on the material for their collaboration. During that period, they cut some preliminary studio sessions that included contributions from such stellar jazz instrumentalists as bassist Stanley Clarke, keyboardist Jan Hammer, guitarist John McLaughlin, saxophonist Gerry Mulligan, and drummer Tony Williams. These recordings would not be released to the general public, although some would eventually surface in underground collectors’ circles.

At the time, Mingus was battling Lou Gehrig’s disease, and Mitchell accompanied Mingus and his wife Sue to Mexico, where the musician sought alternative treatments for his illness. After Mingus died on January 5, 1979, Mitchell refashioned the project as a tribute to the late jazz giant. As completed by Mitchell and an all-star electric band that included Pastorius, Shorter and keyboardist Herbie Hancock, drummer Peter Erskine, and percussionist Emil Richards, the album was released that June as *Mingus*, and combined recordings of three Mitchell/Mingus collaborations, along with some new Mingus-inspired Mitchell compositions and a heartfelt interpretation of the Mingus classic “Goodbye Pork Pie Hat,” with the tracks linked by bits of Mingus conversation that made the late musician a palpable presence on the album.

Mingus was released in July 1979 to a less than enthusiastic response from critics. Although it managed to place in the *Billboard* Top Twenty, it received little airplay and was the first Joni Mitchell album to fall short of gold sales

status since her 1968 debut. Although it was widely regarded as a failure at the time of its release, the album's prestige has grown considerably over the years, and many supporters now regard it as a visionary work.

By this point, Mitchell had lost much of her mainstream pop audience, leaving her with a relatively small but devoted core of followers. Those loyalists would stick with her in the years to come, as she continued to heed the call of her unpredictable muse while ignoring the demands of the mainstream marketplace.

Meanwhile, Mitchell's increasing esteem within the jazz community was confirmed by several high-profile appearances. A week before *Mingus's* release, she unveiled the new material at the U.C. Jazz Festival in Berkeley, California, with a band that included Alias, Hancock, Pastorius, and Williams. She also headlined the prestigious Playboy Jazz Festival at the Hollywood Bowl in June.

During this period, Mitchell began to devote increased attention to her passion for painting. One of her canvases graced the front cover of *Mingus*, whose release coincided with the publication of *StarArt*, a coffee-table book collecting artwork by Joni and fellow musicians Cat Stevens, John Mayall, Commander Cody, Klaus Voorman, and Rolling Stone Ron Wood.

Nineteen eighty saw the release of *Shadows and Light*, Mitchell's second live double album, which was accompanied by a concert video of the same name. Unlike *Miles of Aisles*, *Shadows and Light* concentrated on songs from her recent jazz-inspired recordings, offering vibrant new readings featuring such star sidemen as Jaco Pastorius, guitarist Pat Metheny, saxophonist Michael Brecker and keyboardist Lyle Mays, all of whom were given abundant room to stretch out and interact. The collection offered a handy summation of Mitchell's boundary-breaking late 1970s work.

In late 1980, Mitchell went to Toronto to work on *Love*, an offbeat multi-part feature film written by various prominent female artists. Mitchell scripted a segment, as well as assembling the soundtrack and starring onscreen in the same male role she'd introduced on the cover of *Don Juan's Reckless Daughter*. Rather than use her own music, she scored her portion of the film using jazz recordings, most of them by Miles Davis, during which she did write and perform the film's title theme. Intriguing as the project may have been, *Love* was apparently never completed.

Mitchell was still in Toronto when she was inducted into the Juno Awards' Canadian Music Hall of Fame by Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. She then made an extended trip to the Caribbean to work on new songs, during which she also found time to paint a mural on a wall in the home of Jamaican filmmaker Perry Henzell (director of the reggae-themed cult hit *The Harder They Come*). During her visit to the islands, Mitchell soaked up the beat of Jamaican reggae, as well as the exotic rhythms of such new-wave rock acts as the Police and Talking Heads. At one point, Mitchell even asked the Police to record with her.

CHALK MARK IN THE 1980s

Although a Mitchell/Police collaboration did not come to pass, Joni's new polyrhythmic influences would manifest themselves on her next album, *Wild Things Run Fast*. More significantly, though, the album found Mitchell returning to melodic pop songwriting and emotionally direct lyrics, while retaining an unmistakable jazz sensibility that informed the album's musical palette.

Wild Things Run Fast was originally recorded for Asylum Records, to whom Mitchell owed one more album. But it was ultimately released in October 1982 on old friend David Geffen's much-touted new label, which bore his surname. The high-profile move, combined with the fact that the album featured her most commercially accessible music since *Court and Spark*, helped to put Mitchell back in the mainstream public eye. She even briefly returned to the pop charts when her tongue-in-cheek reworking of the old Elvis Presley number "(You're So Square) Baby I Don't Care" narrowly scraped into the Top Fifty to become her first chart single in eight years.

Wild Things Run Fast yielded such catchy, upbeat originals as "Solid Love," "You Dream Flat Tires," and "Underneath the Streetlights," while "Chinese Cafe" demonstrated left-field pop savvy by incorporating elements of the beloved pop standard "Unchained Melody." The album's accessible orientation was further reflected in the presence of guest vocalists James Taylor, Kenny Rankin, and Lionel Richie, the ex-Commodores member who at the time was riding high as a solo star.

Much of Mitchell's new material was inspired by her relationship with bassist Larry Klein, whom she wed on November 21, 1982, in a ceremony at the home of manager Elliot Roberts. Klein quickly emerged as the artist's chief musical collaborator, playing on and helping to mix *Wild Things Run Fast*.

Wild Things Run Fast won back some of the old fans that Mitchell had lost with *Don Juan's Reckless Daughter* and *Mingus*. But she had the misfortune of releasing her potential commercial comeback just as the pop mainstream had begun to emphasize the slick, gimmicky acts that were being promoted through the new music-video cable channel MTV, limiting Mitchell's ability to reach new listeners.

If *Wild Things Run Fast* didn't quite restore Mitchell to her former level of popularity, it wasn't for lack of trying. To support the album, she embarked on the most extensive concert tour of her career, running five months and encompassing Japan, Australia, Britain, Europe, and the United States. Mitchell and Klein later put together *Refuge of the Roads*, a documentary that mixed live performances from the tour with home-movie footage.

Mitchell would continue to release challenging new music through the 1980s and 1990s, albeit with less frequency than in her 1970s heyday. By the end of 1984, she and Klein had taken an active interest in electronics, and had

begun working with the Fairlight synthesizer, a state-of-the-art instrument capable of reproducing a vast array of sounds.

When they indicated their intention to integrate their electronic experiments into Mitchell's next recording project, Geffen brought up the possibility of working with an outside collaborator with more synthesizer experience. Geffen suggested Thomas Dolby, one of the most accomplished of the then-current crop of new British synth-pop stars. Although he'd scored an international hit in 1983 with his wacky techno-pop anthem "She Blinded Me with Science," Dolby was also a longtime Mitchell fan who'd recorded a memorable cover of "The Jungle Line."

With Dolby acting as player, programmer, and co-producer, 1985's *Dog Eat Dog* combined an assortment of modern sounds with some of the most uncompromisingly political songwriting of Mitchell's career. "Dog Eat Dog," "Fiction," and "The Three Great Stimulants" were sharp indictments of the callousness and materialism of Reagan-era America, even if their lyrics were occasionally so abstract as to partially obscure their messages.

Dog Eat Dog's social consciousness was further reflected in "Ethiopia," which poignantly contrasts the gravity of third-world poverty with the emptiness of show-business glitz. The song was partially Mitchell's skeptical response to the all-star charity recordings that proliferated at the time (although she did participate in one such project, Northern Lights, a one-off assemblage of Canadian musicians, including such contemporaries as Neil Young, Gordon Lightfoot, and Anne Murray, who recorded the song "Tears Are Not Enough" to raise funds for Ethiopian famine relief).

Dog Eat Dog's Los Angeles release party was held at the James Corcoran Gallery, in conjunction with an exhibition of Mitchell's recent abstract expressionist collage paintings. She also made an effort to join the music-video explosion by putting together a visually inventive promo clip for the album track "Good Friends." The video premiered on MTV with a fair amount of fanfare, but received limited exposure on the channel thereafter.

Dog Eat Dog's extensive use of advanced recording technology made it Mitchell's most expensive recording project to date, but the album's lackluster sales hardly justified the expense. The songs' angry stance divided and confused many critics, and the album stalled at number sixty-three—Joni's poorest chart showing since her debut album.

Like many of Mitchell's more "difficult" releases, *Dog Eat Dog* has gained resonance with the passage of time, and its harsher visions have largely been vindicated by subsequent world events. At the time, though, its commercial performance was so disappointing that Mitchell cancelled a planned six-month tour to support the album, choosing to use the time to paint instead.

During the summer of 1985, Mitchell and Klein survived a serious automobile accident on the Pacific Coast Highway, when their car was hit by a drunk driver. In September, Joni, who owned a home in a remote section of British Columbia, became embroiled in controversy when she and her rural neighbors

campaigned against a salmon-fishing company whose nearby processing plant they believed to be threatening the area's ecology. The situation became particularly uncomfortable after local newspapers sided with the fishing company.

Over the next two years, Mitchell limited her public appearances to a handful of benefit shows. For example, on June 15, 1986, Mitchell was a last-minute addition to the all-star Amnesty International Conspiracy of Hope benefit concert at New Jersey's Giants Stadium.

Mitchell continued to pursue electronic influences on 1988's *Chalk Mark in a Rain Storm*. On paper, the album might have seemed like a commercial move, since it teamed Mitchell with a diverse assortment of famous guest vocalists, including Peter Gabriel, Don Henley, Willie Nelson, Tom Petty, cartoon pop-punk Billy Idol, the Cars' Benjamin Orr, former Prince sidekicks Wendy Melvoin and Lisa Coleman, and even Iron Eyes Cody, the Native American actor who'd played Tonto in the old Lone Ranger film series. Despite its roster of big-name singers, though, the album was as idiosyncratic—and as out-of-step with the 1980s mainstream—as its predecessor.

Beyond its resourceful use of multiple voices and its emphasis on spare, percussion-heavy instrumental tracks, *Chalk Mark in a Rainstorm* continued to explore many of the topical themes that Mitchell had explored on *Dog Eat Dog*. The songs encompassed the environment ("Lakota" and a rewrite of the old cowboy song "Cool Water"), war ("The Tea Leaf Prophecy," "The Beat of Black Wings"), and the soullessness of contemporary American culture ("Number One," "The Reoccurring Dream").

The album led off with Mitchell's duet with Gabriel, the tender love song "My Secret Place"; it was recorded at Gabriel's studio in England, where Klein was playing on the sessions for Gabriel's album *So*. Elsewhere, Nelson brought his trademark twang to "Cool Water," while Henley was featured on "Lakota" and "Snakes and Ladders," and Petty and Idol assumed colorful character roles on "Dancin' Clown." The album-closing "A Bird That Whistles" was a rewrite of the blues standard "Corrina, Corrina," featuring Wayne Shorter on sax.

Chalk Mark in a Rainstorm generally received more favorable reviews than *Dog Eat Dog*, and its sales were slightly better—although not sufficiently so to prevent the cancellation of yet another planned concert tour. It did, however, bring Mitchell her first Grammy nomination in over a decade, in the Best Female Pop Vocal Performance category. She ended up losing to newcomer Tracy Chapman. Ironically, Chapman was managed by Joni's longtime manager Elliot Roberts, whom Mitchell had fired only a few months before.

Although Mitchell didn't tour behind *Chalk Mark in a Rainstorm*, she did make a guest appearance at a performance of *The Joni Mitchell Project*, a stage revue built around her songs that ran for three months at the L.A. Theater Center. She debuted the new "Cherokee Louise," which would appear on her 1991 album *Night Ride Home*.

TURBULENCE AND GRACE

Mitchell's final Geffen release *Night Ride Home* represented a strong return to the artist's roots, dispensing with the technological frills and celebrity duets of her recent work in favor of spare, mostly acoustic arrangements built around her voice and guitar. "Night Ride Home," "Passion Play (When All the Slaves Are Free)," and "Come in from the Cold" echoed the reflective intimacy of her early work, while tackling more mature subject matter in a manner that reflected the viewpoint of a fiercely independent woman closing in on her fifties.

Night Ride Home won Mitchell the most enthusiastic reviews she'd received in years. Unfortunately, Geffen's artist roster was now dominated by young hard-rock and heavy metal bands, and the soon-to-be-departing Mitchell was no longer much of a promotional priority for the label. The result was that the album failed to win the mass audience it might have reached had it been released a few years earlier.

Although *Night Ride Home* didn't quite reestablish Joni Mitchell as a cultural icon, she did receive some unexpected notoriety the following year, when Bill Clinton became the Democratic Party candidate for president. The press was quick to note that Clinton's teenage daughter Chelsea had been named after Mitchell's "Chelsea Morning"—although it had actually been Judy Collins's cover version that Clinton and wife Hilary had heard at the time.

Mitchell and Larry Klein separated in 1994, but continued to work together on that year's *Turbulent Indigo*, which marked Mitchell's return to Warner Bros./Reprise. Her return to her original label carried some symbolic value, since the album largely continued to embrace the sound and spirit of her beloved earlier work.

Turbulent Indigo's melodically accessible, lyrically direct songs seamlessly meshed the personal and the topical, looking outward at a troubled world while exploring the rocky terrain of the human heart. The resulting album offered an incisive and sometimes disturbing panorama of contemporary life, all the more effective for its spare, understated sound.

While "Last Chance Lost" and the disquieting domestic-abuse tale "Not to Blame" observed relationships gone awry, other tracks maintained the socio-political perspective that had been so prominent on *Dog Eat Dog* and *Chalk Mark in a Rain Storm*. For example, "Sunny Sunday" presented an eloquent metaphor in its protagonist's nightly attempt to shoot out a streetlight, while "Sex Kills" offered a dark assessment of the state of civilization, encompassing a litany of ills from AIDS to the degradation of the environment.

Although its sales were again underwhelming, *Turbulent Indigo*—whose front cover featured a Van Gogh-inspired Mitchell self-portrait—was widely acclaimed as a return to form for Mitchell. Its release coincided with a growing sense of public acknowledgment of her importance and influence, an

awareness that was affirmed when *Turbulent Indigo* won a Grammy award as the year's Best Pop Album.

Mitchell's rising public profile was underlined by the simultaneous 1996 release of a pair of retrospective compilations, *Hits* and *Misses*, which collected her successful singles and lesser-known gems, respectively. The latter disc was the idea of Mitchell, who had refused to give her blessing to the proposed best-of collection unless she was allowed to assemble a companion volume of more esoteric material.

Hits included such early favorites as "Urge for Going," "Woodstock," "The Circle Game," and "Big Yellow Taxi," as well as her trio of *Court and Spark*-era hit singles. *Misses*, meanwhile, concentrated on more challenging and esoteric material, offering a handy primer to show Mitchell's pop fans what they'd been missing during the artist's years in the music-industry wilderness. That period was represented here by the *Mingus* highlight "The Wolf That Lives in Lindsey," the title songs of *For the Roses* and *Hejira*, and various favorites from each of her 1980s and 1990s releases.

In January 1996, in an article headlined "Too Feminine for Rock? Or Is Rock Too Macho?," *New York Times* critic Stephen Holden took the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame—an institution that had been widely accused of conservatism and elitism, and which had yet to honor any female performers—to task for not having inducted Mitchell, who had become eligible in 1993. Coincidentally or not, Mitchell would finally be voted into the Hall of Fame on May 15, 1997, becoming the first woman artist to receive the honor.

Also in January 1996, Reprise released a CD single containing six diverse remixes of "Big Yellow Taxi." Mitchell's original recording had been featured on a soundtrack album for the TV sitcom *Friends*, released the previous September. The remix EP briefly got Mitchell onto the dance charts; she would venture into R&B the following year, guesting with rapper Q-Tip on the Janet Jackson song "Got 'Til It's Gone," from Jackson's platinum album *The Velvet Rope*.

Mitchell played a more active role in another soundtrack project, director Allison Anders's 1996 film *Grace of My Heart*, a drama set in the pop-music scene of the 1960s. Larry Klein, who served as the project's music supervisor, asked Mitchell to write a song to in the vein of her *For the Roses* period, to be performed by the film's lead character. Although she initially balked at the idea, she reconsidered after viewing scenes from the film, and wrote the bittersweet "Man from Mars" for the occasion.

"Man from Mars" was performed in the film by singer Kristen Vigard, who did all the singing for actress Ileana Douglas's character. Anders had planned to use Mitchell's vocal on the soundtrack album, but when Mitchell objected, Vigard's voice was substituted—but not before the initial batch of CDs reached stores with the Mitchell version included by mistake. MCA Records recalled most of the faulty pressings, but a handful of copies containing Mitchell's voice reached the hands of fans and collectors.

Mitchell revived “Man from Mars” for 1998’s *Taming the Tiger*. The album continued the personally charged songwriting of her recent efforts, while recalling some of the fluid jazz textures of her *Hejira* era. The album’s title track and “Stay in Touch” seemingly referred to the artist’s recent reconnection with her long-lost daughter—and her concurrent discovery that she was a grandmother—and family-related themes ran through the songs. Mitchell promoted *Taming the Tiger* with a long-awaited concert tour, playing numerous co-headlining shows with Bob Dylan and Van Morrison.

In 2000, Mitchell released *Both Sides Now*, a stylistic departure consisting largely of covers of jazz and pop standards of the 1930s and 1940s, with the singer backed by a seventy-one-piece orchestra and/or a 1940s-style big band. As co-producer Klein explained in his liner notes, the album was intended as a song cycle illustrating the trajectory of a modern relationship—despite most of the songs being more than half a century old, and most of them having an unmistakably melancholy mood.

In addition to such familiar numbers as “Stormy Weather” and “Answer Me, My Love,” *Both Sides Now* featured a pair of reworked Mitchell classics, the title song and the *Blue*-era favorite “A Case of You.” Both provided a compelling contrast between the middle-aged artist’s wise, dusky tone and the bright, eager voice of her earlier work. Beyond its conceptual ambitions, the project offered persuasive evidence of Joni’s growth into a masterful, evocative vocalist capable of immense subtlety.

The release of *Both Sides Now* was accompanied by an all-star tribute concert, which was broadcast as a special on the TNT cable network. The broad array of artists who turned out to pay musical tribute to Mitchell—including Bryan Adams, Shawn Colvin, Elton John, Wynonna Judd, Diana Krall, k.d. lang, Cyndi Lauper, James Taylor, and Richard Thompson—attested to the broad swath of her influence.

In 2002, Mitchell abruptly announced that she was finished with the music industry. She stated in interviews that her forthcoming release *Travelogue* would be her last album, and that she had no intention of signing another record deal, or of recording or touring at any time in the foreseeable future. By the time the album was released, she had apparently reconsidered her decision, stating that her retirement plans may have been premature.

If she’d made good on her threat to quit, *Travelogue* would certainly have been an uncommonly graceful swan song. The two-CD set featured new readings of twenty-two classic Mitchell classics, with lush orchestral accompaniment as well as an assortment of jazz players including Larry Klein, Herbie Hancock, Wayne Shorter, organist Billy Preston, and trumpeter Kenny Wheeler.

Travelogue transcended its ostensible status as an instant greatest-hits collection to craft a dynamic and deeply personal statement that attests to the musical and emotional richness of Mitchell’s remarkable body of work. The package—which also reproduced an extensive selection of Mitchell’s paintings—revisited material from various points of her career, largely avoiding her

best known songs (except for “The Circle Game” and “Woodstock”) in favor of more challenging selections. She often recast the songs drastically, placing the songs in new musical contexts that, more often than not, enhanced their insights.

At a time when many of her peers and contemporaries were revisiting their songbooks with easily digestible *Unplugged*-style quasi-retrospectives, *Travelogue* offered a far more complex and rewarding experience.

In 2003 *The Complete Geffen Recordings* was released, which combined remastered editions of her four albums for the label, along with some bonus rarities and Mitchell’s own liner notes observations. The release of the collection coincided with a growing level of appreciation for the artist’s Geffen-era output.

The Complete Geffen Recordings was followed by a trio of themed compilations drawn from Mitchell’s catalog. *The Beginning of Survival* was a collection of topically themed Geffen-era material. *Dreamland* focused on her jazz-based compositions. *Songs of a Prairie Girl* consisted of songs inspired by her upbringing in Canada. The latter collection coincided with Mitchell’s appearance at a concert as part of Saskatchewan’s Centennial celebration, at which Mitchell performed before Queen Elizabeth II.

While her fans had to be satisfied with the flood of retrospective product, Mitchell focused on her visual art, which she rarely sold or exhibited in public. February 2007 saw the debut, in Mitchell’s old stomping grounds of Calgary, of *Dancing Joni*, a ballet built around Mitchell’s songs.

A few months earlier, in an interview with the *Ottawa Citizen*, Mitchell revealed that she’d been working on her first set of new songs in nearly a decade. The news came as a relief to fans who’d worried that she’d never record again. But regardless of her future musical ventures, Mitchell’s discography is already one of the most remarkable bodies of work in contemporary music, and its influence remains incalculable.

TIMELINE

November 5, 1962

Joni Anderson makes her first paid performance, at the folk club the Louis Riel in Saskatoon, Canada.

August 1963

Joni makes her first television appearance, singing several songs and playing ukulele on a late-night TV show in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan.

January 21, 1967

Country singer George Hamilton IV’s version of “Urge for Going,” enters the Country singles chart, the first recording of a Joni Mitchell composition to become a hit.

March 9, 1968

Joni Mitchell’s eponymous debut album is released.

December 1, 1968

Joni Mitchell and Graham Nash move into a home on Lookout Mountain Road in Los Angeles's Laurel Canyon, which will later be immortalized in the Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young hit "Our House."

August 18, 1969

Mitchell is scheduled to perform at the Woodstock festival, but cancels in order to honor a commitment to appear on Dick Cavett's TV talk show. Although she doesn't appear at Woodstock, she's inspired to write the song of the same name while watching TV news reports about the event.

April 1970

Mitchell's third album *Ladies of the Canyon*, including her first Top Forty single "Big Yellow Taxi," is released.

June 1971

Mitchell's fourth album, *Blue*, is released.

December 14, 1972

For the Roses, Mitchell's first album for David Geffen's new Asylum label, is released.

January 1974

Mitchell's album *Court and Spark* is released. It will go on to become her biggest-selling album.

Summer 1976

Mitchell and two friends drive cross-country from California to Maine, after which Mitchell drives back to California on her own. Her travels inspire most of the songs for her next album, *Hejira*.

November 20, 1976

Mitchell performs for the first time with bassist Jaco Pastorious, at a Save the Whales benefit concert in Sacramento, California. Her new album *Hejira*, featuring Pastorious on several tracks, will be released two days later. The day after that, Mitchell is one of several guest performers at The Band's farewell concert at the Winterland ballroom in San Francisco's Winterland ballroom.

July 14, 1979

Mingus, Mitchell's collaboration with jazz giant Charles Mingus, is released six months after his death.

November 14, 1982

Joni Mitchell moves to David Geffen's new label, Geffen Records with *Wild Things Run Fast*.

February 28, 1996

Mitchell's seventeenth album, *Turbulent Indigo*, wins a Grammy award for Best Pop Album.

February 8, 2000

Mitchell releases *Both Sides Now*, a collection of 1930s and 1940s jazz and pop standards with orchestral and big-band arrangements. The album's release coincides with an all-star Mitchell tribute show on the TNT cable network.

November 19, 2002

Mitchell releases *Travelogue*, a retrospective collection featuring new versions of twenty-two Mitchell classics. In interviews promoting the album, the artist announces

that she's done with the music business, stating that she has no intention of recording or touring again.

October 8, 2006

In an interview with the *Ottawa Citizen*, Mitchell reveals that she's been working on her first set of new compositions in nearly a decade.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Joni Mitchell (aka Song to a Seagull), 1968

Clouds, 1969

Ladies of the Canyon, 1970

Blue, 1971

For the Roses, 1972

Court and Spark, 1974

The Hissing of Summer Lawns, 1975

Hejira, 1976

Don Juan's Reckless Daughter, 1977

Mingus, 1979

Night Ride Home, 1991

Turbulent Indigo, 1994

NOTE

1. Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Induction Essay, available online at www.rockhall.com/inductee/joni-mitchell.

FURTHER READING

O'Brien, Karen. *Joni Mitchell: Shadows and Light*. London: Virgin Books, 2002.



Courtesy of Photofest.

Pink Floyd

Scott Schinder

THE BAND WHO ATE ASTEROIDS FOR BREAKFAST

Pink Floyd bridged the free-spirited experimentalism of 1960s psychedelia and the stadium-filling excess of 1970s progressive rock. The English foursome began as esoteric psychedelic avatars and ended up as one of the world's most successful and influential recording acts, having sold, by one recent estimate, approximately 175–200 million records worldwide.

Pink Floyd was born of the first generation of rock bands to consciously break away from the standard format of the three-minute verse/chorus song. Although its members had all begun their careers playing conventional R&B-based rock and roll in other bands, Pink Floyd would play a crucial role in expanding rock's formal structures. The quartet made rock safe for extended compositions, constructing futuristic sonic vistas that incorporated hypnotic

rhythms, majestic keyboard flights, soaring guitar figures, and an imaginative array of high-tech gadgets and sound effects. Those elements would eventually become commonplace among the Floyd's prog-rock contemporaries, but few bands employed them as effectively—or with as much commercial success—as Pink Floyd.

In the 1970s, Pink Floyd's technically complex, thematically provocative concept albums raised the stakes on the rock LP as a creative medium. Their elaborate cover designs helped to revolutionize album cover art. And the band's elaborately staged live extravaganzas set a standard for epic concert spectacle that's rarely been matched.

Pink Floyd's massive popularity and ubiquitous presence on album-rock radio were all the more impressive in light of the band members' long-standing insistence on maintaining a near-faceless media profile, avoiding interviews and other media activities for much of their career.

The first of the three distinct periods of Pink Floyd's career was the band's years under the leadership of singer/guitarist/songwriter Syd Barrett. Barrett was a uniquely charismatic figure whose impish persona and playfully eccentric songwriting made him an ideal Aquarian-age icon. As Pink Floyd's founder, frontman, and original guiding force, he shone brightly but briefly, before his descent into acid-fueled mental illness turned him into one of rock's most mythologized cult heroes.

It was in 1965 that Barrett, then a promising painter attending London's Camberwell Art School, joined a jazz/R&B combo that had been known, at various times, as Sigma 6, the T-Set, the Megadeaths, and the Architectural Abdabs. Barrett joined at the behest of bassist Roger Waters, an old friend from Barrett's hometown of Cambridge. The band also included keyboardist Richard Wright and drummer Nick Mason, whom Waters had met while all three were studying architecture at London's Regent Street Polytechnic. Rounding out the lineup was Bob Close, a talented jazz guitarist whose musical sensibilities immediately clashed with Barrett's. When Close quit in 1966 to pursue a career in photography, it left Barrett as the group's *de facto* leader.

Waters, Wright, and Mason were initially more concerned with their studies than with music, which they apparently regarded as a casual diversion rather than a serious career option. But Barrett instilled a sense of focus and direction, bringing a distinctive sonic vision to the band's repertoire of familiar R&B covers by adding layers of guitar feedback and distortion. Before long, Syd's unconventional songwriting would open up a new set of possibilities, as would Wright's classically trained keyboard work.

Barrett rechristened the group the Pink Floyd Sound, borrowing the names of American bluesmen Pink Anderson and Floyd Council. The "Sound" was soon dropped from the band's billing, but "The" would remain for a few more years.

Their retooled approach represented the group's interpretation of the new brand of psychedelic rock that was being made by a new wave of long-hair bands from America's West Coast. Actually, since most of those U.S. acts had yet to release records, their U.K. contemporaries were largely basing their version of psychedelia on what they'd heard and read about them. That helped to ensure that the Pink Floyd and their contemporaries on the nascent British psychedelic scene would develop a style and attitude distinct from their stateside inspiration.

Barrett's idiosyncratic tunes suggested a sort of lysergic Lewis Carroll, with whimsical, fantasy-filled lyrics populated by gnomes, unicorns, and scarecrows. On stage, the band was prone to stretch the tunes out with improvisational freakouts incorporating feedback and electronic noise. Their live shows were elevated with the addition of Britain's first quadraphonic PA and first liquid light show—the perfect hallucinatory experience for an audience looking for something headier and more mind-expanding than mere pop music.

The Pink Floyd soon found itself at the center of the psychedelic counterculture that was beginning to take root in London. With England belatedly emerging from post-World War II austerity, an air of optimism and possibility had taken hold in the city, inspiring a generation of young artists, filmmakers, and writers—and a new breed of rock musicians.

The band made its public debut at London's Countdown Club in late 1965, and subsequently became a fixture at a series of popular Sunday-afternoon multi-media happenings at London's Marquee Club, and a regular attraction at such fabled venues as the UFO Club and the Roundhouse, providing a perfect soundtrack to the heady counterculture of what America's *Time* magazine had officially dubbed "swinging London."

London scenesters were taken with the quartet's flamboyantly experimental live sets, which incorporated psychedelic light shows and lengthy instrumental improvisations to create a multi-sensory experience that was a perfect manifestation of the scene's iconoclastic spirit.

By early 1967, when the Pink Floyd won a recording deal with the powerful EMI, such Barrett originals as "The Gnome," "Matilda Mother," and the epic instrumental "Astronomy Domine" had largely pushed the R&B covers out of the band's set lists. They soon proved adept at channeling the energy, mischief, and experimentalism of its live shows into disciplined, smartly crafted recordings.

In March 1967, the band released its auspicious debut single "Arnold Layne," a vivid vignette about a transvestite kleptomaniac. The session was produced by Joe Boyd, an American who'd co-founded the UFO Club and who would soon emerge as an important figure on the U.K. music scene. The song boasted a powerful hook and a mind-bending sound, and instantly established the Pink Floyd at the forefront of the burgeoning U.K. rock underground.

Symphony in Rock: Procol Harum, Moody Blues, Deep Purple

There wasn't any particular name for the music of the Left Banke in 1966 when the New York-based group scored a U.S. Top Five hit with "Walk Away Renee." But with its sweeping strings and delicate choirboy vocals over an understated rock rhythm track, "Walk Away Renee" was a harbinger of things to come from the movement known first as "art rock" and later as "prog" ("progressive rock").

Classical music was a crucial influence on prog and English groups were the leading exponents of the style from 1967 onward. From primary school classes to BBC national broadcasts, classical music is a long-standing and deep-rooted cultural tradition in Great Britain—far more so than in the United States. English rock musicians were more likely to relate to the music, whether as a source of creative inspiration or as an upper-class realm to be parodied or subverted.

It wasn't until the release of the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* in June 1967 that the art-rock trend really got under way. *Sgt. Pepper* represented a giant step forward in studio experimentation, and its release served notice to a previously dismissive adult world that rock and roll had reached a new level of seriousness and maturity. Most early British art-rock aggregations had begun life as beat groups or R&B bands and developed on a track parallel to that of the Beatles.

In 1965, the Paramounts' repertoire drew heavily on American R&B songs by such artists as the Coasters and Johnny "Guitar" Watson. By early 1967, the Paramounts had become Procol Harum and were playing original songs co-written by singer/pianist Gary Brooker and lyricist Keith Reid. The group's first single, "A Whiter Shade of Pale," was a stately ballad with a melody borrowed from a Bach cantata and the cathedral-like organ playing of Matthew Fisher. In the same week that *Sgt. Pepper* entered the *Billboard* album chart, "A Whiter Shade of Pale" debuted on the U.S. Hot 100, where it rose rapidly to number 5 (and reached number 1 in the United Kingdom). Procol Harum delivered on this initial promise with a half-dozen well-crafted LPs including a 1972 live set recorded with the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra that became the band's only gold album.

Like Procol Harum, the Moody Blues started out as an R&B band from Birmingham, England. Their first Top Ten hit, in 1965, was a version of the American soul ballad "Go Now." Three years later, a revamped lineup featuring new lead singer Justin Hayward released *Days of Future Past*, a lush *Sgt. Pepper*-inspired song cycle recorded with the London Festival Orchestra that spun off the U.S. number two single "Nights in White Satin." It was the first in a long series of best-selling releases by the increasingly middle-of-the-road Moodies, including the number one albums *Seventh Sojourn* (1972) and *Long Distance Voyager* (1981).

Art rock met heavy metal in the sound of Deep Purple, formed in 1968 by organist Jon Lord and guitarist Ritchie Blackmore and later joined by drummer

Ian Paice. The English quintet first scored with its dramatic revamps of American pop tunes (cf. “Hush” by Joe South) but took a heavier direction (i.e., playing longer solos at higher volumes) after the arrival of singer Ian Gillan and bassist Roger Glover in 1969.

In 1970, this lineup joined forces with the London Philharmonic Orchestra to record Jon Lord’s *Concerto for Group and Orchestra* in concert at the Royal Albert Hall. The overblown album that resulted was a commercial failure and eventually Deep Purple returned to playing organ/guitar power rock. In this vein, the band scored five U.S. Top Twenty albums during the next five years including the platinum double-disc live set, *Made in Japan* (1973). The crushing Ritchie Blackmore guitar riff that kicks off “Smoke on the Water” is a sonic landmark of the pre-punk 1970s: the song broke out of FM rock radio to become Deep Purple’s only U.S. Top Five single after “Hush” in 1968.

Andy Schwartz

Despite its controversial subject matter, “Arnold Layne” made the pop Top Twenty in Britain. The group ran into some censorship problems with the song’s B-side, which had originally been titled “Let’s Roll Another One” before the band was prevailed upon to change the title to “Candy and a Currant Bun.”

June saw the release of the Pink Floyd’s second single, “See Emily Play,” an infectious slice of kaleidoscopic pop that Barrett claimed he’d literally dreamed up after dozing off in the woods. The song became a smash, rising to number six in Britain, and appearing on the pop charts alongside the likes of the Beatles’ “All You Need Is Love” and Procol Harum’s “A Whiter Shade of Pale.” “See Emily Play” solidified the Pink Floyd’s position as standard bearers of the British arm of flower power. That status was also aided by the band’s appearance performing “Interstellar Overdrive” in the documentary film *Tonite Let’s All Make Love in London*.

Their success on the mainstream pop charts put the Pink Floyd on the English touring circuit, but they found audiences outside of London to be far less receptive than their usual London crowds. The band didn’t do much to endear themselves to their new listeners, refusing to perform their current hit during their set.

The Pink Floyd’s debut LP, *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn*—the title was borrowed from a chapter of the classic British children’s book *The Wind in the Willows*—was recorded at EMI’s Abbey Road studios at the same time that the Beatles were cutting *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*. At one point, Paul McCartney, George Harrison, and Ringo Starr stopped by to say hello and lend support to their new labelmates.

Released in August 1967, *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn* was dominated by Barrett’s, unconventional guitar work and visionary songwriting. His surrealist ditties (e.g., “Bike,” “Matilda Mother”) and free-form instrumentals

(“Astronomy Domine,” “Interstellar Overdrive”) suggested the pleasures and terrors of the psychedelic experience.

The album also featured an array of innovative recording techniques. Norman Smith, the EMI staff engineer who produced the sessions (and who’d previously worked with the Beatles) found that Barrett’s tendency to never perform a song the same way twice—and to rework material between takes—made it tricky to employ multiple takes. The album’s version of “Interstellar Overdrive” avoided that issue simply by taking two complete band performances of the song and dubbing one on top of the other.

The Piper at the Gates of Dawn’s intoxicating yet vaguely uneasy atmosphere was enhanced by a variety of advanced production techniques that helped the album to sound unlike anything else in rock at the time.

The album was a hit in Britain, reaching number six on the charts. By then, however, Syd Barrett’s behavior was growing increasingly erratic, a situation that many of his friends attributed to his prodigious intake of LSD and other mind-altering substances. Although he’d apparently shown no prior signs of mental illness, the frontman would often become transfixed on stage, refusing to play the same song as the rest of the band—or simply staring into space and not playing at all.

The Pink Floyd’s first U.S. tour in the autumn of 1967 included dates at the Fillmore and the Winterland in San Francisco, and L.A.’s Cheetah Club. At a time in which America’s homegrown hippie acts were beginning to make mainstream commercial headway, the trip had the potential to put the band and “See Emily Play” across in the States.

But the visit had to be cut short after just eight days, following an uncomfortable performance on TV’s *American Bandstand* in which Barrett was unwilling or unable to lip-sync his vocal, and an appearance on Pat Boone’s variety show in which he greeted the host’s genial questions with a blank stare. The U.S. edition of *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn* (released by Capitol’s Tower imprint in a butchered, truncated version that deleted “Astronomy Domine,” “Bike,” and “Flaming” from the running order) ended up stalling at a modest number 131 on the charts.

The ill-fated American adventure was followed by a November tour of England, on which the Pink Floyd supported the Jimi Hendrix Experience. Barrett’s distressing mental state continued to manifest itself, both on and off stage. The guitarist was prone to spend the entire set playing a single chord on his mirrored Telecaster, or not playing anything. On some nights he refused to even emerge from the tour bus, leaving the group to draft Davy O’List of opening act the Nice to fill in for him. As frustrating as Barrett’s decreasing participation was, it also showed his less flashy bandmates—who, despite Pink Floyd’s acid-drenched reputation, didn’t share Syd’s passion for hallucinogenics—that they were capable of functioning without the input of their unreliable leader.

Prog-Rock Supergroup: Emerson, Lake, and Palmer

Emerson, Lake, and Palmer were prog-rock's first supergroup. The flamboyant Emerson's former outfit, the Nice, had released an album titled *Ars Longa Vita Brevis* in 1968. One full side of *Ars Longa* was devoted to a suite for rock band and orchestra that quoted liberally from J.S. Bach's *Brandenburg Concertos*.

In late 1969, bassist Greg Lake left another leading prog band, King Crimson, to join forces with organist Keith Emerson and drummer Carl Palmer. The trio's second public performance took place in August 1970 at the massive Isle of Wight Festival. ELP were launched on a career trajectory of arena concerts and nine consecutive U.S. gold albums including *Tarkus* (1971) and *Pictures at an Exhibition* (1972). The level of sheer bombast in ELP's music rose with each new recording, reaching its apex in 1974 with *Welcome back, my friends, to the show that never ends—Ladies and Gentlemen . . .* Even the title ran on far longer than necessary, yet this lavishly packaged three-disc set became (at number four) the group's highest-charting U.S. album.

In May 1977, Emerson, Lake, and Palmer embarked on a U.S. tour accompanied by a seventy-piece orchestra, sixty-three roadies, two accountants, a doctor, a hairdresser, and Carl Palmer's personal karate instructor. Sound equipment and stage sets filled eight semi trucks; production costs were estimated at \$2 million. This colossal extravaganza threatened to bankrupt the group. The orchestra was jettisoned after three weeks (save for concerts in New York and Montreal) and ELP were forced to tour as a trio for three additional months simply to recoup their earlier outlay. After one further album and a "farewell" tour, they disbanded on December 30, 1978.

A. S.

A third Pink Floyd single, "Apples and Oranges," was released in November 1967. While the song featured some typically endearing Barrett lyrical flights, it replaced the melodic infectiousness of its predecessors with a ramshackle looseness that hinted at the band's internal instability. The song was a chart failure, endangering the commercial status that had been achieved with "See Emily Play."

In January 1968, following much internal hand-wringing over how to deal with Barrett, Pink Floyd brought in a fifth member, David Gilmour, another Cambridge native and a longtime friend of Barrett's. Gilmour and Barrett had been classmates at the Cambridgeshire College of Arts and Technology and had often traded guitar licks in their spare time, but had not played in a band together previously. In 1965, Gilmour had tasted some minor success and done a bit of recording with the Cambridge beat combo Jokers Wild. While Pink Floyd had been taking Swinging London by storm, Gilmour had spent

much of 1966 and 1967 touring the European continent with an outfit known initially as Flowers and later as Bullitt.

According to an official announcement, the addition of Gilmour was a reflection of the band's desire "to explore new instruments and add further experimental dimensions to its sound." The initial plan was for Pink Floyd to continue as a quintet, with Gilmour picking up the slack on stage and Barrett continuing to write songs and contribute in the studio.

But Syd grew increasingly unpredictable, which did little to ease the talented Gilmour's entry into the lineup. After a handful of shambolic gigs as a five-piece, Barrett was unceremoniously dumped from the lineup. Driving to a gig in Southampton in February, his exasperated cohorts simply didn't bother to pick him up. That didn't stop the deposed leader from turning up in the audience at his band's gigs, turning his piercing gaze upon his replacement.

SOPHOMORE SAUCER

The post-Barrett Pink Floyd debuted with the Wright-penned single "It Would Be So Nice," a buoyantly upbeat ditty that wasn't a major departure from the band's Barrett-led singles. Its B-side, the Waters-penned "Julia Dream," saw the bassist engaging in a brief flirtation with flower-power fairy-tale pop. Regardless of its resemblance to their prior successes, the disc, like "Apples and Oranges," came and went without making much of a dent on the charts.

Although Barrett was credited on Pink Floyd's second LP *A Saucerful of Secrets*, he appeared on only one track, "Jugband Blues," whose poignant lyrics seemed to document its author's descent into madness. The song also featured a guest appearance by a Salvation Army brass band, which Barrett had brought into the studio and instructed to play whatever they wanted.

Elsewhere, the uneven yet sporadically vibrant *Saucerful* retained some of the Barrett-era band's sound while previewing the more sprawling, expansive approach that they would continue to pursue for the next few years. Waters contributed the album-opening freakout "Let There Be More Light," as well as the supremely spacey "Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun" and the ironically bouncy "Corporal Clegg." The latter track's portrayal of a shell-shocked war veteran previews some of the military themes that Waters would explore in the future.

Wright's pastoral, warmly nostalgic "Remember a Day" was more appealing than his stolid "See Saw," but both songs represented the airy flower-power sensibility that the band would soon be leaving far behind.

A Saucerful of Secrets' screechy, feedback-laden twelve-minute title track, constructed from scratch in the studio, was both a sonic and compositional landmark for Pink Floyd. It signaled the most substantial shift in the band's creative approach, trading Barrett's improvisational attitude for a more formal

sense of structure that was appropriate for a group containing three former architecture students.

That perfectionist streak would be a hallmark of their subsequent work. Still, the band hadn't lost its taste for sonic experimentation, as evidenced by the mass of distorted tones that launched the title piece—another section of which finds Gilmour fretting his guitar with a microphone stand while soloing over a repetitive drum loop.

A Saucerful of Secrets found Gilmour establishing himself as a crucial element of Pink Floyd's sound, demonstrating an imaginative, blues-rooted guitar style as well as a smooth singing voice that would soon become one of the band's most attractive features.

On the day of the album's release, Pink Floyd staged the first-ever free concert in London's Hyde Park, setting the stage for legendary subsequent Hyde Park performances by the Rolling Stones and Blind Faith.

Although the group remained largely unknown in America, *A Saucerful of Secrets* made the British Top Ten. Meanwhile, Pink Floyd's futuristic sound resulted in the band's music being featured in televised coverage of the *Apollo 11* moon landing in England, Germany, and Holland.

While Pink Floyd surprised many of their early admirers by rebounding in his absence, Syd Barrett continued to struggle with his deteriorating mental state. Gilmour, Waters, and Wright attempted to aid his dwindling recording career, helping to piece together a pair of scattershot 1970 solo albums, *The Madcap Laughs* and *Barrett*. Gilmour and Waters volunteered to salvage the former after Barrett's unsteady condition caused the sessions to run over budget and EMI threatened to pull the plug. Gilmour and Wright played on, and co-produced, the follow-up *Barrett*.

Despite Syd's declining lucidity, *The Madcap Laughs* and *Barrett* maintained a daffy charm, and featured enough worthy material and engaging performances to instill hope among the wayward visionary's admirers that he might carve out a productive solo career. *Madcap's* "Terrapin," "Dark Globe," and "Octopus" and *Barrett's* "Baby Lemonade," "Gigolo Aunt," and "Effer-vescing Elephant" maintained the playful imagery and artful songcraft of his best work with his former band. But the two albums would be the last new material that Barrett would release.

In 1972, Barrett would make a brief stab at launching a new band, Stars, with ex-Pretty Things/Pink Fairies drummer Twink Alder and bassist Jack Monck, but that project would fall apart after a handful of low-key gigs. Two years later, Syd returned to EMI's Abbey Road studios for another abortive solo session, before withdrawing completely from the music industry and returning to Cambridge, where he continued to lead a quiet life away from public scrutiny until his death in 2006. In the decades since, the absent icon has remained the subject of much ongoing fascination, while his unique songs and persona have continued to provide inspiration for multiple generations of left-of-center artists.

Pink Floyd, meanwhile, took another unsuccessful stab at the singles charts with Waters's "Point Me at the Sky," an undistinguished bit of paisley pop that failed to chart, but whose one-chord-jam B-side "Careful with That Axe, Eugene" would become a popular live number. Over the next decade, the band would take the unheard of step of almost entirely ignoring the singles market.

The group had considerably more success staking out new territory on its albums, while developing an elaborate state-of-the-art live show whose audiovisual presentation matched the music's complexity, incorporating films projections, a light show, and a prodigious amount of audio gear. The latter included the Azimuth Coordinator, a quadraphonic sound system that projected three-dimensional sound throughout the venue.

With their colorful frontman gone, the four remaining musicians cultivated an impassive, workmanlike stage demeanor that kept the focus on the music—and on the visual fireworks.

The band structured its live show into a pair of thematic song cycles, which they titled "The Man" and "The Journey." "The Man" carried the listener through a day in the life of an English everyman, from sunrise through the working day through a dream-filled sleep. That segment also included the on-stage construction of the table at which the musicians took a tea break. "The Journey" offered more of a stream-of-consciousness experience, stringing together several of the band's more atmospheric pieces.

Although still a little-known cult act in America, Pink Floyd took its elaborate live setup on the road in the United States. Their assault on the States was typically ambitious, with the band assuming considerable additional expense by playing only headlining shows with no other acts on the bill. They even paid to rent out the Fillmore ballroom, rather than appear on one of that venue's standard multi-act gigs.

Their stateside strategy would ultimately pay off. Pink Floyd made its first appearance on the U.S. Top 100 with 1969's *Ummagumma*, a two-LP set (on EMI's new progressive imprint Harvest) combining live and studio material. The live disc included extended readings of the previously released "Careful with That Axe, Eugene," "Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun," "A Saucerful of Secrets," and the Barrett-era "Astronomy Domine," all of them superior to their studio incarnations and demonstrating the Waters/Mason rhythm section's knack for injecting an aggressive, propulsive edge into the Floyd's spiciest pieces. The live tracks gained substantial U.S. airplay on FM album-rock stations, an emerging radio format that would play a key role in establishing Pink Floyd as a commercial force in America.

Ummagumma's less impressive studio half comprised eclectic individual solo experiments spotlighting each member of the band. The format was an outgrowth of Wright's frustration with the limitations of writing for a four-piece rock lineup and his desire to compose "real music." Wright's four-part keyboard epic "Sysyphus" demonstrated his facility on an array of pianos, organs, and synthesizers. Gilmour's "The Narrow Way" was a three-part

instrumental showcasing his facility for balancing acoustic and electric textures. Mason's "The Grand Vizier's Garden Party" was a nine-minute drum piece utilizing an array of percussive devices.

The only member who really distinguished himself in the solo context was Waters. His pastoral, acoustic "Grantchester Meadows" utilized the recorded sounds of birds and a buzzing fly, while his "Several Species of Small Furry Animals Gathered Together in a Cave and Grooving with a Pict," showed the bassist in uncharacteristically wacky mood, whipping up a dizzying mass of distorted, sped-up voices approximating the title creatures.

1971's *Atom Heart Mother*—notable for its decidedly non-cosmic front-cover shot of a cow in a pasture—was a tad more focused than *Ummagumma*, but similarly uneven. The album's first side was occupied by a grandiose multi-part twenty-three-minute collaboration with avant-garde composer Ron Geesin, who oversaw the track's orchestral and choir arrangements. Side two featured accessible songs by Gilmour, Waters, and Wright, before reaching a perplexing climax with the twelve-minute "Alan's Psychedelic Breakfast," which mixed an extended sound collage with a meandering jam.

Despite containing some of Pink Floyd's most outré music to date, *Atom Heart Mother* became the group's first number one album in the United Kingdom and continued their commercial progress in the United States. They launched the album with a series of elaborate concerts including another free show in Hyde Park, in which the band performed the title piece accompanied by a raft of classical musicians (whose instruments were reportedly out of tune due to the soggy weather). Pink Floyd also performed "Atom Heart Mother" at the Montreaux Classical Music Festival, the first rock act to perform at that prestigious event.

At around the same time, the band was briefly involved in another classically influenced project, a prospective ballet adaptation of Marcel Proust's literary classic *Remembrance of Things Past* by French choreographer Roland Petit's, which was to feature ballet star Rudolf Nureyev and be filmed by director Roman Polanski. The production was to be scored with Pink Floyd music, performed by the band and a massive orchestra, but the project never got off the ground. The quartet would eventually collaborate with Petit on a smaller scale, providing live accompaniment for Marseilles and Paris performances of a ballet Petit had built around several Floyd numbers.

Considering Pink Floyd's visual sensibility and affinity for mixed media, it was only natural that they would gravitate toward film. They provided the music for a pair of features by European auteur Barbet Schroeder, the 1969 heroin-addiction drama *More* and the 1972 hippie fantasy *La Vallee*. The soundtrack pieces were released on a pair of appropriately atmospheric albums, the moody electro-acoustic *Music from the Film More* and the droning, dreamy *Obscured by Clouds*.

Pink Floyd also provided music for the 1967 British feature *The Committee*, and wrote and recorded a full-length score for Michelangelo Antonioni's

1970 underground hit *Zabriskie Point* (although Antonioni only used three of the group's pieces). Waters had also stepped outside of the band to collaborate with electronic innovator Geesin to produce an offbeat score (incorporating organic noises in place of instruments) for the 1970 documentary *The Body*. Waters and Geesin reworked the pieces extensively for the album *Music from the Body*, which had Gilmour, Mason, and Wright guesting on one track.

1971's *Meddle* is regarded by many as the first appearance of the Pink Floyd that fans around the world would make one of the decade's biggest rock acts. It was certainly the album on which the disparate strains of the band's post-Barrett work finally settled into a cohesive direction, forming a blueprint for the textured widescreen sound of the group's most artistically and commercially successful work.

Meddle's centerpiece was another side-long epic, "Echoes," the best example to date of how well the group had mastered long-form composition—and one which they didn't need an orchestra to put across. The multi-part piece moved seamlessly between multiple build-ups and climaxes, veering off into various unexpected directions but maintaining its momentum for its entire twenty-three-and-a-half-minute length.

Elsewhere on *Meddle*, the ominous "One of These Days" was one of Pink Floyd's most satisfying instrumentals, crystallizing the science-fiction ambience that had long been hinted at on prior releases, while maintaining recognizable pop and rock elements that balanced the band's more eclectic leanings.

Meddle also reflected the increased influence of Gilmour, whose musicianship and sense of melody had helped to establish him as a forceful presence within Pink Floyd. If Waters's lyrical and conceptual sensibilities would come to dominate the band's attitude, Gilmour's imaginative yet concise guitar work and expressive singing voice would become the most identifiable features of its sound.

THE DARK SIDE

While *Meddle* had established much of the blueprint for Pink Floyd's 1970s sound, their real artistic breakthrough would be its next studio album. The suite of songs initially known as "Eclipse" became the centerpiece of the band's concerts in February 1972. It would take another year for them to polish and record the song cycle as the basis for their next album.

By then, they had completed filming on *Pink Floyd at Pompeii*, a feature-length documentary built around the band's performance in an empty 2,000-year-old amphitheater in the fabled Roman city, which provided a suitably spooky backdrop for their confident renditions of "Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun," "Careful with That Axe, Eugene," "A Saucerful of Secrets," and the *Meddle* standouts "Echoes" and "One of These Days." The film also

included footage of the band working in the studio on its next album, which would be released in March 1973 as *The Dark Side of the Moon*.

The painstakingly constructed sonic extravaganza was the project on which the post-Syd Barrett Pink Floyd truly came into its own as a creative unit, mastering the medium of the long-playing LP as a complete and cohesive artistic statement. *Dark Side of the Moon* featured state-of-the-art production, with an artfully layered sonic palette that incorporated inventive sound effects, spoken-word snippets, Clare Torry's wailing backup vocals, and Dick Parry's uplifting saxophone work. Engineer Alan Parsons's precise recording methods set new standards for the rock genre, while making imaginative use of stereo effects.

Beyond its meticulously assembled soundscapes (recorded on Abbey Road's newly outfitted twenty-four-track deck), much of *Dark Side of the Moon*'s appeal was in its focused, accessible songcraft and its compelling lyrical themes. Although all four members contributed to writing the music, Waters provided all of the album's lyrics, which addressed the fears and anxieties of contemporary life, and touched upon many lyrical themes that he would explore more extensively in the future.

Waters's lyrics on *Dark Side of the Moon* embodied the combination of biting cynicism and passionate humanism would define his songwriting persona for decades to come. Throughout the album, Waters persuasively decries dehumanization, alienation and aggression.

"Us and Them" (which, in an earlier incarnation, had been rejected by Antonioni for the *Zabriskie Point* soundtrack) assessed the futility of war, "Breathe" embraced ecology, "Time" and "The Great Gig in the Sky" muse on mortality, while "Brain Damage" confronts the specter of mental breakdown in a manner that's especially resonant in light of Syd Barrett's decline. Those songs all became familiar album-rock radio fixtures, while the Waters-penned, Gilmour-sung "Money" (which incorporated the sound of clanging cash registers and clinking coins into its rhythm) became the band's first American hit single.

Dark Side of the Moon became a runaway commercial smash, rising to number one in the United States, spending a record-setting fourteen-year run on *Billboard*'s sales charts and selling an estimated 40 million copies as of 2004. After years of solid popularity at home and cult status in America, Pink Floyd were suddenly worldwide superstars.

The new commercial clout conferred by *Dark Side of the Moon*'s success allowed Pink Floyd, more than ever, to operate on its own uncompromising terms. The musicians were now in a position to spend unprecedented amounts of studio time perfecting their recordings.

The band would also continue to stage increasingly elaborate stage shows, in which they risked being upstaged by outsized props and over-the-top light shows. They supported *Dark Side of the Moon* with its most extravagant concert production yet, for which musicians and crew traveled with thirty tons of gear.

Pink Floyd's mystique would be further enhanced by the members' increasing avoidance of media interviews, and their practice of not including photos of themselves on their album covers.

In the wake of *Dark Side of the Moon*'s success, Columbia Records head Clive Davis lured the band away from EMI/Capitol to sign a megabucks deal with Columbia in the United States (they remained with EMI/Harvest elsewhere). Despite the daunting prospect of following such a huge hit, Pink Floyd produced a worthy follow-up with 1975's *Wish You Were Here*.

Depending on how one listened, *Wish You Were Here*—encompassing three shorter songs plus the multi-part, twenty-six-minute “Shine on You Crazy Diamond”—could be seen as deeply negative or fiercely humanistic. Waters's lyrics confronted the pain of loss and lamented the dehumanization of modern society. “Welcome to the Machine” presented a bleak assessment of the individual's place in modern society, while the bitterly humorous “Have a Cigar” (with a lead vocal provided by band friend and Harvest Records label-mate Roy Harper, who was drafted for the occasion when Waters's voice gave out) posited the music industry as a soul-crushing microcosm of societal oppression.

The spirit of Syd Barrett (whose long shadow the band had finally escaped with *Dark Side of the Moon*) seemed to loom over much of *Wish You Were Here*, both in the album's title track and in Waters's heartfelt paean “Shine on You Crazy Diamond,” which invokes the exhilaration of Barrett's early highs and confronts the tragedy of his decline.

Barrett's presence was more than just thematic. At one point during the sessions, a barely recognizable Syd (who'd put on a great deal of weight and had shaved his hair and eyebrows) showed up unannounced in the studio. Indeed, it took a while for his former colleagues to realize who he was. According to some reports, his unexpected visit had a jarring effect on his ex-bandmates, who played some of their new material to an unimpressed Barrett.

Wish You Were Here also featured one of the most audacious of the band's always impressive cover-art concepts. Designed by artist/photographer Storm Thorgerson (a childhood friend of Waters, Gilmour, and Barrett) and his graphic studio Hipgnosis (who would provide the cover designs for almost every Pink Floyd album), the album's front cover pictured two lookalike business-suited men—one of whom happens to be consumed by flames—shaking hands. In its original vinyl release, the provocative image was hidden behind opaque black shrink wrap.

It was later revealed that the period between *Dark Side of the Moon* and *Wish You Were Here* was accompanied by internal doubts and tensions that nearly split up the band. The creative malaise ran so deep that they briefly planned to follow up their commercial blockbuster with an album to be titled *Household Objects*, which was to consist of tracks recorded using everyday items in lieu of conventional instruments. Pink Floyd completed three tracks

using this method in the autumn of 1973, before abandoning the project and moving on to make *Wish You Were Here*.

The years 1976 and 1977 saw the rise of punk rock in Britain. While the movement was a relative blip on mainstream cultural radar in America, it was a major social and cultural force in the United Kingdom. Punk's angry primitivism was a direct reaction against the bloated pretensions of such 1970s "dinosaur" acts as Pink Floyd. In fact, Sex Pistols frontman Johnny Rotten had been recruited after manager Malcolm McLaren spotted him wearing a Pink Floyd T-shirt that he'd defaced with the words "I hate" above the band's name.

At least one Pink Floyd member took the punk explosion in stride. Nick Mason, who regarded punk as a healthy development, signed on to produce *Music for Pleasure*, the second LP by punk pioneers the Damned. The album, recorded at Pink Floyd's new Britannia Row studios, was regarded as something of a disappointment by the Damned (who'd initially hoped to coax Syd Barrett out of retirement to produce it) and critics.

It's not much of a stretch to read the relatively stark, astringent sound of Pink Floyd's next album, 1977's *Animals*, as the band's response to punk. If Waters's cynical lyrical insights had seemed harsh on *Dark Side of the Moon* and *Wish You Were Here*, they blossomed into outright misanthropy on *Animals*. Inspired partially by George Orwell's classic political allegory *Animal Farm*, Waters's new lyrics decried capitalism's greed and hypocrisy, dividing society into self-righteous, hypocritical "Pigs," ruthlessly ambitious "Dogs," and compliant, unquestioning "Sheep." By now, Waters was exerting near-complete control over Pink Floyd's creative direction and, while some critics were struck by the music's intensity, others opined that *Animals* suffered for the other members' relative lack of input.

One area in which *Animals* stood out was its characteristically iconoclastic cover art, which depicted a giant flying pig floating past London's Battersea Power Station. Although a photo shoot had originally been staged with an inflatable prop pig, the wind made the balloon difficult to control, so a photo image of the pig was superimposed for the actual cover. The flying pig would become an enduring icon, putting in appearances in all of Pink Floyd's subsequent touring productions.

The spring of 1978 saw the release of David Gilmour's eponymous first solo album and Rick Wright's solo debut *Wet Dream*. Those albums' appearance was indicative of their creators' decreased involvement in their more famous parent band.

BUILDING THE WALL

Waters's control of Pink Floyd's musical, lyrical, and conceptual direction was almost total by the time the band recorded the two-LP, twenty-six-song rock

opera *The Wall*, an emotionally charged magnum opus with unmistakable, if highly stylized, autobiographical elements. Indeed, Waters had briefly considered recording it as a solo project.

The initial impetus for the project was Waters's increasing discomfort with his position as rock idol. For him, the situation came to a head on July 6, 1977, during a Pink Floyd concert at Montreal's Olympic Stadium.

As Waters wrote for an exhibit devoted to *The Wall* at Cleveland's Rock and Roll Hall of Fame museum,

I found myself increasingly alienated in that atmosphere of avarice and ego until one night . . . the boil of my frustration burst. Some crazed teenage fan was clawing his way up the storm netting that separated us from the human cattle pen in front of the stage, screaming his devotion to the demi-gods beyond his reach. Incensed by his misunderstanding and my connivance, I spat my frustration in his face. Later that night, back at the hotel, shocked at my behavior, I was faced with a choice. To deny my addiction and embrace that comfortably numb but magic-less existence or accept the burden of insight, take the road less traveled and embark on the often-painful journey to discover who I was and where I fit. *The Wall* was the picture that I drew for myself to help me make that choice.¹

Fortunately, Waters used *The Wall* to tackle a varied set of themes and emotions that extended beyond rock star dissatisfaction. The narrative chronicles the emotional breakdown of its tortured rock star protagonist, Pink. Pink loses his father in World War II (as did Waters when he was only a few months old), and is smothered by a domineering, overprotective mother and bullied by a cruel, repressive education system. His alienation—from his wife, his audience, and his own conscience—is symbolized by the metaphorical wall that grows higher as his isolation increases. He eventually becomes the defendant in a flamboyant imaginary trial, and is ultimately sentenced to tear down the wall and re-engage with the outside world.

While some critics would accuse *The Wall* of being pretentious or overblown, there's no denying the humanism of its message, belying Pink Floyd's persistent image as heartless technocrats. And despite its conceptual and thematic ambitiousness, *The Wall* actually featured some of the shortest and catchiest songs of the band's career.

With Waters firmly at the helm of the project, the other three band members were largely reduced to glorified sidemen, although Gilmour co-wrote the popular tunes "Run Like Hell," "Young Lust," and "Comfortably Numb" and sang lead on the latter, as well as having a fair amount of input into the arrangements.

Waters's dominance continued to stoke growing resentment within the band. Richard Wright was actually fired from the group late in the recording of *The Wall*, although that fact was not announced to the public at the time. Wright was brought back as a hired musician for the *Wall* concerts.

Although *The Wall* was lyrically Pink Floyd's bleakest work to date, the quality of the songwriting, playing, and production helped to make Pink's plight accessible to audiences beyond the band's established fan base. The album became a best-selling blockbuster, even spawning a highly unlikely smash single in "Another Brick in the Wall (Part 2)." That song's menacing but infectious chorus—featuring a group of children recruited from a local elementary school by Britannia Row engineer Nick Griffiths—and its pointed indictment of organized education, struck a responsive chord with teenagers, who helped to make it a number one pop hit on both sides of the Atlantic. *The Wall* spent fifteen weeks at the top of the American album charts. At the time of its release, it was the third-highest selling album in U.S. history.

To promote *The Wall*, Waters devised Pink Floyd's most elaborate concert spectacle to date, a production so complex—and expensive—that the band, rather than taking it on a full-fledged tour, performed the show in five cities in the United States, England, and Germany. Incorporating an estimated \$1.8 million worth of equipment, the *Wall* concerts featured giant prop versions of the grotesque characters that artist Gerald Scarfe had designed for the album's cover, along with a life-sized model airplane that flew over the audience before crashing in flames, and, most imposingly, the construction of a forty-foot-high on-stage wall during the performance. The wall gradually grew higher until the musicians were completely hidden from the audience's view, before being demolished in the show's cathartic climax.

The Wall was popular enough to spawn a 1982 feature film version, directed by Alan Parker and starring Bob Geldof (at the time the leader of new wave band the Boomtown Rats) as Pink. The film added two new songs, as well as reworking versions of several album tracks.

The film version of *The Wall* indirectly spawned the next Pink Floyd album, 1983's *The Final Cut*. That project had begun life as the movie's soundtrack disc but evolved into an independent Waters song cycle tackling several of the same themes addressed in *The Wall*; militarism, social injustice and the callousness of global politics.

The Final Cut—subtitled "A requiem for the post war dream," and haunted by the memory of Roger's father Eric Fletcher Waters, killed in World War II at the age of thirty, as well as by Britain's recent Falkland Islands war—boasted some of Waters's most impassioned songwriting to date. But the album, even more so than *The Wall*, was a virtual Waters solo project, with Gilmour (who sang lead on only one track) and Mason relegated to low-key supporting roles. By Pink Floyd's lofty sales standards, *The Final Cut* was a flop, but Waters claimed not to care.

During the first half of 1984, Gilmour and Waters released solo albums—*About Face* and *The Pros and Cons of Hitchhiking*, respectively—two months apart. Both were commercial disappointments, as were the respective tours mounted to promote them (despite the presence of superstar Eric Clapton playing guitar in Waters's backup band).

SPLITTING HEADACHES

The ignominious fate of his solo venture didn't stop Waters from informing Gilmour and Mason, in the summer of 1985, that he was leaving Pink Floyd. The news was kept quiet at the time. But on October 31, 1986, Waters made the situation public, filing suit to officially dissolve the partnership and declaring the group to be "a spent force creatively." Gilmour and Mason, however, had other ideas, and made it known that *they* had no intention of disbanding Pink Floyd.

The previously press-shy Waters used the media as a forum to bash his former bandmates, deriding their instrumental and songwriting abilities, and dismissing their efforts to continue under the valuable brand name as dishonest and cynical. Gilmour countered in his own interviews, asserting that after all the hard work he'd done to establish the Pink Floyd name, he had no desire to start over.

The public airing of Pink Floyd's internal disputes was distinctly out of character for a band that had maintained such a low public profile for so much of its existence. After a bitter court battle, Waters would fail in his legal effort to retire the Pink Floyd name.

Gilmour and Mason released *A Momentary Lapse of Reason* under the Pink Floyd banner in 1987. The album was cut at Gilmour's Astoria studio, located in a houseboat docked on the Thames, with producer Bob Ezrin (who'd collaborated closely with Waters on *The Wall*) and a passel of sidemen, including a returning Richard Wright on keyboards. The lush, smoothly crafted effort recaptured some of the band's 1970s sound, but was noticeably lacking in the lyrical bite that Waters had previously brought to the table.

A Momentary Lapse of Reason was beaten to the marketplace by Roger Waters's second post-Floyd effort, *Radio K.A.O.S.*, a concept album that offered a cautionary anti-corporate message as well as a hopeful meditation on the potential of mass communication. But the Gilmour/Mason effort was the clear commercial winner, outselling the Waters album by a wide margin and making it clear how much commercial value the Pink Floyd name held. While many longtime fans regarded *A Momentary Lapse of Reason* as a Pink Floyd album in name only, that didn't stop it from going platinum and becoming a Top Five hit.

Both albums were accompanied by elaborately mounted stage shows. The Gilmour-led ensemble offered a retrospective of familiar Floyd favorites. The band's long-standing habit of downplaying individual personalities meant that many casual fans probably didn't notice Waters's absence, particularly when many of the stage frills that fans associated with Pink Floyd remained intact.

The *Momentary Lapse of Reason* tour ran for nearly two years and did boffo business around the world, grossing an estimated \$135 million, making it the most financially successful music tour of all time. When the financial

magazine *Forbes* cited 1989's highest-paid entertainers, Pink Floyd was listed seventh—behind Michael Jackson, Steven Spielberg, Bill Cosby, Mike Tyson, Charles Schultz, and Eddie Murphy, and ahead of the Rolling Stones.

The situation clearly infuriated Roger Waters, who pointed out that he was essentially touring in competition with his own repertoire—and that he was losing. Despite his characterization of his former partners' actions as “despicable,” he officially withdrew his legal challenge to Pink Floyd's continued existence in December 1987. As part of the settlement, Waters retained the rights to the concept of *The Wall* (which he would restage for an all-star 1990 benefit performance in Berlin, commemorating the reunification of East and West Germany) and a per-show fee for the use of the trademark flying pig (which Gilmour would circumvent by adding testicles to the previously female animal).

Despite the success of *A Momentary Lapse of Reason* and the live *Delicate Sound of Thunder*, the Waters-less Pink Floyd didn't release another studio album until the multi-platinum *The Division Bell* in 1994, by which time Wright had returned as a full member. Wright also co-wrote “Wearing the Inside Out,” which featured his first lead vocal on a Pink Floyd record since *Dark Side of the Moon*. *The Division Bell* continued in a vein similar to *A Momentary Lapse of Reason*, delivering solid, well-crafted songs but adding little to the band's enduring canon. The same could be said of the subsequent live disc *Pulse*.

The Division Bell and *Pulse* seemingly closed the door on the latter-day Pink Floyd. Through the 1990s and early 2000s, Waters continued to release new solo projects, including an all-star live version of *The Wall* recorded live in Berlin. Gilmour kept a relatively low profile, guesting on projects by other artists including Paul McCartney, Pete Townshend, Bryan Ferry, Robert Wyatt, Elton John, and Tom Jones, as well as contributing to a variety of charity recording projects. In 2004, Nick Mason published his memoir *Inside Out: A Personal History of Pink Floyd*, and it was reported that Waters was working on a Broadway stage adaptation of *The Wall*.

Despite the band's long absence from the marketplace, further evidence of the public's ongoing fascination with Pink Floyd was provided by a widely circulated rumor that *Dark Side of the Moon* revealed new levels of meaning when listened to while viewing the movie *The Wizard of Oz*. Although the album's creators denied any intentional correlation between the record and the film, fans around the world scrambled to experience the multi-media sensation and ponder its possible significance.

IN THE FLESH

In 2001, Gilmour, Mason, Waters, and Wright had managed a low-key reunion of sorts, collaborating on the editing, sequencing, and song selection of

the greatest hits collection *Echoes: The Best of Pink Floyd*. But even the most optimistic fans were pleasantly shocked when Waters and his long-estranged ex-bandmates put aside their twenty-year feud to play a one-off set at London's Hyde Park on July 2, 2005, as part of the multi-city Live 8 benefit concert simulcast.

The reunion came at the urging of Bob Geldof, who since starring in the film version of *The Wall* had become a widely admired philanthropist through his spearheading of the 1986 Live Aid concerts. Gilmour initially resisted the idea, but reconsidered after receiving a call from Waters. Both agreed that the cause—the raising of public awareness of third world debt in conjunction with that year's G8 summit—trumped the internal squabbles that had torn Pink Floyd apart.

The quartet played a surprisingly upbeat set of some of their best-known songs, with none of the visual frills that have routinely accompanied Pink Floyd live performances. The performance was ecstatically received by fans, igniting widespread speculation about a longer-term reconciliation. Despite a reported \$250 million offer for a world tour, Gilmour made it clear that he regarded the Live 8 performance as an opportunity to lay Pink Floyd to rest on a positive note and in the service of a worthy cause. He quietly made it official with an announcement in January 2006, stating that Pink Floyd had no plans to tour or release new material.

Prog Perennials: Genesis and Yes

Genesis and Yes were two leading British prog-rock bands that proved highly adaptable to changing times. As early as 1969, Genesis was well known in England for theatrical live shows, elaborate costumes, and its complex multi-part compositions. The group's record sales eventually caught up to its creative élan in 1974 with *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway*, an ambitious musical drama stretched over two LPs. When lead singer Peter Gabriel suddenly departed for a solo career in May 1975, drummer Phil Collins took over on lead vocals. Soon, the costumed epics of earlier years were replaced by airy, soft-pop love songs accompanied by high-tech laser light shows. Beginning with *Abacab* in 1981, the group placed five albums in the Top Ten: *Invisible Touch* (1986), with its U.S. number one title single, sold over six million copies in the United States alone. After Phil Collins left following *We Can't Dance* (1991), Genesis went into terminal decline.

Yes started out in 1968 as a sort of psychedelic beat group known for its extended arrangements of Beatles and Byrds songs. Jon Anderson (lead vocals), Steve Howe (guitar), Tony Kaye (keyboards), Chris Squire (bass), and Bill Bruford (drums) created Yes's signature high-register vocal harmonies and suite-like song structures. In 1972, the flamboyant Rick Wakeman replaced Kaye on keyboards and Alan White took over the drum seat from Bruford. In the same year, Yes released two albums that both reached the U.S. Top Five.

Fragile featured the hit single “Roundabout” and was the first Yes release to feature Roger Dean’s mythical, Tolkein-inspired cover art. *Close to the Edge*, at number three, was the highest-charting album of the band’s career.

Not content with coming “close to the edge,” Yes stampeded right over it with *Yessongs*, an endless three-disc live album. The next studio album, *Tales from Topographic Oceans*, contained only four tracks: each ran for approximately twenty minutes and occupied a full side of the two-LP set. One was titled “The Revealing Science of God (Dance of the Dawn).”

Individual ambition and frequent personnel shifts led to the breakup of Yes in 1981. Two years later, the group was reconstituted with Jon Anderson, Chris Squire, Tony Kaye, Alan White, and guitarist/vocalist Trevor Rabin. In November 1983, this lineup released *90125*, a collection of tightly constructed pop-rock songs laced with dance beats and electronic effects. Produced by Trevor Horn, *90125* was the first Yes album to reach the U.S. Top Five since *Relayer* in 1974. Its lead track, the danceable “Owner of a Lonely Heart,” became the band’s only U.S. number one single.

After *Big Generator* (1987), Yes once again splintered into competing factions performing under various names. But in 2002 a “classic” version of the band (with Anderson, Howe, Squire, Wakeman, and White) regrouped for a world tour, including a rapturously received appearance at New York’s Madison Square Garden. Yes was now the last band standing—the longest-running show in the history of prog-rock.

A. S.

Mason later speculated that the band might be persuaded to reform again for a charitable purpose, but not for profit. Meanwhile, when Gilmour released his 2006 solo album *On an Island*—his first collection of new material since *The Division Bell* a dozen years before and his first solo effort since 1984’s *About Face*—he called upon Richard Wright to contribute some keyboard work, and to play in Gilmour’s touring band when he took his new material on the road.

Pink Floyd’s albums have always remained solid sellers, even during the band’s lengthy absence from the public eye. But sales of the band’s catalog experienced an unexpected surge in the wake of their Live 8 set. England’s HMV chain reported that sales of *Echoes: The Best of Pink Floyd* had increased by 1,343 percent in the week following Live 8, while Amazon.co.uk announced that *The Wall*’s sales had ballooned by a whopping 3,600 percent. Gilmour announced that he would donate his profits from this sales windfall to charity, and urged that other Live 8 artists and their record companies do the same.

The fact that their vintage work can still have such an impact decades after its creation—and the fact that fans continue to pine for a reunion—says much about Pink Floyd’s generation-spanning appeal.

TIMELINE

October 12, 1965

The Pink Floyd plays its first live show at the Countdown Club in London.

February 12, 1966

The band performs at a series of Sunday afternoon multimedia happenings at London's Marquee Club.

October 11, 1966

The Pink Floyd performs at the launch party for Britain's first underground paper, the *International Times*.

December 23, 1966

Pink Floyd perform for the first time at London's UFO Club, epicenter of the city's burgeoning Underground scene.

February 27, 1967

Pink Floyd record their first single, "Arnold Layne," at Sound Techniques Studio in London.

April 5, 1967

The Piper at the Gates of Dawn, the debut album by Pink Floyd—and its only LP with Syd Barrett as bandleader—is released in Britain.

May 23, 1967

The band's second single, "See Emily Play," is recorded. It will reach number six on the British pop chart.

January 7, 1968

David Gilmour joins Pink Floyd.

April 6, 1968

Syd Barrett's departure from Pink Floyd is announced to the public.

October 24, 1970

Atom Heart Mother reaches number one on the British album chart.

February 17, 1972

Pink Floyd debuts a new extended piece titled "Eclipse" at London's Rainbow Theatre. "Eclipse" will soon evolve into the album *Dark Side of the Moon*.

March 13, 1973

Pink Floyd releases *Dark Side of the Moon*.

April 28, 1973

Dark Side of the Moon hits the number one spot on the *Billboard* album chart, where it will spend a record-setting 741 weeks.

June 23, 1973

Pink Floyd scores their first-ever Top Forty single in America with "Money," from *Dark Side of the Moon*. The song will peak at number thirteen.

September 12, 1975

Wish You Were Here, the band's long-awaited follow-up to *Dark Side of the Moon*, is released.

December 15, 1979

Pink Floyd releases *The Wall*. It will spend fifteen weeks at number one in the United States, where it will sell over 23 million copies, making it history's third best-selling album.

March 22, 1980

"Another Brick in the Wall (Part II)," the controversial first single from *The Wall*, reaches number one on the U.S. charts, where it will remain for four weeks.

June 17, 1981

Pink Floyd performs *The Wall* for the twenty-fourth and final time, in Dortmund, Germany.

December 12, 1985

Roger Waters notifies Columbia and EMI Records that he is no longer a member of Pink Floyd.

October 31, 1986

Roger Waters files suit to formally dissolve Pink Floyd. The legal battle will drag on for years, but Waters's ex-bandmates David Gilmour, Nick Mason, and Richard Wright will continue to record and tour as Pink Floyd.

September 19, 1987

Pink Floyd, minus Roger Waters, releases *A Momentary Lapse of Reason*.

July 2, 2005

Gilmour, Mason, Waters, and Wright surprise fans by staging a one-off reunion of the classic Pink Floyd lineup in London's Hyde Park as part of the multi-city Live 8 benefit concert simulcast.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

The Piper at the Gates of Dawn, 1967

A Saucerful of Secrets, 1968

Ummagumma, 1969

Meddle, 1971

The Dark Side of the Moon, 1973

Wish You Were Here, 1975

Animals, 1977

The Wall, 1979

The Final Cut, 1983

NOTE

1. www.pinkfloyd-co.com/band/hof/pf_hof.html.

FURTHER READING

- Mason, Nick. *Inside Out: A Personal History of Pink Floyd*. San Francisco: Chronicle, 2005.
- Schaffner, Nicholas. *A Saucerful of Secrets*. New York: Harmony, 1991.
- Watkinson, Mike and Pete Anderson. *Crazy Diamond: Syd Barrett and the Dawn of Pink Floyd*. London: Omnibus Press, 1993.



Courtesy of Photofest.

Neil Young

Scott Schinder

THE LONER

It's hard to think of an artist who's taken greater advantage of rock's potential for self-reinvention than Neil Young. Of all of the major performers who rose to prominence during the rock explosion of the late 1960s, none have pursued a career course as stubbornly unpredictable as that of the Canadian-born singer/songwriter/guitarist.

Young's expansive body of recorded work is distinguished by countless abrupt stylistic shifts, ranging from sensitive acoustic singer-songwriter fare

to bleak, pensive introspection to the raucous, raw-nerved electric rock he's recorded with his recurring backup band Crazy Horse, with stops along the way for traditional country, rockabilly, electronica, and horn-driven R&B. The artist's propensity for musical shape-shifting would be less impressive if he wasn't so adept at making compelling, deeply personal music in all of the genres in which he's worked.

The durable Canadian iconoclast first came to prominence as guitarist in the seminal late 1960s L.A. country-folk-rock band Buffalo Springfield, and subsequently attained commercial superstardom as one-fourth of the soft-rock supergroup Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young. When he achieved massive solo success in the early 1970s, Young seemed destined to take his place alongside such crowd-pleasing troubadours as James Taylor and Jackson Browne. But his unshakable fidelity to his restless muse caused Young to pursue his career on his own terms. While it may have cost him some of his original fans, it ultimately yielded far more rewarding artistic results.

As Young later observed, the mainstream success of his chart-topping 1972 breakthrough hit "Heart of Gold" "put me in the middle of the road. Traveling there soon became a bore, so I headed for the ditch. A rougher ride, but I saw more interesting people there."

While most of his 1960s and 1970s contemporaries were falling into careerism or becoming content to rest on their laurels, Young continued to test limits, spontaneously moving forward into new projects. With little regard for audience expectations, he's often followed his most commercially successful releases with his most challenging, difficult music. Meanwhile, his uncompromising work ethic has caused him to consistently reject music that doesn't meet his standards. Young's body of unreleased recordings, including several full albums, is impressive on its own, and has kept collectors and bootleggers busy for years.

While his unconventional methods have undoubtedly cost him record sales and alienated some of his less adventurous fans, they've also earned Young respect from his peers and reverence from multiple generations of younger bands. It's significant that, when punk rock arose in the late 1970s, Young was the only prominent American rocker of his generation to openly embrace the new movement, recognizing the same nonconformist spirit that's always been present in his own music.

It's worth noting that Young's most commercially successful album, 1972's *Harvest*, was a sterling example of the laid-back singer-songwriter genre that he helped to invent, while his second-biggest, 1979's *Rust Never Sleeps* mixed acoustic material with squalling, feedback-laden hard rock.

The son of noted Canadian sportswriter/novelist Scott Young and Rassy Ragland Young, Neil Percival Kenneth Robert Ragland Young was born in Toronto and spent his early childhood in Omemee, a small town that he would later memorialize in the song "Helpless." A bout with polio at the age of six left him with a limp and a weakened left side.

After his parents divorced in 1960, the teenaged Neil moved with his mother back to Winnipeg. While attending high school there, he played guitar in a series of instrumental garage bands. One of those combos, the Squires, developed a small following and scored a minor local hit with their surf-style single “The Sultan.” When Young began writing lyrics and adding those songs to the Squires’ sets, he took his first stabs at singing in public. In 1964, Young discovered Bob Dylan, and began playing his compositions solo in local folk clubs and coffeehouses, while continuing to play rock and roll with the Squires.

In the mid-1960s, Young returned to Toronto and became active on the city’s burgeoning folk scene. By 1966, he’d joined the Mynah Birds, which also included future Buffalo Springfield bassist Bruce Palmer and American singer Ricky James Matthews, who would later gain fame as funk-soul star Rick James. The Mynah Birds recorded an album for Motown, the hugely successful R&B label located across the U.S. border in Detroit. But the band’s Motown recordings were shelved when Matthews was arrested for being AWOL from the U.S. Navy.

Frustrated by his inability to make headway within the Canadian music scene, Young drove to Los Angeles in his 1948 Pontiac hearse, which he’d nicknamed Mort, with Bruce Palmer in tow. Shortly after their arrival, Young and Palmer got stuck in a traffic jam on Sunset Boulevard, and ran into Stephen Stills and Richie Furay, a pair of American singer/guitarists whom Young had met and befriended while they were touring in Canada. The chance meeting sparked the formation of the Buffalo Springfield, whose lineup was completed by drummer Dewey Martin.

In its two-year lifespan, Buffalo Springfield released three influential, if flawed, albums—1967’s *Buffalo Springfield* and *Buffalo Springfield Again*, and the following year’s *Last Time Around*—whose rootsy country/folk/rock hybrid picked up where the Byrds’ similar experiments had left off.

Buffalo Springfield scored a Top Ten hit with the Stills-penned protest number “For What It’s Worth,” and gave lead guitarist Young a chance to flex his songwriting muscles with such memorable tunes as “Nowadays Clancy Can’t Even Sing,” “Mr. Soul,” “On the Way Home,” and “I Am a Child,” and the mock-symphonic *Sgt. Pepper*-inspired art-rock experiments “Broken Arrow” and “Expecting to Fly.” But it’s generally agreed that the Buffalo Springfield failed to live up to its immense musical potential, and management problems and the band’s volatile mix of personalities helped to hasten its premature demise. Young had already quit multiple times by the time the Springfield finally disbanded in mid-1968.

The Band: Across the Great Divide

Almost before 1967’s fabled Summer of Love had ended, rock and roll was beginning to change once again. Just as many young people were leaving San Francisco’s Haight-Ashbury for bucolic, sparsely populated areas of northern

California and the Pacific Northwest, so some rock musicians began to turn away from extended jamming and high-volume theatrics and toward country, blues, folk music, and R&B. Neil Young's 1970 album *After the Gold Rush* was a prime example of this more reflective approach. But it was predated by *Music from Big Pink*, the debut album of the mostly Canadian quintet called The Band: Rick Danko (bass, vocals), Levon Helm (drums, vocals), Garth Hudson (organ), Richard Manuel (piano, vocals), and Robbie Robertson (guitar).

As the Hawks, this group (minus Helm) had backed Bob Dylan on his groundbreaking world tour of 1965–66 and later recorded informally with him in Woodstock. Those sessions ultimately led to the release of *Music from Big Pink* in July 1968: "The Weight," "Chest Fever," and Dylan's "I Shall Be Released" were among its key tracks. The music was tight-knit and unflashy; the lyrics were redolent with mystery and quasi-mythical characters like "Crazy Chester" and "The Swede."

"The sense of teamwork and collaboration was incredible," Levon Helm recalled years later. "Robbie was writing stuff that evoked simple pictures of American life. . . . There was a whole movement toward country values in America in those days, as young people searched for different ways of surviving during the Vietnam era. That's in there too" (p.165).¹

The group's self-titled second album, *The Band* (released September 1969), was even more specific in its evocations of a bygone America. "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down" is a lament for the destruction of the South in the Civil War, poignantly sung by Arkansas native Levon Helm. In "King Harvest Has Surely Come," Richard Manuel sings in the character of an impoverished farmworker who hopes for a better life through union membership. The Band augmented its rock instrumentation with the rustic strains of fiddle, mandolin, and accordion.

"The title we had for the record was *Harvest*, because we were reaping this music from seeds that had been planted many years before we'd even been born. But we could have called it *America* as well, because this music was right out of the air" (p.189).²

The Band made the Billboard Top Ten, sold over one million copies, and sent many rock musicians back to the music's American roots. The Band broke up in 1976; Richard Manuel took his own life in 1986 while on tour in Florida with Garth Hudson and Rick Danko. In 1994, The Band was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

Andy Schwartz

1. Levon Helm with Stephen Davis, *This Wheel's On Fire* (New York: Wm. Morrow & Company, 1993), 165.

2. *Ibid.*, 189.

It was during his tenure with Buffalo Springfield that Young began experiencing seizures that were eventually diagnosed as epilepsy.

DON'T SPOOK THE HORSE

Determined to pursue a solo career, Young hired manager Elliot Roberts, who also managed Young's friend and fellow Canadian transplant Joni Mitchell; Roberts would continue to manage Young for the next four decades. Young signed a solo deal with Reprise Records (for which Mitchell also recorded), and in early 1969 he released *Neil Young*, a mixed bag of rock tunes, brooding ballads, and densely overdubbed studio experiments.

Creedence Clearwater Revival: Rollin' on the River

In July 1968, the same month in which The Band released *Music from Big Pink*, Creedence Clearwater Revival released its self-titled debut album and created its own brand of musical Americana. Creedence hailed from El Cerrito, a working-class suburb of San Francisco, and comprised John Fogerty (lead vocals, lead guitar), his older brother Tom Fogerty (guitar, vocals), Stu Cook (bass), and Doug Clifford (drums). They'd been playing together since 1959 (under other names) without coming close to a hit record. Now, the group's nearly nine-minute version of Dale Hawkins's 1957 hit, "Suzie Q," was becoming an underground FM rock radio favorite. When released as a two-part single, "Suzie Q" reached number eleven on the Hot 100.

"Suzie Q" was the first of the group's thirteen Top Forty hits and the only one not written by John Fogerty, who had a gift for writing three-chord songs with indelible melodic hooks and lyrics that often invoked images of the American South. Creedence's number two hit "Proud Mary" (1969) was the tale of a Mississippi River steamboat, while in "Born on the Bayou" he sang about New Orleans.

Elsewhere, Fogerty wrote from a distinctly blue-collar perspective: as the itinerant musician who narrates "Lodi" or the working man who aims his scornful anti-war protest at a "Fortunate Son" of privilege. Creedence also brought 1950s rock and roll and R&B back into the spotlight with their versions of songs first popularized by Bo Diddley, Elvis Presley, and Screamin' Jay Hawkins.

In 1969–70, Creedence Clearwater Revival was the best-selling American rock band in the country. The group scored five Top Ten albums including *Green River* (number one for four weeks in 1969) and *Cosmo's Factory* (number one for nine weeks in 1970). Both titles, along with *Willy and the Poor Boys* (also 1969), were later named to *Rolling Stone* magazine's list of the 500 Greatest Albums of All Time.

Eventually, the other members began to chafe under John Fogerty's strong-willed control of their musical direction and business affairs. Tom Fogerty left in early 1971 (he died in 1990) and the group disbanded in the fall of 1972. Creedence Clearwater Revival was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1993.

A. S.

Although Young's artistic potential was demonstrated on such tracks as the turbulent rocker "The Loner," the enigmatic ballad "The Old Laughing Lady," and the uneasy surrealist narrative "The Last Trip to Tulsa," the debut LP suffered from murky sound caused by an experimental mastering process that was applied to the album without Young's knowledge.

By the time *Neil Young* was released, Young had already begun playing with a local outfit called the Rockets, which included guitarist Danny Whitten, bassist Billy Talbot, and drummer Ralph Molina. Young renamed the band Crazy Horse and enlisted them to back him on his second album, *Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere*.

Recorded in just two weeks, the sophomore effort traded its predecessor's stylistic meanderings for a musically and emotionally raw sound that helped to make such songs as "Cinnamon Girl," "Down by the River," and "Cowgirl in the Sand" into beloved classic rock standards. The latter two tracks, which ran nine and ten minutes respectively, demonstrated the lineup's knack for spare, seething instrumental jams. Both were reportedly written while Young was delirious with a 103-degree fever. Crazy Horse's primitive crunch proved inspirational to Young, who would continue to work with the band off and on for decades to come.

Shortly after the album's release, Young was invited by his old bandmate Stephen Stills to join Crosby, Stills, and Nash, who had already achieved substantial success with their self-titled 1969 debut LP. Although the trio had initially attempted to recruit Young as a guitar sideman, Elliot Roberts's fierce negotiating skills won Young equal membership, allowing him to walk into an established hit act as a full partner. The move instantly raised Young's public profile, and would prove invaluable in promoting his concurrent solo career.

Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young performed their second show as a quartet at the landmark Woodstock festival. The following year, they released the massively successful studio album *Déjà Vu*, which was followed by a single of Young's "Ohio," a seething protest song inspired by the recent fatal shooting of four student protesters by National Guardsmen at Kent State University. The tougher sound and darker mood of "Ohio" and much of *Déjà Vu* demonstrated the extent to which Young's influence had pushed the group away from the harmony-driven folk-pop that had dominated the first Crosby, Stills, and Nash album. The quartet's extensive touring also yielded the 1971 double live album *Four Way Street*.

Despite his CSNY commitments, Young found time to continue recording and performing on his own, releasing *After the Gold Rush* in late 1970. That album, which mixed such subtly uneasy acoustic numbers as "Only Love Can Break Your Heart" and "Don't Let It Bring You Down" with harder-edged material such as "Southern Man" and "When You Dance (I Can Really Love)," established Young as a solo star. The dreamlike title track was based on an idea that Young had for an apocalyptic science fiction concept, which Young and actor Dean Stockwell had hoped to turn into a movie.

In addition to marking an evolution in his songwriting, *After the Gold Rush* also marked the first instance of Young forsaking the formality of a conventional recording studio in favor a more homespun recording approach. The tracks were cut in a tiny basement studio that Young had set up in his home in the Bohemian Los Angeles enclave of Topanga Canyon.

Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young soon went their separate ways, but Young forged ahead undaunted. He recorded 1972's *Harvest* largely in Nashville with a group of country session musicians, whose seasoned professionalism contrasted with Crazy Horse's inspired primitivism. The sessions began spontaneously, while Young was in Nashville to tape a guest appearance on Johnny Cash's TV variety show, and decided to try cutting some of his new songs while in town.

The largely laid-back *Harvest* was a massive hit, on the strength of such songs as "Heart of Gold," "Old Man," and the anti-heroin anthem "The Needle and the Damage Done." The album hit the top spot on the *Billboard* album charts and remained in the Top Forty for six months, while the lilting, poignant "Heart of Gold" became a number one pop single, making Young an instant household name. Ironically, "Heart of Gold" was pushed out of the number one chart spot by America's similar-sounding, but inferior "A Horse with No Name." Elliot Roberts soon signed America to a management contract, reportedly to Young's annoyance.

Harvest also included "Alabama," which, like "Southern Man," was Young's angry response to the poisonous race relations of the American Deep South. The songs were vitriolic enough to inspire a lyrical riposte from seminal Southern rockers Lynyrd Skynyrd, who dismissed Young in their 1974 hit "Sweet Home Alabama." Although the situation led many observers to assume that there was bad blood between the two acts, that wasn't the case. Young admired Skynyrd, whose singer/songwriter Ronnie Van Zant was a big Young fan (and is seen wearing a Young T-shirt on the cover of his band's album *Street Survivors*). Young would also offer several of his unrecorded compositions to Skynyrd, but the 1977 plane crash that killed Van Zant and two other band members kept a Young/Skynyrd collaboration from coming to pass. After the crash, Young would pay tribute to the band with a medley of "Alabama" and "Sweet Home Alabama" at a show in the band's home state of Florida.

The Allman Brothers Band: Midnight Riders

In the 1969 film *Easy Rider*, a motorcycle trip from southern California through the Deep South ends in the violent death of its two long-haired, pot-smoking protagonists. This scene was emblematic of the counterculture's fearful attitude toward the South, with its racism and political conservatism. But in that same year, the self-titled debut album by the Allman Brothers Band helped to offset these prejudices and gave rise to a new school of Southern rock.

Twenty-two year-old Duane Allman was a fiery and inventive guitarist, especially adept on slide guitar. (On *Rolling Stone* magazine's list of the greatest guitarists of all time, published in 2003, he is ranked number two—right behind Jimi Hendrix.) Duane founded the group in March 1969 with Dickey Betts (guitar), Berry Oakley (bass), and drummers Butch Trucks and Jaimoe, and then recruited younger brother Gregg Allman on lead vocals and Hammond B-3 organ. Rather than relocate to the music industry centers of New York or Los Angeles, the Brothers based themselves in Macon, Georgia.

The Allman Brothers Band (ABB) was inspired by 1960s rock groups like the Yardbirds, by jazzmen Miles Davis and John Coltrane, and by Southern soul music. (As a session musician, Duane Allman had played guitar with soul singers Wilson Pickett and Clarence Carter.) But the core of their sound was the blues, from Robert Johnson to B.B. King. The feeling and tonality of the blues was ever-present in the Brothers' music even when their heady improvisations stretched live performances of songs like "Whipping Post" beyond the twenty-minute mark.

By playing more than 200 live dates in the year following their debut album, the Brothers amassed the following that would propel their landmark double live set, *At Fillmore East*, to number thirteen and platinum status after its release in July 1971. Duane Allman died October 29 in a motorcycle accident in Macon; just over a year later, bassist Berry Oakley was killed in another Macon motorcycle crash. These tragic losses precipitated years of depression, addiction, and instability among the surviving members even as *Brothers and Sisters* (featuring the the Dickey Betts-penned Top Ten single "Ramblin' Man") topped the *Billboard* chart in 1973.

The Allman Brothers Band broke up in 1982. But in 1989, Gregg Allman, Dickey Betts, Butch Trucks, and Jaimoe re-formed for a twentieth anniversary tour, joined by lead/slide guitarist Warren Haynes and bassist Allen Woody. The Brothers signed a new recording contract and began touring annually; the original sextet was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1995 while the latter-day ABB won a 1996 Grammy Award for Best Rock Instrumental Performance. In the turbulent year 2000, Allen Woody died of a drug overdose (he was replaced by Oteil Burbridge) and Dickey Betts was replaced by Butch Trucks's twenty-one-year-old nephew Derek Trucks. But for the Allman Brothers Band, "the road goes on forever."

A. S.

The massive success of *Harvest* and "Heart of Gold" caught Young by surprise, and he reacted to his new commercial status by venturing into edgier, less accessible territory on his next several projects. He indulged his long-standing cinematic interests by directing *Journey Through the Past*, a incomprehensible but occasionally striking film memoir that included some interesting candid studio moments and some entertaining archival footage. The film also

produced an equally disjointed double-LP soundtrack album that combined stray Buffalo Springfield and CSNY tracks and a wealth of non-Young material with fascinating side-long studio outtakes of the *Harvest* songs “Alabama” and “Words.”

Journey Through the Past was followed by the muddy-sounding 1973 album *Time Fades Away*, largely recorded during a turbulent post-*Harvest* tour on which Young struggled with vocal problems and his distress over the recent death of Crazy Horse guitarist Danny Whitten. Whitten had died of a heroin overdose in November 1972, shortly after his drug use had caused Young to fire him from his touring band.

The tour that produced *Time Fades Away* marked the first instance of Young rebelling against his own success. His ragged performances during that period, combined with set lists that emphasize unfamiliar new material, alienated fans who’d expected *Harvest*’s smooth country rock. The chaotic shows also angered several of the veteran session pros who comprised the Stray Gators. Young has called *Time Fades Away* his least favorite of his albums; more than three decades after its original release, it remains unissued on CD.

The dark period—during which Young abruptly walked away from the guaranteed payday of a proposed Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young project—continued with two of Young’s most compelling and confrontational works: 1974’s pensive, haunting *On the Beach* and 1975’s unhinged and unsettling *Tonight’s the Night*.

On the Beach was a brooding song cycle comprised of turbulent rockers and haunting, impossibly sad ballads. The apparently Charles Manson-inspired “Revolution Blues” was a disturbing account of brewing discontent and societal collapse, while “On the Beach” and “Ambulance Blues” evoked breakdown on a more personal level. Curiously, the consistently downbeat album opened with “Walk On,” one of Young’s most uplifting rockers.

Tonight’s the Night (which had actually been recorded before *On the Beach* but temporarily shelved by Young) was a ragged, harrowing mood piece haunted by the recent overdose deaths of Danny Whitten and Young’s guitar tech Bruce Berry, and recorded in a series of mind-altered stream-of-consciousness sessions. Although both albums sold poorly and received mixed reviews at the time of their release, both are now regarded as being among Young’s greatest works.

The band that recorded most of *Tonight’s the Night*—guitarists Ben Keith and Nils Lofgren, plus the Crazy Horse rhythm section of bassist Billy Talbot and drummer Ralph Molina—took the album’s grim songs and sleazy, dissipated late-night vibe on the road with a series of shows in late 1973. For those gigs, a wasted Young assumed the persona of a seedy nightclub MC, referring to Neil Young in the third person and opening the sets with the introduction, “Welcome to Miami Beach, ladies and gentlemen. Everything is cheaper than it looks.” Since the album had yet to be released and most listeners were unfamiliar with the circumstances that had inspired the material, audiences

who'd come to hear "Heart of Gold" were taken aback by the material and its presentation, and some crowds had violently negative reactions to the performances.

Oddly, Young's dark period was punctuated by an attempt in the summer of 1973, to regroup Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young. The quartet convened in Hawaii with the intention of recording a new album—tentatively titled *Human Highway*, after a Young composition that would eventually surface as part of *Rust Never Sleeps*—but internal disagreements kept the effort from getting off the ground.

Young did reunite with Crosby, Stills, and Nash in the summer of 1974, for an ostensibly lucrative series of outdoor stadium shows. But the tour—which David Crosby later dubbed "the Doom Tour"—was beset with bad feeling and bad music, and was widely excoriated for its sloppy, indulgent performances. While Young unveiled several new songs on the tour, his partners stuck with tried-and-true oldies. There was little doubt that money was the chief motivation for the reunion, and it became history's the highest-grossing rock tour up to that point. But rampant financial excess caused the foursome to make relatively little money from the enterprise. A plan to release a live album from the tour collapsed when Young withheld his approval. Following a disastrous finale at London's Wembley Stadium, another attempt to record a new CSNY album in December 1974 quickly fell to pieces, amidst reports of internal bad blood and Stills's bizarre, drug-fueled behavior.

Meanwhile, 1975's *Zuma* found Young back on solid, confident musical ground. Recorded with a regrouped Crazy Horse including new guitarist Frank Sampedro, *Zuma* was recorded in a rented house in Malibu, with Young and the band cutting tracks live and loud. *Zuma*'s inspired bashing produced such unsettling yet invigorating rockers as "Barstool Blues," "Danger Bird," and the hallucinatory time-travel epic "Cortez the Killer." At one point, Bob Dylan visited the sessions and joined in on piano and guitar, although none of his contributions made it to the finished album.

Zuma marked the beginning of Young's renewed collaboration with his retooled backing combo. Over the years, many of his musical peers would be appalled that an artist of his stature would work extensively with such primitive, sloppy players. Indeed, Crazy Horse's propensity for egregious technical errors would surely have tested the patience of any bandleader without Young's love for unmanicured spontaneity. Crazy Horse would continue to serve as a source of inspiration and aggravation for Young in the decades to come, and their contributions would be crucial in much of his most inspired and enduring music.

In 1976, Young reunited with Stephen Stills in the short-lived Stills-Young Band, whose only album *Long May You Run* was distinguished mainly by Young's title song, a nostalgic tribute to the much-mythologized hearse that had brought him to California. Young canceled a proposed major tour with Crazy Horse in order to go on the road with the Stills-Young Band. But he

quickly reversed his the decision and abruptly bailed out in mid-tour, leaving Stills to attempt to finish the remaining sold-out dates on his own.

In 1977, Reprise released *Decade*, a three-LP retrospective assembled by Young himself. The collection was distinguished by some worthy unreleased material drawn from Young's copious archives, and by the artist's pithy handwritten liner notes. While such elaborate archival collections would become commonplace in the CD era, they were rare at the time, and the fact that Young was the subject of such a package was a measure of his iconic status.

Nineteen seventy-seven also saw the release of *American Stars 'n Bars*, a mostly country-flavored hodgepodge of tracks, some of them originally intended for the unreleased 1975 Young album *Homegrown*. Although an inconsistent mixed bag, *American Stars 'n Bars* ended with a trio of tracks that were among Young's most powerful, "Star of Bethlehem," "Will to Love," and "Like a Hurricane."

Shortly after the release of *American Stars 'n Bars*, Young resurfaced unexpectedly as a member of the Ducks, a Santa Cruz combo that also included Moby Grape bassist/singer Bob Mosley and Springfield-era Young acquaintance Jeff Blackburn. The Ducks exclusively played low-key local club gigs, with Young taking a relatively low-key role and introducing several new songs.

Nineteen seventy-eight's *Comes a Time*, a mostly acoustic collection that featured some lush country politan orchestrations. Young had originally cut the album as a solo acoustic effort, but followed Warner/Reprise president Mo Ostin's suggestion that he try fleshing out the tracks with additional players. The resulting album was close in spirit to Young's most popular work, and became Young's best-selling release since *Harvest*. Young's reputation for rigorous quality control was confirmed when he purchased 200,000 LP copies of an early pressing of *Comes a Time* back from Warner Bros. in order to correct a technical problem.

Backup singer Nicolette Larson, who'd previously appeared on *American Stars 'n Bars* and whose sweet country harmonies were featured prominently on *Comes a Time*, subsequently scored a Top Ten solo hit the following year with disco-style reworking of the *Comes a Time* number "Lotta Love."

RUST IN PEACE

Typically, Young used the commercial clout he'd earned from the accessible *Comes a Time* to stage a more conceptually ambitious project. His next tour, which he titled "Rust Never Sleeps," was a theatrical tour de force, built around a set of new songs that offered vivid, melancholy observations about life, rock and roll, and America.

The shows were divided into an acoustic solo set and a set of fierce, ear-splitting rock with Crazy Horse, and made extensive use of oversized stage props and costumed "road-eyes," dressed in long robes and with glowing red eyes, recalling the Jawas of the then-recent *Star Wars*. The set was decorated

with giant props, amps, speaker cases, and microphones, and audience members were given cardboard “Rust-O-Vision” glasses that supposedly allowed them to watch the musicians rusting away on stage.

The “Rust Never Sleeps” shows were bookended by a song, alternately known as “My My, Hey Hey (Out of the Blue)” and “Hey Hey, My My (Into the Black),” which was performed in both acoustic and electric versions. The number was a meditation on rock and roll, taking note of the recent death of Elvis Presley and the recent demise of the Sex Pistols, whose lead singer Johnny Rotten was name-checked in the lyrics. The much-quoted contention that “It’s better to burn out than to fade away” is certainly debatable, but the statement was an apt summation of many of his new songs’ thematic concerns, as well as a manifestation of Young’s long-standing willingness to embrace artistic risk.

Young’s enthusiasm for punk was consistent with his preference for raw substance over slick artifice. At the time, it was common for Young’s old-guard contemporaries, feeling threatened by the apparent changing of the musical guard, to decry punk as unmusical sacrilege. While most of his peers were resisting the new music, Young was channeling its influence into such frantic new songs as “Sedan Delivery” and “Welfare Mothers,” on which Crazy Horse’s sound ascended to a new stratosphere of sludgy distortion.

The tour yielded the 1979 album *Rust Never Sleeps*, consisting of the new songs that Young had assembled for the show. By dividing the material into acoustic and electric sides, the album juxtaposed Young’s most accessible music with his most primitive and provocative. Although the tracks were recorded live on tour, the audience noise was largely edited out, giving the album a seamless spontaneity without the sonic distractions inherent in most live recordings. Beyond its meditations on rock and roll, such memorable numbers as “Pochahontas,” “Thrasher,” “Ride My Llama,” and “Powderfinger” reflected the dual interests in frontier Americana and science fiction that had long been recurring motifs in Young’s songwriting.

Rust Never Sleeps was followed by *Live Rust*, a more conventional double live album that mixed old and new songs. There was also a feature film documenting the shows, directed by Young under his cinematic pseudonym Bernard Shakey (Shakey being a childhood nickname the Young acquired after his bout with polio) and also titled *Rust Never Sleeps*.

The critical and commercial success of *Rust Never Sleeps* restored Young to rock’s commercial forefront as well as its artistic cutting edge. Perhaps not surprisingly, he followed his high-profile comeback with a series of releases that largely perplexed his fans and tested his new audience’s goodwill.

Nineteen eighty’s *Hawks and Doves* was a patchy assortment of older unreleased tracks (some from *Homegrown*) and new country-rock numbers whose vaguely right-wing lyrics seemed odd coming from the author of such antiauthoritarian anthems as “Ohio” and “Southern Man.” Nineteen eighty-one’s *Re*ac*tor* comprised raw Crazy Horse workouts whose minimalist lyrics

were lambasted by critics. Young also wrote and recorded the soundtrack music for *Where the Buffalo Roam*, a quickly forgotten 1980 film inspired by the works of gonzo journalist Hunter S. Thompson.

*Re*ac*tor* marked the end of Young's dozen-year association with Reprise, and he signed a lucrative contract with the new Geffen label. But the artistic freedom conferred by the new deal would throw the artist's recording career into near-freefall for much of the 1980s. Nineteen eighty-two's *Trans* largely comprised electronic tracks, with Young's familiar voice rendered largely unrecognizable through the use of a computerized vocoder (although his electric guitar sound was largely intact). The project was recorded with a band composed of musicians from various stages of Young's history, including ex-Buffalo Springfield bassist Bruce Palmer, *After the Gold Rush/Tonight's the Night* guitarist Nils Lofgren, *Harvest*-era steel guitarist Ben Keith, and Crazy Horse drummer Ralph Molina.

The elaborate, surreal live presentation that Young had designed for *Trans* proved to be a financial debacle when Young took it to Europe, and was deemed too expensive to take on the road in America (a Berlin performance was captured for posterity and released as a cable TV special and home video). *Trans* initially sold respectably, reaching number seventeen, but it also severely confused many of Young's fans. Young would later explain that the album's sonic shape-shifting, and its themes of strained communication, were largely a reflection of his and his wife Pegi's extensive, emotionally exhausting involvement with a series of therapies for their new son Ben, who was born with cerebral palsy and was unable to converse verbally.

Nineteen eighty-three's rockabilly-flavored *Everybody's Rockin'*, credited to the fictitious Neil and the Shocking Pinks, fared no better commercially. Young took the Shocking Pinks, which included Stray Gators Ben Keith and Tim Drummond, on the road as part of his stripped-down U.S. *Trans* show, which concluded with a set by the made-up 1950s group.

A considerably more elaborate, outré project from the same period was Neil Young/Bernard Shakey's first narrative feature *Human Highway*, shot over the course of three years with an assortment of friends and cronies. Young co-directed the surrealist musical sci-fi satire with actor and longtime friend Dean Stockwell, with whom he'd planned the abortive *After the Gold Rush* film a decade earlier. Young starred as the largely improvised film's goofy auto-mechanic protagonist, heading a cast that included Stockwell and fellow Hollywood nonconformists Dennis Hopper, Russ Tamblyn, and Sally Kirkland, along with the satirical new wave band Devo, who portrayed workers from the local nuclear power plant. The film was, and remains, little seen.

Young was a staunch admirer of Devo, who also recorded for Warner Bros., and who'd originally been brought to his attention by Stockwell. The artsy Akron, Ohio, outfit's satirical multimedia presentation, built around the concept that the human race was devolving into stupidity and corruption, carried a tragicomic edge that appealed to Young. Young and Devo struck up an

acquaintance that eventually led to the band signing a management deal with Elliot Roberts.

Young's first attempt at recording "Hey Hey, My My" had been with Devo, during *Human Highway's* long birth cycle. That never-released version was a cacophonous mess featuring vocals by Devo leader Mark Mothersbaugh's infantile alter ego, Booji Boy. Mothersbaugh added the words "rust never sleeps," which he'd remembered from an old Rustoleum advertisement. The phrase struck a chord with Young, crystallizing his ideas about rock and roll and life in general.

UNCHARACTERISTIC

Young's genre experiments proved so disturbing to his new label that in November 1983, Geffen filed an unprecedented lawsuit against the artist, requesting damages of over \$3.3 million and charging him with making music that was "not 'commercial' and . . . musically uncharacteristic of Young's previous recordings." Young filed a countersuit, and the matter would drag on for the next year and a half. Artist and label eventually settled the matter. Ironically, the Geffen lawsuit gave Young the best publicity he'd had in years, positioning him as the idealistic underdog persecuted by heartless corporate bullies.

Less attractive to most press outlets was a series of bizarre interviews in which Young offered effusive praise for the bellicose foreign policy of then-president Ronald Reagan. Young's pro-Reagan rants proved so troubling to critics and fans that Elliot Roberts stopped him from doing interviews.

Young would return to more familiar sounds for the remainder of his Geffen years. But 1985's country-oriented *Old Ways*, which he had recorded, scrapped, and recorded again, failed to recapture the magic of *Harvest*. Young toured widely with various versions of the International Harvesters, the band of Nashville session veterans he'd assembled for *Old Ways*.

Nineteen eighty-six's *Landing on Water*, recorded with commercial sessionmen Danny Kortchmar and Steve Jordan, was an uneasy marriage of electric guitars and soulless electronics, and did little to restore Young's commercial status or artistic prestige. The album's cover art—an illustration from an airline crash manual—was indicative of Young's precarious position through the 1980s. *Landing on Water's* main point of musical interest was "Hippie Dream," disillusioned semi-sequel to "Tonight's the Night" that was inspired by Young's former bandmate David Crosby, who at the time was in the midst of a highly publicized drug-fueled decline.

More entertaining than *Landing on Water* was the tour that followed it. Billed as "Live from a Rusted-Out Garage," the shows rivaled the *Rust Never Sleeps* tour for flamboyant theatricality and technical overkill. Young and the reassembled Crazy Horse performed on a giant mock-garage set among giant

talking mice, motorized cockroaches, and various giant props. But the tour's attempts to have the rough-edged Crazy Horse duplicate *Landing on Water's* high-tech rhythms—with bassist Talbot doubling on keyboard bass and drummer Molina playing with prerecorded samples—were decidedly ill-conceived.

Also in 1986, the original members of Buffalo Springfield gathered informally at Stephen Stills's home. But nothing further arose from that meeting, despite various attempts to get the band to reform for a reunion album or tour.

Although his Geffen albums sold poorly, Young retained his iconic status and remained a reliably popular touring act through the 1980s continuing to pull arena-sized crowds, regardless of whatever alternate persona he was embracing at the moment.

In 1985, Young, John Mellencamp, and Willie Nelson co-founded the charity Farm Aid, which staged the first of its annual all-star benefit concerts that September. Since then, the organization has continued to work for the interest of American family farms. Young remains on Farm Aid's board of directors and continues to perform the organization's yearly concerts, often delivering impassioned speeches about the importance of environmental awareness.

In 1986, Young, the father of two sons with cerebral palsy, began hosting a long-running series of annual all-star benefit concerts for the Bridge School, a non-profit California facility that Pegi Young had co-founded to assist mentally and physically handicapped children.

Young regained some of his old fire when he reunited with Crazy Horse for 1987's *Life*. By that point, though, his relationship with Geffen had grown irretrievably contentious, with Young regularly bad-mouthing label head (and Elliot Roberts's former management partner) Geffen in print. At one point, Young announced that the cover of *Life* would show himself in a prison cell, with the number of albums he'd made for Geffen scratched out on the wall.

Young returned to Warner/Reprise in 1988 with *This Note's for You*, after the label bought the artist out of his remaining commitments to Geffen. The album, credited to Neil Young and the Bluenotes, was another stylistic detour, with Young, in sports jacket and shades, assuming the persona of sleazy hipster Shakey Deal and leading a horn-driven R&B band. Although *This Note's for You* was a well-executed genre exercise rather than a return to form, it was delivered with spirit and humor. When Harold Melvin, leader of the veteran soul group the Blue Notes, raised legal objections, Young changed the name of his band to Ten Men Workin', after one of the album's song titles.

This Note's for You's title track offered a tongue-in-cheek critique of pop-star product endorsements, and inspired a humorous promo video that tackled the same subject. The clip was initially banned by MTV, but eventually made its way into heavy rotation on the channel, and was ultimately named Best Video of the Year on MTV's annual video awards show.

Also in 1988, Young reunited with Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young for a slick, uninspired new album, *American Dream*, released the following year.

The foursome played a few benefit concerts, but Young declined to sign on for a long-term commitment, and it would be another decade before CSNY would do a full-blown reunion tour.

FREEDOM AND GLORY

While *American Dream* was greeted with overwhelmingly negative reviews, Young's 1989 release *Freedom* marked a major return to form. A mix of sensitive ballads and tough, largely urban-themed rockers—with an emphasis on the latter—*Freedom* once again rescued Young's reputation and reestablished him at the forefront of contemporary music. Much of the album was recorded in all-night sessions at the Hit Factory, located in Manhattan's Times Square, with the Bluenotes' rhythm section of bassist Rick Rosas and drummer Chad Cromwell. The gritty urban surroundings, and Young's unhappiness about his involvement in the misbegotten *American Dream*, manifested themselves in some of the toughest, angriest music of Young's career. Young launched *Freedom* with an electrifying performance on TV's *Saturday Night Live*, backed by a formidable one-off lineup of Frank Sampedro, Steve Jordan, and bassist Charley Drayton.

Freedom's most popular track was the topical "Rockin' in the Free World," which expressed Young's displeasure with the current Republican administration, and bookended the album in acoustic and electric renditions. The song also became a de facto anthem during the fall of the Berlin Wall, and would later figure prominently in Michael Moore's 2002 agit-prop documentary *Fahrenheit 9/11*.

Nineteen eighty-nine also saw the release of *The Bridge*, a Young tribute album comprised of interpretations of his songs by several young alternative-rock acts. The tribute disc demonstrated how Young had come to be revered as an inspiration and role model by a new generation of left-of-center music makers.

Young continued his resurgence with 1990s *Ragged Glory*, a belated reunion with Crazy Horse recorded in a converted barn on Young's ranch in northern California. The album's loose, feedback-drenched workouts were equally well received by fans and critics, and felt completely current in the context of a new generation of loud underground bands who were beginning to gain wider attention.

When he toured behind the album, Young signaled his support of the current generation of alt-rock bands by using seminal New York noise-rock band Sonic Youth as his opening act. It was Sonic Youth's suggestion that Young augment *Weld*, the 1991 live album recorded on that tour, with the EP *Arc*, a sound collage consisting entirely of feedback and guitar noise recorded on stage.

Having made a decisive return to rock, Young surprised many observers by making 1992's explicitly commercial *Harvest Moon*. The mature, largely acoustic collection was a sequel to the best-selling *Harvest*, recorded in Nashville

with a reunited Stray Gators and vocal appearances by original *Harvest* guests Linda Ronstadt and James Taylor. The new album featured warm, mature songs paying tribute to the enduring values of home, nature, and long-term romance.

Harvest Moon became a major hit, and its success led to an acoustic performance on MTV's popular *Unplugged* show, which was released as an album in 1993. *MTV Unplugged* featured some unexpected choices of material, including an acoustic version of the *Trans* track "Transformer Man." The same year, Geffen capitalized on Young's renewed popularity by issuing *Lucky Thirteen*, a scattershot collection of album tracks and rarities drawn from his years with that company.

Also in 1992, Young wrote and recorded "Philadelphia," for director Jonathan Demme's hit movie of the same name. The song was nominated for an Academy Award, but ironically lost out to Bruce Springsteen's "Streets of Philadelphia," from the same film. Young also guested with old friend Randy Bachman, of Bachman-Turner Overdrive fame, on "Prairie Town," a track on Bachman's album *Any Road* that recalled the pair's early days on the Winnipeg music scene.

Young also won substantial acclaim for his 1992 summer tour, which teamed him with a new backup combo, the legendary Stax Records house band Booker T. and the MGs, with whom he'd first performed at a 1992 Bob Dylan tribute concert at New York's Madison Square Garden.

Young's return to the middle of the road with *Harvest Moon* wasn't permanent. Nineteen ninety-four's *Sleeps with Angels*, recorded with Crazy Horse, was a much darker effort, and led some observers to describe it as a 1990s answer to *Tonight's the Night*. *Sleeps with Angels* reflected the influence of the then-current crop of noisy young grunge bands, whose sound owed a debt to Young's work with Crazy Horse. The title track of *Sleeps with Angels* was widely interpreted as a tribute to the late Nirvana leader Kurt Cobain, who had quoted Young's lyrics in his suicide note earlier that year. The album's highlights included the nearly fifteen-minute "Change Your Mind," which, in edited form, became a popular airplay track.

In the wake of *Sleeps with Angels*, Young began jamming with Seattle grunge stars Pearl Jam, and the association led to the extra-raw 1995 album *Mirror Ball*, on which the members of Pearl Jam (and producer Brendan O'Brien) served as Young's backup band. *Mirror Ball* was recorded in a whirlwind four-day session that also produced the companion EP *Merkin Ball*, which was released under Pearl Jam's name.

Young's longtime passion for model trains—a hobby that he shared with his wheelchair-bound son Ben—became a business venture in 1995, when he became a partner in the Lionel model-train company. Prior to his business involvement with Lionel, the elaborate train setup at Young's ranch had played a crucial therapeutic role for Ben, and Young called upon his technical skills to help pioneer several innovations that now allow handicapped users access to the trains' controls.

In 1996, Young inaugurated Vapor Records, a new label run by himself and manager Elliot Roberts. Vapor would eventually score some commercial success with releases by punk progenitor Jonathan Richman and sibling pop duo Tegan and Sara. But the company's first release was a CD containing Young's music score for Jim Jarmusch's film *Dead Man*, an abstract effort consisting mainly of feedback-driven instrumentals.

The same year, the death of Young's longtime producer David Briggs—whose edgy recording approach had been a key component in most of Young's 1970s albums—inspired him to reunite with Crazy Horse for a series of informal jams that eventually became the 1996 album *Broken Arrow*.

Broken Arrow was largely uninspired, but it was followed by extensive tours of North America and Europe that found Young and Crazy Horse firing on all cylinders again. Those tours produced the live album *Year of the Horse*, and were documented in the same-titled documentary by Jim Jarmusch, which focused on Young's long-running relationship with his on-again, off-again backup band.

Young closed out the century with *Looking Forward*, another Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young album, which was followed by a wildly successful reunion tour, the quartet's first in a quarter-century. Also in 2000, Young released *Silver & Gold*, a set of low-key country-pop songs that followed largely in the vein of *Harvest Moon*, and *Road Rock Vol. 1: Friends & Relatives*, a live album and DVD cut with many of the same musicians.

Young reunited with Booker T. and the MGs for 2002's R&B-tinged *Are You Passionate?* The album received a good deal of advance press for "Let's Roll," a heartfelt tribute to the victims of the September 11, 2001, terror attacks. But the album otherwise focused on love songs dedicated to Pegi Young, his wife and sometime backing vocalist.

In 2002 the publication of author Jimmy McDonough's meticulously researched Young biography *Shakey*, offered a fascinating and insightful portrait of Young's perfectionist work ethic and control-freak tendencies. The latter quality was demonstrated in the fact that the very private Young reluctantly cooperated with McDonough on the project, yet came close to scuttling the project by threatening to withdraw his approval at the last minute.

Young's 2003 project *Greendale* incorporated his multi-media interests, as well as his penchant for sociopolitical commentary. *Greendale* encompassed a studio album, a Young-directed feature film, and an elaborate concert production that combined a Young/Crazy Horse performance with a cast of live actors performing the show's narrative. *Greenville*'s plotline portrays the effect of larger world events upon a fictional small-town farm family, and served as a vehicle for Young's criticisms of the Bush administration's economic and environmental policies and the destructive effects of Bush's war in Iraq.

In early 2005, Young was diagnosed with a potentially fatal brain aneurysm. Prior to undergoing surgery, he wrote and recorded a set of introspective new songs, several of which seemed to reflect his brush with mortality (as well as

the recent death of his father), and explore his rural roots. After undergoing a minimally invasive neuroradiology procedure, Young went to Nashville and recorded his new material for the largely acoustic *Prairie Wind*, which achieved healthy sales and won widespread critical acclaim.

Young returned to the stage on July 2, 2005, performing in Toronto as part of the worldwide Live 8 simulcast. The following month, he performed a pair of concerts at Nashville's Ryman Auditorium with most of his *Prairie Wind* sidemen. Those shows were filmed by Jonathan Demme and formed the basis of the concert film *Heart of Gold*, a celebration of Young's body of work that premiered the following year at the Sundance Film Festival.

Having wasted little time in bouncing back from his life-threatening condition, Young made headlines again in 2006 with *Living with War*, an unapologetic set of noisy protest songs that harshly rebuked the Bush administration's Iraq war policy. The album, recorded with session players and a large vocal choir, was written quickly and recorded over a nine-day period in March and April 2006, initially made available on Young's Web site at the end of that month, and released to retail outlets scarcely six weeks after it was recorded. One place where *Living with War* was not available was the huge—and politically conservative—Wal-Mart chain of stores.

All of *Living with War*'s songs—including such titles as “Let's Impeach the President,” “Shock and Awe,” and “Looking for a Leader”—were performed live during Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young's politically charged “Freedom of Speech Tour '06,” along with many of the group's classic topical material.

Meanwhile, recent years have seen Young beginning to make good on his long-standing promise to make some of his voluminous backlog of unreleased material available to the public. The release of Young's massive rarities box set *The Neil Young Archives*, which has apparently been in the works since the late 1980s, has been announced and postponed numerous times, leading many fans to despair of ever getting to hear it. But in 2006 Young launched what's projected to be a lengthy series of archival releases, beginning with a pair of early 1970s live recordings, the Crazy Horse–fueled *Live at the Fillmore East* and the solo acoustic *Live at Massey Hall*.

Although he's revealed a late-blooming willingness to journey into his past, Neil Young shows no sign of losing interest in his musical present. More than four decades into his recording career, Young remains virtually the only rocker who's as vital in his sixties as he was in his twenties.

TIMELINE

January 23, 1969

Neil Young releases his self-titled debut solo album.

May 27, 1969

Young releases *Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere*, his first album with Crazy Horse.

March 17, 1970

Déjà Vu, Young's first album as a member of Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young, is released. It will reach number one on the *Billboard* album chart, selling over seven million copies.

September 16, 1970

Neil Young's third solo album, *After the Gold Rush*, is released. It will become his first Top Ten album as a solo artist.

March 18, 1972

"Heart of Gold," from Young's fourth album *Harvest*, tops the U.S. pop singles chart.

October 14, 1973

Young releases *Time Fades Away*, whose raw electric sound represents a substantial break with the mellow sound of its best-selling predecessor *Harvest*.

August 15, 1974

Young releases the downbeat *On the Beach*, which *Rolling Stone* later calls "the most despairing album of the decade."

July 16, 1975

Young releases *Tonight's the Night*, inspired by the heroin-related deaths of Crazy Horse member Danny Whitten and guitar tech Bruce Berry.

November 25, 1976

Young performs "Helpless" at The Band's farewell concert at the Winterland Ballroom in San Francisco. The performance, will be featured in *The Last Waltz*, director Martin Scorsese's documentary of the event.

December 17, 1977

Decade, a triple-LP Neil Young retrospective, is released.

October 18, 1978

The gentle, acoustic-flavored *Comes a Time* is released. It will become his biggest-selling album since *Harvest*.

October 22, 1978

Young's concert at San Francisco's Cow Palace is shot for Young's concert film version of *Rust Never Sleeps*.

July 19, 1979

The album *Rust Never Sleeps* is released.

November 19, 1981

*Re*ac*tor* is released, ending Young's sixteen-album association with Reprise Records.

January 13, 1983

Neil Young kicks off his new association with his new label, Geffen, by releasing *Trans*.

April 21, 1988

Young returns to Reprise Records with *This Note's for You*.

September 6, 1989

Young's "This Note's For You" wins an MTV Video Music Award as Video of the Year.

September 22, 1989

Neil Young releases *Freedom*, which many critics acclaim as his best work since *Rust Never Sleeps*.

September 23, 1990

Ragged Glory, widely regarded as a return to form by Young and Crazy Horse, is released.

October 24, 1992

Young releases *Harvest Moon*, a sequel to his twenty-year-old *Harvest*. It will become his first platinum album since 1979's *Rust Never Sleeps*.

February 7, 1993

Young tapes an acoustic performance for MTV's *Unplugged*. The performance will be released as a fourteen-song CD and home video in July.

March 21, 1994

Neil Young's Academy Award-nominated "Philadelphia," from Jonathan Demme's film of the same name, loses to Bruce Springsteen's "Streets of Philadelphia," from the same film.

July 25, 1994

Young and Crazy Horse release *Sleeps with Angels*, whose title song pays tribute to the late Nirvana leader Kurt Cobain.

May 26, 1995

Young releases *Mirror Ball*, an album recorded with Seattle grunge stars Pearl Jam.

May 8, 2006

Young returns to the realm of political protest with the release of *Living with War*, a collection of songs harshly critical of the George W. Bush administration.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Neil Young, 1969

Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere, 1969

After the Gold Rush, 1970

Harvest, 1972

Time Fades Away, 1973

On the Beach, 1974

Tonight's the Night, 1975

Zuma, 1975

Comes a Time, 1978

Rust Never Sleeps, 1979

Live Rust, 1979

Trans, 1982

Freedom, 1989

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Harvest Moon, 1992
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Prairie Wind, 2005
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Courtesy of Photofest.

David Bowie

Jesse Jarnow

INTELLECTUAL SHAPESHIFTER

David Bowie staked his claim in the pop world by creating and courting controversy. First charting with a hit called “A Space Oddity,” before taking on the persona of Martian bandleader Ziggy Stardust, and eventually portraying spaceman Thomas Jerome Newton in Nicholas Roeg’s 1976 film, *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, Bowie cut an almost literally alien figure when he rose to stardom in the early 1970s. Like Bob Dylan before him and Prince afterward,

the British singer tapped into his era's mores. Bowie willfully positioned himself as a transgressive rock star.

"You can't go out on stage and live, it's all false that way," Bowie said in 1976, at the height of his fame. "I can't stand the premise of going out in jeans and a guitar and looking as real as you can in front of 18,000 people. I mean, it's not normal!"¹ In part, when Bowie forged glam-rock along with T. Rex singer Marc Bolan, it was in reaction to the earnestness of singer-songwriters like Neil Young and Bruce Springsteen. But his artistry was much more than that.

Musically, glam mixed theatrical camp with the power of loud guitars and anthemic choruses. Bowie dressed and played the part off stage as well. He streaked his natural blonde hair red and was bone skinny, due in part to massive cocaine consumption. Appearing like an alternate universe Elvis Presley, Bowie was an androgynous chameleon. He appeared bare-chested with a leather jacket, or dressed in skintight clothes, which ranged from paisley jumpsuits to dancer's leotards to immaculately tailored suits. Openly bisexual and vociferously intellectual, David Bowie in the late 1970s was the very definition of charisma.

Indeed, the look Bowie created as Ziggy Stardust was massively iconic. As one of the first pop stars to declare attraction to the same sex, Bowie became the figurehead of a subculture of disenfranchised youth of all genders, sexualities, and cultural differences. Even after Bowie himself moved on to new characters, Ziggy's influence resonated throughout popular culture, in movies like *Velvet Goldmine* and *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*. He was a template of fashion, a shorthand adopted and adapted as an outrageous bridge between stadium pomp and the onset of punk in 1977.

But as market savvy as David Bowie was, he also came from an even firmer tradition: British music hall. In fact, Bowie began his career in the shadow of Anthony Newley, an unapologetically nostalgic British pop act. First and foremost, David Bowie—whose birth name was David Jones—was an entertainer. He was willing to do anything necessary to put on a show, either on stage or in the culture at large, from studying mime to deliberately spreading a reputation as a sexual provocateur.

On top of it all, Bowie was a vocalist of extraordinary technical ability, able to pitch his singing to particular effect. "I don't think people realize how finely he can tune his singing, in terms of picking a particular emotional pitch," producer Brian Eno once said. "It's really scientific the way he does it, very interesting. He'll say 'I think that's slightly too theatrical there, it should be more withdrawn and introspective'—and he'll go in and sing it again, and you'll hear this point-four of a degree shift which makes all the difference."²

After the global triumph of Ziggy Stardust, Bowie continued to reinvent himself. He had numerous personas, which informed both his exterior appearance and his method of making music. These characters included a gaunt

studio experimentalist with fascist leanings in Berlin in the late 1970s (known as “the Thin White Duke”), a normal dude pop star in a dinner jacket in the 1980s, and a jam-happy democratic bandmember with Tin Machine in the 1990s. Though he served as a producer and a collaborator for artists he felt were overlooked, Bowie’s primary extramusical work explored a number of alternate occupations, as an actor, an art dealer, and a businessman. When Bowie agreed to reissue his back catalog in 1997, he managed his profits by selling so-called Bowie bonds to fans, promises on future earnings.

Even as he changed, Bowie was always extraordinarily conscious of the way he was perceived, and what he could do to affect that. “It’s true—I am a bisexual,” he told *Playboy*. “But I can’t deny that I’ve used that fact very well. I suppose it’s the best thing that ever happened to me.”³ Ever self-reflective, Bowie was also a prolific reader and an inquisitive intellectual who befriended artists such as Damien Hirst and novelist Hanif Kureishi. As he reached a half-century, Bowie emerged as an elder statesman in the music world. As an arbiter of taste, Bowie performed and recorded with a number of high-profile bands who cited him as an influence, and curated music festivals that included both his musical spawn as well as more established avant-garde acts. Bowie remained present in the theater and fashion worlds, as well.

Though he has not remained as influential as he was in the 1970s and 1980s, Bowie has nonetheless remained an active part of the transatlantic cultural scene.

BIRTH OF A STARCHILD

David Robert Jones was born January 8, 1947, in London, England. His parents, Haywood (John) Jones and Margaret (Peggy) Burns were unmarried, each with children from previous relationships, though they wed seven months after David’s birth. They lived in south London, in working-class Brixton, where John was a promotions officer and Peggy an usher at a movie theater. David was a shy child, but grew close with his mother’s first son Terry, with whom he shared a bedroom. When David was six, the family moved nine miles southeast to suburban Bromley, in Kent. London was still only a half-hour train ride away.

On Sundays, the family listened to *Two Way Family Favorites*, a radio show that played nostalgic British pop music, such as Ernest Lough’s “On the Wings of a Dove,” one of Peggy’s favorites, with which she sang along. John was keen on the emerging popular culture. He bought a television long before many in the neighborhood, and a 78 RPM gramophone soon after. Three years later, John brought home a collection of 45 RPM singles. Having the wrong speed record played posed only a minor problem for David.

“I would crouch over the heavy-armed turntable, twirling the disc ever faster until it approached what I presumed would be its real speed,” Bowie wrote

many years later. “Although wobbly and wonky, these really great sounds came out of the horn.” David made his way through singles by Fats Domino and Frankie Lymon, among others, before he found the song that would change his life: Little Richard’s melodramatic “Tutti Frutti.” “It filled the room with energy and color and outrageous defiance. I had heard God. Now I wanted to see him.”⁴ In that moment, David Jones decided he wanted to be a musician.

David’s older half-brother Terry was a jazz fan, and introduced his sibling to American jazz bassist and bandleader Charles Mingus, as well as the beat writings of novelist Jack Kerouac and poet Allen Ginsberg. David played occasionally in a skiffle duo with classmate George Underwood and performed the swing-influenced folk songs of Lonnie Donegan. He also took a part-time job at a record shop. Though he was fired for daydreaming, David used his earnings to purchase a white Bakelite acrylic alto saxophone and took lessons with respected jazzbo Ronnie Ross.

When David was fifteen, he got into a fistfight with Underwood over the affections of a girl. Underwood punched David in the eye and sent him to Farnborough Hospital. After two operations, David was diagnosed with anisocoria. The pupil of his left eye was paralyzed and permanently dilated. His vision was mostly unaffected, though under certain light, his left eye could turn from blue to green or brown. Many years later, tabloids would publish outlandish accounts of how the eye came to be as it was, part of Bowie’s alien mythology.

At Bromley Technical High School, David studied art with Owen Frampton, whose son Peter would become a massive pop star in his own right. Though Frampton emphasized the liberal attitudes then popular in the country’s art schools, which David absorbed, David’s own work leaned toward commercial art. Except in graphic design, David was not a good student. At sixteen, David left school and worked as a low-level assistant at Nevin D. Hirst Advertising in London. He continued to gig with various groups, such as the R&B-influenced Konrads (where David called himself “David Jay”), and the blues-based groups the King Bees and the Manish Boys (both named for blues songs). Bowie quit his job and—on June 5, 1964—saw the release of his first single, the slave spiritual “Liza Jane,” with the Manish Boys.

The band appeared on several television shows to promote the single, and opened for Gene Pitney and Gerry and the Pacemakers on a short tour. Still, David Jones continued to explore new sounds and ideas. On November 12, 1964, David appeared in a comic interview on Britain’s *Tonight* show, pretending to be the president of “the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Long-Haired Men.” His music wasn’t mentioned, though his performance was firmly tongue-in-cheek.

Half-brother Terry, returned from the military, often joined David as he discovered new bands, though Terry was increasingly debilitated by a mental illness. When not living at home, crippled with depression and schizophrenic

visions, Terry spent much of the decade in various institutions; he committed suicide in 1982. David pressed on and joined the Who-influenced Lower Third. In September 1965, at the Marquee with the Lower Third, David Jones drew the attention of music industry veteran Ken Pitt.

Pitt had served as a publicist for Frank Sinatra, Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, and others before he became a manager. He took David under his wing, and exposed him to the work of outlandish literary gay humorist Oscar Wilde and the psychedelic erotic illustrator Aubrey Beardsley. Pitt also suggested that David pick a full-time stage name, as another Davy Jones had become popular as a singer for the Monkees. On September 16, 1965, David Jones began to use the surname Bowie, for the single-bladed hunting knife favored by American frontiersman Jim Bowie.

PREPPING THE LAUNCHPAD

Though the Lower Third remained nominally a rock act, the newly christened David Bowie grew more theatrical by the month. Influenced heavily by actor, songwriter, and Music Hall revivalist Anthony Newley, they even performed and recorded “Chim Chim Cher-ee,” a bit of whimsy penned by the Sherman brothers for Disney’s film musical *Mary Poppins*. “I’m determined to be an entertainer,” Bowie said at the time. “Clubs, cabaret, concerts, the lot. . . . A lot is said and written about the musical snobbery with the fans, but I think the groups are just as bad. For some reason even the words ‘entertainer’ and ‘cabaret’ make them shudder.”⁵

Throughout the next two years, Bowie performed with both the Buzz (his own band) and Riot Squad. In the latter, Bowie first wore makeup on stage and encouraged the band to cover Frank Zappa’s “It Can’t Happen Here.” As a solo artist, Bowie signed to Deram, an experimental subsidiary of major label Decca. There, he released a number of singles throughout 1966, which included the semi-orchestral arrangement of “Rubber Band.” With collaborator Dek Fernley, Bowie scored parts for the London Symphony Orchestra. Some songs, like “Gravedigger,” were nearly pure theater. Others contained campy one-liners, such as “The Laughing Gnome.” Another, “She’s Got Medals,” was about a cross-dressing female soldier. On June 1, 1967—the same day Decca released the Beatles’ *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*—Deram issued *David Bowie*. The underpromoted album sold poorly.

Bowie’s time at Deram was far from wasted. At one session, he met Tony Visconti, a twenty-two-year-old American-born producer who had recently joined Decca’s London staff. The two hit it off famously. They shared an affinity for taboo-breaching American acts such as the Velvet Underground, Frank Zappa, and the Fugs. With a few exceptions, Visconti became Bowie’s de

facto producer. Bowie continued to draw from theater, too, and in 1967 he attended Lindsay Kemp's mime classes at the flamboyantly gay dancer's Mime Company. Beginning on December 28, 1967, and through the spring of 1968, Bowie appeared in Kemp's *Pierrot in Turquoise*, where he sang several songs. Though he was never a gifted practitioner of mime, Bowie took the skills with him to his other endeavors.

In 1968, Bowie worked on an unfinished rock musical (*Ernie Johnson*), submitted an original play to the Beatles' newly formed Apple Corps (*The Champion Flower Grower*, rejected), failed auditions for several television plays, and appeared in Kemp's choreography for Alexander Pushkin's *The Pistol Shot* on the BBC. He rehearsed (though did not perform) a cabaret routine that had him singing Beatles songs and acted in several television commercials as well as a silent movie. Dropped by Deram and signed to Mercury Records, musically Bowie moved in a folkier direction. He formed the short-lived Feathers with then-girlfriend Hermione Farmingdale, a dancer he met while working on *The Pistol Shot*, and co-founded a weekly folk society in the Beckenham neighborhood where he lived. By 1969, though, the club had evolved into Growth, an anything-goes arts lab where people could showcase their creative talents of any variety.

In February 1969, with the July moon landing on the horizon, Bowie wrote the timely "Space Oddity." A haunting, chorusless narrative about a never-to-return astronaut named Major Tom, the Gus Dudgeon-produced single was released in July 1969. The BBC banned it until the *Apollo 11* astronauts returned safely to earth. In September, the song reached number five in the United Kingdom and became Bowie's first hit. Though now a minor success, Bowie's flamboyance was still not always tolerated. In the fall of 1969, when he toured solo acoustic opening for Humble Pie, Bowie was frequently booed. His full-length album, *A Space Oddity*, released in November, reached number seventeen in the United Kingdom, and number sixteen in the United States. The follow-up single, "The Prettiest Star," which featured T. Rex's Marc Bolan on guitar, did not chart.

During 1969, Bowie met Angie Barnett when the two discovered they were both sleeping with the same man, Mercury Records' Calvin Mark Lee. Like Bowie, Barnett was bisexual, and her extravagance complemented his. She encouraged Bowie to try wilder fashions and acted as an informal manager after Bowie parted ways with Kenneth Pitt. The two married on March 20, 1970, at the Beckenham Registry Office and moved into Haddon Hall, a large Victorian home that became something of a salon of sex, fashion, and music. While musicians, like new guitarist Mick Ronson, slept on mattresses on the floor, the Bowies spent time at the Sombrero, a gay disco.

All of this, in fact, was a type of research for David Bowie. During 1970 and 1971, though his singles and albums did not sell well, Bowie's music transformed into what became known as glam-rock. Both Bowie and T. Rex's Marc Bolan (a sometimes friend, sometimes rival) were both credited as being

the genre's progenitors, though the style was a perfectly natural outgrowth of the London rock scene. Piece by piece, Bowie implemented new facets into his act, though little showed on *The Man Who Sold the World*, released in November 1970 in the United States (number 105), and April 1971 in the United Kingdom (number 26). On May 30, 1971, Angie gave birth to Duncan Zowie Haywood Jones, Bowie's first son. Until the late 1970s, to his later regret, Bowie was mostly an absentee father.

The New York Dolls: Looking for a Kiss

From inauspicious beginnings in the decaying Mercer Arts Center in downtown Manhattan, the New York Dolls created some of the most exciting and passionate music of the glam era. The Dolls never reaped any financial reward in their own time. But they exerted a profound influence on far more successful bands, from KISS to Guns N' Roses, and paved the way for punk and new wave.

When the New York Dolls formed in 1971, the American music scene was dominated by singer/songwriters (James Taylor, Carole King) and by 1960s survivors like the Grateful Dead. The Dolls brought back flash and excitement with their outrageous, streetwise image: on the cover of their 1973 self-titled debut album, the five musicians appeared in full drag, complete with makeup and teased coiffures. The Dolls' punchy three-chord songs like "Personality Crisis" and "Looking for a Kiss" invoked the spirit of 1950s and early 1960s rock and roll refracted through the witty lyrics of lead singer David Johansen and the careening two-guitar attack of Johnny Thunders and Sylvain Sylvain.

Internal problems plagued the band almost from its inception. During their first tour of Britain, in the fall of 1972, drummer Billy Murcia died from an accidental drug overdose. His replacement, the dynamic Jerry Nolan, soon developed his own drug dependency, as did Johnny Thunders. Radio programmers shied away from the Dolls' androgynous look and raw sound; neither of their two albums reached the *Billboard* Top 100 and the original quintet broke up in 1975.

By 2004, only Johansen, Sylvain, and bassist Arthur Kane were still alive. But they reconstituted the New York Dolls with several new members to play the London Meltdown Festival in June 2004 at the personal request of former Smiths lead singer and festival curator Morrissey. The show was a resounding success but a few weeks later, Arthur Kane entered a Los Angeles hospital, suffering from flu-like symptoms. Diagnosed with leukemia, he died July 13, 2004, at age fifty-five.

With new bassist Sam Jaffa (formerly of the Dolls-influenced Hanoi Rocks), Johansen and Sylvain soldiered on. In July 2006, the New York Dolls released *One Day It Will Please Us to Remember Even This*—their first new album in thirty-two years.

Andy Schwartz

In addition to appearing on numerous BBC radio programs, Bowie also masterminded the group Arnold Corns, who released a terrible selling single of two songs that would later appear on Bowie's *Ziggy Stardust*, "Moonage Daydream" and "Hang on to Yourself." Likewise, ex-Herman's Hermit Peter Noone scored a number twelve U.K. hit with Bowie's "Oh You Pretty Things." Most important, though, Bowie found the perfect backing band: guitarist Mick Ronson, drummer Woody Woodmansey, and bassist Trevor Bolder. Tony Visconti, meanwhile, had jumped to the Marc Bolan camp. In his place, Bowie employed Ken Scott, a former engineer for the Beatles, to record *Hunky Dory* throughout the summer of 1971.

Released in December, it rose to number three on the U.K. charts after Bowie made a deliberately shocking announcement in a *Melody Maker* cover story published on January 22, 1972. "I'm gay and I always have been, even when I was David Jones,"⁶ Bowie told journalist Michael Watts. The quote caused an immediate stir, sending *Hunky Dory* rocketing up the chart. Bowie did nothing to clarify why he was also married with a child. Even as an admission of bisexuality, it was a risky move in what was still a predominantly homophobic society. If Bowie's post-hippie fashion hadn't put him on the pop culture radar, his declaration that he wasn't straight surely did.

If Bowie exploited his sexuality for publicity, it was merely a part of a more studied campaign. On his first tours of the United States in 1971, Bowie grew fascinated with conceptual artist Andy Warhol, the Velvet Underground's early patron, who believed that fame was a carefully manufactured construction. Bowie used all of the skills he had thus accumulated—songwriting, provocation, theater, fashion, the conveyance of a deep Otherness—to create Ziggy Stardust, the character he would inhabit nominally for the next few years and, in the eye of the public, well beyond.

ZIGGY STARDUST AND THE THIN WHITE DUKE

By the time of *Hunky Dory*'s release in December 1971 (number three U.K., number ninety-three U.S.), Bowie was already well through the recording sessions for Ziggy's unveiling. In guitarist Mick Ronson, Bowie found a perfect musical foil. "I would . . . literally draw out on paper with a crayon or felt-tip pen the shape of a solo," Bowie explained. "The one in 'Moonage Daydream,' for instance, started as a flat line that became a fat megaphone type shape and ended in sprays of disassociated and broken lines. . . . Mick could take something like that and actually bloody play it, being it to life."⁷

Bowie based Ziggy Stardust on two outsider musicians: the Legendary Stardust Cowboy, an American country-and-western musician who claimed to have traveled into space, and Vince Taylor, the so-called French Elvis Presley, who spiraled into truly epic drug abuse and subsequent mental health issues. Visually, Bowie drew from Stanley Kubrick's recently released adaptation of Anthony Burgess's

violent novel, *A Clockwork Orange*, as well as Japanese kabuki theater. Japanese designer Kansai Yamamoto created a hairstyle for Ziggy, as well as a series of outlandish costumes for Bowie's tours. His shows now involved numerous costume changes, face makeup, and the uniquely reverberated guitars of Mick Ronson. The result was a character unlike anything seen before in pop music.

With the band in costume and dubbed the Spiders from Mars, Ziggy made his stage debut on January 28, 1972, at Friars Aylesbury, a small club, before the start of a theater tour. They would continue to tour, more or less continuously, for the next year and a half, playing over 170 shows. The performances grew to include mime routines, mimicked fellatio on Ronson's guitar neck, and a costume that exposed Bowie's ass to the crowd. Whenever there was media present, Bowie was in character as Ziggy Stardust.

"It was so much easier for me to live within the character, along with the help of some of the chemical substances at the time," Bowie said in 1993. "It became easier and easier for me to blur the lines between reality and the blessed creature that I'd created—my doppelgänger. I wasn't getting rid of him at all; in fact, I was joining forces with him. The doppelgänger and myself were starting to become one and the same person. Then you start on this trail of psychological destruction and you become what's called a drug casualty at the end of it."⁸ Though Bowie was by now a regular cocaine user, it did not begin to take its toll until later.

The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars, released by RCA on June 6, 1972, reached number five in the United Kingdom, though only number seventy-five in the United States. As "Starman" reached the U.K. Top Ten, Bowie took Ziggy to the airwaves to perform on *Top of the Pops* and *Lift Off*—performances cited as highly important by future generations of musicians who saw the show as children. Throughout the year, Bowie continued his influence on then-current musicians, as well. He contributed "All The Young Dudes" to Mott the Hoople, who scored a number three hit with what many consider to be the singular anthem of glam-rock. He also befriended two radical 1960s icons who had hit hard times: ex-Velvet Underground leader Lou Reed, who joined the Spiders on stage in July 1972, and former Iggy and the Stooges frontman Iggy Pop, who became a lifelong friend. Bowie produced *Transformer* for Reed, which yielded Reed's "Walk on the Wild Side" (number ten U.K., number sixteen U.S.), a song that relaunched Reed's career as an American glam-rocker. Bowie had not had as much luck in Reed's native country.

Mott the Hoople: All the Young Dudes

After several unsuccessful albums and tours, Mott the Hoople were on the verge of disbanding when David Bowie came to their rescue—and turned Mott into a "glam rock" band by unavoidable association. In truth, the group's original sound had little in common with T. Rex, Roxy Music, or early 1970s

Bowie. Rather, it was unashamedly derivative of the influential Bob Dylan albums *Highway 61 Revisited* and *Blonde on Blonde*, from the Dylan-esque drawl of lead singer Ian Hunter to the characteristic instrumental combination of Verden Allen's organ and Hunter's piano. Although Mott never recorded any Dylan songs, their versions of songs by Dylan emulators like Sonny Bono ("Laugh at Me") and Doug Sahm ("At the Crossroads") were highlights of such uneven early albums as *Mott the Hoople* (1970).

The group struggled for three years until David Bowie offered them a new song. Written and produced by Bowie, "All the Young Dudes" was a mid-tempo ballad with an irresistible sing-along chorus—and a perfect fit for Mott's sound and Ian Hunter's wry delivery. The lyrics held up a mirror to the post-1960s teenage rock audience.

A number three U.K. hit that also made the U.S. Top Forty, "All the Young Dudes" and the album of the same name gave Mott a new lease on life. The band reached its creative peak with the self-produced *Mott* (1973), on which Ian Hunter truly came into his own as a rock songwriter with the compassionate love song, "I Wish I Was Your Mother," and "The Ballad of Mott the Hoople," which examined the performer/audience relationship in a way that seemed to chronicle not just one band's unsteady rise but that of glam rock itself.

A. S.

In the next two years, Bowie fell in love with the United States. He toured, recorded, and lived there. "Here was this alternative world that I'd been talking about," Bowie remembered, "and it had all the violence, and all the strangeness and bizarreness, and it was really happening. It was real life and it wasn't just in my songs. Suddenly my songs didn't seem so out of place."⁹ Between promotional work and tours in the United States, Bowie recorded a new album in January 1973. Named for another character he'd developed during his shows, *Aladdin Sane* (number one U.K., number seventeen U.S.) added a harder edge to the sound the Spiders developed on *Ziggy Stardust*, especially with the contributions of new keyboardist Mike Garson. After the April release of the album, throughout the remainder of the year, Bowie had four singles in the Top Ten, and another during the first months of 1974, including "Drive-In Saturday" (number three), an unauthorized re-release of 1967's "The Laughing Gnome" by Deram (number six), *Hunky Dory's* "Life on Mars?" (number three), and "Rebel Rebel" (number five). Over the summer, all but one of his six albums hovered in the Top Forty.

Despite the massive success he'd worked so long to achieve, Bowie was fed up with *Ziggy Stardust* and *Aladdin Sane*. On May 12, 1973, during the tour's closing performance at Earls Court in London, Bowie announced his retirement. In truth, he only disbanded the Spiders (who toured briefly without him) and reevaluated his own career. In October, Bowie released *Pin-Ups* (number one U.K., number twenty-three U.S.), an album of cover songs by

contemporary artists like Pink Floyd, the Who, the Kinks, and Bruce Springsteen. By the end of 1973, he had sold over a million albums and a million singles in the United Kingdom. As Bowie prepared for the next phase of his career, the image of Ziggy Stardust continued to circulate throughout England. So-called Bowie boys and Bowie girls perpetuated it as a fashion craze and a hairstyle of short-cropped orange hair.

By the first months of 1974, he had composed much of *Diamond Dogs*, the first album he produced by himself. Originally conceived as a musical adaptation of George Orwell's dystopian novel *1984*, Bowie worked with a new band on his dense new songs; only keyboardist Mike Garson remained from the Spiders. An important element for Bowie's new direction came into place when he reconnected with Tony Visconti, who had parted ways with Marc Bolan. In Visconti's new home studio, the two pared down the sound of *Diamond Dogs*. Back in the fold, Visconti would remain an important part of Bowie's music over the next decade. Released on April 24, 1974, *Diamond Dogs* hit number one in the United Kingdom, and became Bowie's first Top Ten album in the United States, where it reached number five, despite the fact that "Rebel Rebel" had petered out at number sixty-four on the singles charts there.

Still unsatisfied, Bowie moved to New York. Though he grew more reliant on cocaine, he was no less ambitious in his art. In Manhattan, he befriended Carlos Alomar, a guitarist he met while producing a session for faded British pop star Lulu. The former house guitarist at the famed Apollo Theater had never heard of Bowie before. Alomar, born in Puerto Rico, was Bowie's guide to the local music scenes. Bowie asked Alomar to join the Diamond Dog Revue, the expensive American tour Bowie was about to begin. Alomar turned him down.

The Diamond Dogs Revue featured Bowie alone on stage, the band hidden behind backdrops. He interacted with a number of sets and props, which included a bridge and a giant hand. The stage cost \$400,000 and required thirty men to build. The tour ran for over a month with very few gigless days. During a six-week break in the tour, Bowie recorded at Sigma Sound in Philadelphia. Carlos Alomar came down from New York, and brought a band with him, including a young vocalist named Luther Vandross. Bowie brought in former Sly and the Family Stone drummer Andy Newmark, among others. With Visconti in charge, Bowie sang live with the band.

Sessions for *Young Americans* ran throughout the rest of the year, in various combinations. Meanwhile, *David Live*, a concert album, was released in October (number two U.K., number eight U.S.), and kept Bowie's visibility high. In January 1975, Bowie collaborated with ex-Beatle John Lennon on "Fame" (number one U.S., number seventeen U.K.). Far from glam, Bowie's new music hinted at the disco that had infiltrated the U.S. pop charts. Bowie changed his appearance, too, sweeping his hair to the side in the guise of a new persona, The Thin White Duke. Despite the simpler clothes, the Thin White Duke was just as alien as Ziggy Stardust. In large part, this is

because Bowie had shrunk to just over eighty pounds, the result of his cocaine addiction.

The Thin White Duke took on a more definite persona when Bowie joined the cast of Nicholas Roeg's *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, based on Walter Tevis's science fiction novel. Bowie played Thomas Newton, an alien sent to earth to save his own planet, but corrupted into total detachment by the materialistic popular culture, especially television. "I find it very sad," said Bowie twenty-five years later, "because I look at a younger me and I feel almost protective because I can see an incredible amount of pain and isolation that I was putting myself through with my drug abuse and I just feel quite sad for that person."¹⁰

After he finished work on the film in New Mexico, Bowie moved to Los Angeles, where he bottomed out, sinking deep into paranoid delusions during the nocturnal hours he kept and living on milk and cigarettes. These fantasies, in part, were stoked by his burgeoning interest in the occult, notably mysterious British poet Aleister Crowley. In interviews, Bowie alternated between acute hallucinations, such as claiming to see a body fall past the outside window, and outlandish statements. "As I see it I am the only alternative for the premier of England. I believe England could benefit from a fascist leader."¹¹

"Around late 1975, everything was starting to break up," Bowie said later. "I would work at songs for hours and hours and days and days and then realize after a few days that I had done absolutely nothing. I thought I'd been working and working, but I'd only be rewriting the first four bars or something."¹²

Bowie worked on two projects throughout the fall, an unused soundtrack for *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, and a new album of original songs, titled *Station to Station*. The cover featured a still photograph from *The Man Who Fell to Earth*. By contrast with the tight pop songwriting of his previous albums, *Station to Station* (number five U.K., number three U.S.) heralded a newly experimental Bowie. With a title track that lasted over ten minutes, Bowie still managed a Top Ten single in "Golden Years" (number eight U.K., number ten U.S.). Two shows into Bowie's American tour, Iggy Pop—whom Bowie had visited in a Los Angeles mental hospital the year before—joined up as a backing vocalist. The two were inseparable for the next year and a half.

In April, Bowie returned to Europe, determined to continue his musical experimentation. The shows featured little obvious grandeur. Instead, they were centered on the harsh lights that revealed Bowie's features like in an expressionist film. In Berlin, he toured former Gestapo landmarks. When he visited England for the first time in two years on May 2, he immediately caused controversy. When he arrived at London's Victoria Station, a photographer claimed to have shot a picture of Bowie giving a Nazi salute. The *New Music Express* ran it with the caption, "Heil and Farewell." Bowie countered that he was merely caught mid-wave.

As he traveled throughout Europe, Bowie absorbed as much culture as he could. When the tour ended in May, he moved to the Swiss Alps with Angela

and his son Zowie, where he painted and read from the library of 5,000 books he'd accumulated. The Bowies' marriage, which had been open for some years, was nearly over, however. After the arrival of Iggy Pop in Switzerland, the two singers traveled to the Château d'Hérouville in July 1976, northwest of Paris, an expensive live-in recording studio. There, with Bowie as producer, they recorded Pop's new album, *The Idiot*. Bowie used the sessions to experiment. Influenced by the new wave of German experimental acts, such as Kraftwerk and Neu, he tried out tape loops to alter the basic sound of the instruments.

Bowie took August off, and returned to the Château on September 1 with producer Tony Visconti and another new collaborator: Brian Eno. Once a member of Roxy Music, one of Bowie's glam contemporaries, Eno had quit the band to experiment with his own brand of pop, as well as with what he called ambient music. The author of an essay titled "The Recording Studio as a Compositional Tool," Eno championed unorthodox methods of music making, such as the Oblique Strategies cards he created with artist Peter Schmidt, in which abstract statements were used to jump-start creativity. Eno also introduced an EMS synthesizer to Bowie's palette, which complemented the sounds Visconti wrung from the instruments with an Eventide Harmonizer. *Low* took shape. The first side of *Low* was filled with more traditional songs. The second featured long, instrumental pieces influenced by Eno's theories of ambient music.

T. Rex and Roxy Music: Top of the Pops

During David Bowie's original reign as the "godfather of glam" in the 1970s, his principal rivals for the loyalty of fans and domination of the British charts were T. Rex and Roxy Music.

At age fifteen, Marc Bolan (1948–77) already was a much-publicized face on the style-conscious Mod movement in London. His first group, John's Children, played hopped-up R&B in the style of the early Who. In 1967, Marc broke up this band to form Tyrannosaurus Rex with Steve Peregrine Took. Their fey, pseudo-mystical debut LP is a minor classic of British "flower power" music bearing the title *My People Were Fair and Wore Sky in Their Hair But Now They're Content to Wear Stars on Their Brows*.

Bolan soon segued into the more earthy and upbeat sound of T. Rex's 1970 single, "Ride a White Swan," which reached number two in the United Kingdom. Marc was not a virtuoso guitarist, and his breathy voice was limited in range and power. But on this and subsequent hits he deployed melodic hooks and bouncing back beats with the carefree insouciance of (and frequent direct quotations from) original 1950s rockers like Chuck Berry and Eddie Cochran.

These qualities, together with Bolan's flair for fashion and the sparkling sonic details supplied by producer Tony Visconti, combined to make T. Rex the biggest pop group in Britain from 1971 to 1973. The group scored eleven consecutive U.K. Top Ten singles, including the number one hits "Bang a Gong (Get It On)"

and “Telegram Sam,” and created a frenzied, largely female fan base. (T. Rex didn’t fare as well in the United States, where they had just one Top Ten single and a lone Top Twenty album.) Marc Bolan died in a car crash in 1977, a twist of fate that tragically echoed the death of Eddie Cochran in England in 1960.

Bolan’s chart decline after 1974 made room for Roxy Music. Where T. Rex was virtually a one-man show, Roxy Music was a real band: the key founding members were lead singer and principal songwriter Bryan Ferry, Phil Manzanera (guitar), Brian Eno (keyboards and “treatments”), Andy McKay (saxophone), and Paul Thompson (drums). The group’s influences ranged from the pop art of Andy Warhol to obscure 1950s saxophone instrumentals, and their retro-futurist look and eccentric but catchy songs seemed to fit in with the glam-rock style.

Roxy Music was an immediate success in Great Britain. The group placed ten singles in the Top Ten including “Virginia Plain,” “Street Life,” “Love Is the Drug,” and the 1981 John Lennon tribute “Jealous Guy” (which reached number one). Beyond his persona of soulful, world-weary elegance, Bryan Ferry was an exceptional lyricist and vocalist whose skills were perfectly matched by those of his musicians. *Roxy Music* (1972) and *For Your Pleasure* (1973) had a manic, experimental edge often attributed to the influence of Brian Eno, who left the group in July 1973. Eno released a series of extraordinary solo discs (cf. *Another Green World*, 1975), and later produced U2’s number one albums *The Joshua Tree* (1987) and *Achtung Baby* (1991).

Ferry was now firmly in control of the band, and its sound became progressively smoother and more commercial. The American mass audience never quite “got” Roxy Music, however: its first and only U.S. million-seller, *Avalon*, was the last album of new material released prior to the group’s breakup in 1982. Bryan Ferry carried on with the solo career he’d maintained in tandem with that of the band. In 2001 Roxy Music reunited for a well-received, fifty-date world tour, but no new recordings were forthcoming.

A. S.

Though Bowie was not completely free of his demons—several times he went to the local hospital, convinced he was being poisoned—he was on the mend. Bowie and Iggy Pop decamped to West Berlin, where each tried to get sober—Bowie from cocaine, Pop from heroin. The two drank a great deal as Bowie mixed *Low* and began on Iggy’s next endeavor. Titled *Lust For Life*, Bowie contributed the title track, which he wrote on a ukulele. Bowie spent the next two years in Germany. He cropped his hair short and grew a moustache. “Every day I get up more nerve, and try to be more normal, and less insulated against real people.”¹³

“I just can’t express the feeling of freedom I felt there,” Bowie said in 2001. “Some days, the three of us would jump into a car and drive like crazy through East Germany and head down to the Black Forest, stopping off at any small village that caught our eye. Just go for days at a time. Or we’d take long, all-afternoon lunches at the Wannsee on winter days. The place had a glass roof

and was surrounded by trees and still exuded an atmosphere of the long gone Berlin of the twenties.”¹⁴

Released in January 1977, with another *Man Who Fell to Earth* photograph on the cover, *Low* (number two U.K., number eleven U.S.) was fronted by “Sound and Vision” (number three U.K., number sixty-nine U.S.). Bowie thrived in Berlin. In the summer, with Brian Eno and Tony Visconti, he reconvened the *Low* band at what he called “the hall by the Wall.” Hansa Studios had a Nazi-era stage big enough to accommodate 120 musicians. From the control room one could see the armed guards positioned at the top of the Berlin Wall. The album contained tributes to both Neu (“Heroes”) and Kraftwerk (“V-2 Schneider,” after Kraftwerk member Florian Schneider), as well as the spiraling guitar work of Robert Fripp, a longtime Eno collaborator.

The triumphant title song only reached number twenty-four on the U.K. charts, but along with the album (number three U.K., number thirty-five U.S.) was received with rapture by the press when it was released on October 14, 1977. Over the Christmas holiday, David and Angela Bowie split permanently. They divorced finally in March 1980, ten years to the month of their wedding. Early the next year, Bowie shot *Just a Gigolo* in Berlin with director David Hemmings in which Bowie played a soldier forced into prostitution after World War I.

When he finished his acting work, Bowie went on the road with *Heroes*. Carlos Alomar led the band, which also featured experimental guitarist Adrian Belew, whom Bowie had veritably stolen from Frank Zappa backstage at one of the latter’s shows. Like the tour for *Station to Station*, Bowie stripped the staging down even further. He was still a performer, but the emphasis was on the music. The shows began with “Warszawa,” one of the abstract instrumentals from *Low*. Alomar conducted the band with a baton. Bowie only included a few of his hit singles in the tour’s set list. His influence as a cultural figure was undiminished, however, with even Andy Warhol in attendance when the tour arrived at New York City’s Madison Square Garden. The tour continued through the rest of 1978 and finished in Japan, where Bowie spent Christmas and attended the premiere of *Just a Gigolo*. Despite including Marlene Dietrich’s last film appearance, the film bombed.

In the new year, Bowie traveled to Switzerland to create the final album in his trilogy with Brian Eno. With the addition of Adrian Belew, the experimentation continued, such as when Bowie played “All the Young Dudes” backward to create the chord changes for “Move On,” or when the band switched instruments to record “Boys Keep Swinging.” In general, though, the *Lodger* sessions were not as wide-ranging as the previous two discs. Neither Bowie nor Eno was thrilled with the final product, though it reached number four in the United Kingdom, number twenty in the United States upon its May 1979 release, with “Boys Keep Swinging” making the Top Ten in England.

David Bowie was at the end of one creative path, though his previous direction was already well represented in the music world. Just as his visual style had overtaken the youth of England, his albums had a profound impact on a

new generation of musicians, which included both arty experimentalists like Devo and Talking Heads (both would go on to work with Brian Eno), flamboyant singers who borrowed a bit of Bowie's androgynous sex appeal (such as the Eurythmics' Annie Lennox and Culture Club's Boy George). Some performed covers (such as Bauhaus, who had a Top Twenty U.K. hit with their version of "Ziggy Stardust" in 1980), and others were veritable imitators, like pop star Gary Numan. "To be honest, I never meant for cloning to be part of the eighties," Bowie said. "He's not only copied me, he's clever and he's got all my influences in too. I guess it's best of luck to him."¹⁵ To naturally disenfranchised young fans, Bowie himself was no longer the icon he once was.

THE MOONLIGHT FROM EARTH

Recorded at the Power Station in Manhattan in the spring of 1980, *Scary Monsters (and Sugar Creeps)* was, according to Tony Visconti, an effort to move in a more overtly commercial direction. The first single, "Ashes to Ashes," was a sequel to "A Space Oddity." Released in August 1980, it reached number one in the United Kingdom, Bowie's first U.K. number one, save for the 1975 reissue of "Space Oddity." With MTV's launch less than a year away, David Bowie had long ago embraced the video age, shooting promotional clips for many of his singles. In the early 1980s especially, he threw an increasing amount of creative energy into the fledgling medium. Bowie took an active hand in his videos, storyboarding "Ashes to Ashes" and playing multiple roles in "Fashion" (number five U.K., number seventy U.S.).

While Bowie's public character became increasingly normal, he returned to the theater to play a role that was anything but. In New York, Bowie rehearsed as the titular character in Bernard Pomerance's *The Elephant Man*, published in 1979, about disfigured man and sometimes circus oddity John Merrick. Notably, Bowie played the role without makeup. After a brief run in Denver, Colorado, in July, the show moved to Manhattan for the autumn season. On December 8, tragedy occurred when Mark David Chapman, an insane fan, murdered Bowie's friend, former Beatle John Lennon, outside Lennon's Manhattan apartment. It soon came out that just days before, Chapman had seen Bowie perform as John Merrick. Within weeks, Bowie left the cast of *The Elephant Man*. He has not acted in a play since.

Bowie did not record his own music or tour again during 1981, though he still managed to end up on the top of the charts, via a one-off collaboration with over-the-top British rockers Queen on "Under Pressure," released in October (number one U.K., number twenty-nine U.S.). Over the summer, he took to the television stage, acting in a BBC production of Bertolt Brecht's *Baal*. Bowie had included Brecht's songs in his live set before, and recorded a soundtrack EP with Tony Visconti and an orchestra during a one-day session back at

Hamsa Studios in Berlin. The following spring, he acted in two more films: as a vampire in Tony Scott's *The Hunger*, and as a prisoner of war in Nagisa Oshima's *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence*. Finally, in December, he announced his first tour in five years, and entered the Power Station in New York City with producer Nile Rodgers for his first original session in nearly three.

The result, released in April 1983, was *Let's Dance* (number one U.K., number four U.S.). Issued on MCA-America, to which Bowie had signed in January for a reported \$17 million, it was unquestionably his biggest hit yet. Rodgers, who led the dance-funk outfit Chic, gave Bowie's songs a glittering sheen. Another addition was blues guitarist Stevie Ray Vaughan, who gave Bowie's music a directness never present in the work of previous collaborators. With a new jacket-and-tie look, Bowie was at a peak, even appearing on the cover of *Time* magazine in the United States. The album's title song reached number one in both the United Kingdom and United States, while ten of his albums charted on the U.K. Top 100. There were even two more charting singles, "Modern Love" (number two U.K., number fourteen U.S.), and "China Girl" (number two U.K., number ten U.S.).

On his Serious Moonlight Tour, Bowie sold out stadiums across England, including three shows at the 65,000-seat Keynes Bowl in Milton Keynes, and performed for 250,000 fans at the U.S. Festival in San Bernardino, California, in May 1983. The stage set was as bold as ever, and included the giant hand as well as the release of tiny balloons at the show's peak. Instead of playing only his newest material, as on past tours, Bowie performed his hits. During the show, Bowie removed his jacket, rolled up his sleeves, and loosened his tie with the studied charm of a cabaret singer. Despite his vast creative success as a pop star experimenting with form and sound, Bowie revealed in Serious Moonlight that he was still the same entertainer he always was. It was here that Bowie's commercial success began to separate from his critical popularity. It was at this time, as well, that Bowie fell out with Tony Visconti, who had not worked on *Let's Dance*. The pair would not work together again for over a decade and a half.

Five months after the Serious Moonlight tour, Bowie traveled to Morion Heights, north of Montreal, to record *Tonight*. Though Iggy Pop joined him for a pair of songs, Bowie's work with producer Derek Bramble was erratic, and Bramble left the album midway through. The album yielded one Top Ten hit in "Blue Jean" (number six U.K., number eight U.S.), though the title track duet with Tina Turner did not break the Top Fifty in either England or the United States, and Bowie himself admitted that the album was below his own artistic expectations. "I feel, on the whole, fairly happy about my state of mind and my physical being," he said when the album was released in September 1984. "I guess I wanted to put my musical being in a similar staid and healthy area, but I'm not sure that that was a very wise thing to do."¹⁶

Bowie continued to keep a jet-set profile, performing "Heroes" at Live Aid at Wembley Stadium on July 13, 1985, and recording a one-take duet with the

Rolling Stones' Mick Jagger that same month on Martha and the Vandellas' "Dancin' in the Street." The two shot a video, played heavily by MTV, and the single reached number one in the United Kingdom, number seven in the United States. He played large roles in two more films, Julien Temple's musical *Absolute Beginners*, for which Bowie recorded the title single (number two U.K., number fifty-three U.S.), and Jim Henson's *Labyrinth*, where Bowie played Jareth, the goblin king at the center of Henson's dark, puppet-infested maze. In interviews, he still sounded discouraged about the state of his own creativity. "I don't have the riveting desire now to persuade people that what I have to say is right,"¹⁷ he said.

In the fall of 1986, Bowie regrouped with Iggy Pop at Mountain Studios in Switzerland, producing and co-writing much of *Blah Blah Blah*. As soon as they'd finished, he immediately recorded his next album at the same studio. Though he recorded once again with longtime guitarist Carlos Alomar, the album was almost wholly devoid of experiments. Once again, Bowie came to the studio almost fully prepared and left little room for spontaneity. *Never Let Me Down* (number six U.K., number thirty-nine U.S.) was a critical disappointment. None of its singles made the Top Ten, on either side of the Atlantic, though Bowie accompanied the album was a lavish tour. Dubbed Glass Spider, eleven dancers and musicians worked inside a giant set, while Bowie ran about the stage with wireless microphones, speaking cryptically with the dancers.

Like the album, the Glass Spider tour received harsh reviews. When the six months of shows were over, Bowie needed another change. He got something more, entering a period of his career where every album constituted a potential new direction. Some would be considered failures, some would be considered successes, but none redefined the way the public perceived David Bowie, nor did they offer much in the way of lasting musical directions for Bowie himself. During these years, many of Bowie's projects involved old collaborators brought back into the fold for another round of creative dialogue.

TO INFINITY AND BEYOND

The catalyst for his immediate evolution, though, was someone Bowie had never worked with before: Reeves Gabrels, a guitarist whose wife Sarah was a publicist on the Glass Spider tour. Bowie and Gabrels hit it off backstage, talking about art and making up new dialogue for cartoons. When the tour was over, Sarah gave Bowie a tape of Gabrels's guitar playing. In May 1988, Bowie invited Gabrels to spend the weekend in Switzerland. Gabrels stayed for the duration of a month. Bowie aimed to return to the experimental music on which he once thrived. That same summer, on July 1, he also appeared at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, where he performed a drum-machine rework of *Lodger's* "Look Back in Anger" and joined La La La Human Steps, a Canadian dance ensemble.

In the studio, the Sales brothers, drummer Hunt and bassist Tony, joined Bowie and Gabrels. The pair—the sons of comedian Soupy Sales—had worked with Bowie on Iggy Pop's *Lust for Life* in 1977, and gave a powerful rock rhythm section to the arty experiments Bowie and Gabrels had worked up. In Switzerland, the Bahamas, and New York studios, the quartet became Tin Machine. Influenced by American indie rock bands like Sonic Youth and the Pixies, Tin Machine released their self-titled debut in May 1989 (number three U.K., number twenty-eight U.S.). As he did on the Serious Moonlight tour, Bowie made a conscious effort to appear as “normal,” as he smoked cigarettes on stage and engaged in long jams with the band.

Bowie spent 1990 locked in his own past. To promote the *Sound + Vision* box set of his old songs, Bowie staged a greatest hits tour. It would “probably be the last time I will be doing these songs,” he announced. “And generally I stick by what I say.”¹⁸ The goal, he said, was to separate himself from his past so that he could concentrate full time on Tin Machine in the future. Adrian Belew used samplers to trigger orchestras and previous versions of the Bowie sound. Like the Diamond Dogs Revue, the band (except Belew) performed behind a screen, Bowie performed synthesized re-creations of songs from throughout his career. He sold out three nights at the 12,000-seat London Arena, while a new greatest hits collection, *ChangesBowie* reached number one in the United Kingdom.

That fall, Bowie began a relationship with thirty-five-year old Somalian supermodel Iman Abdulmajid. True to his word, Bowie reentered the studio with Tin Machine as well. *Tin Machine II*, however, sold poorly (number 23 U.K., number 126 U.S.)—his first album not to crack the British Top Ten in over twenty years. Quietly, the band disbanded. “Once I had done, nobody could see me anymore,” Bowie said. “[It] was the best thing that ever happened, because I was back using all the artistic pieces that I needed to survive.”¹⁹

On June 6, 1992, Bowie and Iman married, and he recorded a tribute to their recent nuptials. Titled *Black Tie White Noise* (number one U.K., number thirty-nine U.S.), Bowie worked with *Let's Dance* producer Nile Rodgers. Though the album spawned Bowie's last Top Ten single, “Jump They Say,” Rodgers now felt constrained by Bowie and wanted to make a more pop-oriented album than Bowie had in mind. Keyboardist Mike Garson returned, too, adding keyboards to “Looking for Lester.” The next year, Garson thrived when Bowie recorded a soundtrack to the BBC adaptation of Hanif Kureishi's *Buddha of Suburbia* (number seven U.K.), a novel in part about growing up in Bowie's hometown of Bromley in the early 1970s. Kureishi and Bowie met in February 1996, when the former interviewed the pop star.

Following his association with Kureishi, Bowie reestablished himself in the British creative world. He associated with controversial artists like conceptualist Damien Hirst and painter Peter Howson. Throughout 1994 and 1995, Bowie worked once again with intellectual producer Brian Eno and guitarist Reeves Gabrels. 1. *Outside* (number eight U.K., number twenty-one U.S.) was

intended to be the first installment of a massive collaboration that would encompass everything from “interactive” material to an opera. Only the album, comprised of long improvisations guided by Eno’s chance-oriented methods, was finished. In the fall of 1995, he toured with American shock-goth Nine Inch Nails, singing a half-dozen songs with frontman Trent Reznor each night. Bowie frequently paired himself with younger artists, including former Smiths’ frontman Morrissey (who opened a leg of the *Outside* tour) and the Pet Shop Boys (who appeared on a rerecorded version of 1. *Outside*’s “Hallo Spaceboy” that reached number twelve U.K.).

Like “Hallo Spaceboy,” 1997’s *Earthling* (number six U.K., number thirty-nine U.S.) once again played on Bowie’s alien persona. With Gabrels and Garson, Bowie embraced samples. Many of the songs featured club-oriented jungle beats behind them. And though Bowie worked with his longtime collaborators, he also sought to make himself visible to younger fans. To celebrate his fiftieth birthday in 1997, he performed at New York City’s Madison Square Garden with Sonic Youth and the Foo Fighters, as well as old friend Lou Reed. He became involved in a number of extramusical projects. With his Bowie bonds, he sold bonds against the future earnings of his EMI back catalog. Though it caused a good deal of stir, perhaps more prescient was Bowie’s involvement in the Internet. His company, Ultrastar, managed and ran a number of high-profile Web sites unrelated to music. On September 1, 1998, he launched BowieNet.

“If I was 19 again, I’d bypass music and go straight to the internet,” he said. “When I was 19, music was still the dangerous communicative future force, and that was what drew me into it, but it doesn’t have that cachet any more. It has been replaced by the internet, which has the same sound of revolution to it.”²⁰ The Web site became one of Bowie’s foremost outlets around the turn of the century. He posted long journal entries, previewed new songs, and even collaborated with a fan on one number. Though his albums, such as *hours. . .* (number five U.K., number forty-seven U.S.) did not sell well in the two primary markets, many found greater acceptance elsewhere in Europe and Japan. In 1998, Bowie rekindled his collaboration with producer Tony Visconti, yielding 2002’s *Heathen* (number five U.K., number fourteen U.S.) and 2003’s *Reality* (number three U.K., number twenty-nine U.S.).

Living in New York City with Iman, the two raised their child Alexandria Zahra Jones, born August 15, 2000. Growing into his role as an elder musician, Bowie curated festivals (including the Meltdown Festival in London in 2002, where he also performed *Low* in its entirety, and the Highline Festival in Manhattan in 2007), and continued to perform with bands that had grown from his influence, including the Arcade Fire and TV on the Radio. In June 2004, he underwent an angioplasty only days after leaving a performance in Prague with a pinched nerve in his shoulder.

“There are no yearning ambitions anymore,” he said. “There are things I’d like to do, but none are crucial. I sense that I’ve become the person I always should’ve been.”²¹ Like *The Man Who Fell to Earth*’s Thomas Newton, David Bowie has become fully assimilated into contemporary culture, but his music can still sound otherworldly.

INFLUENCE

Because of David Bowie’s standing as an agent of provocation, he has—besides hip-hop—influenced many of the major rock and pop movements that have emerged since his rise. In many cases, the artists influenced ended up sounding nothing like Bowie himself, and just as often borrowed a bit of his look or presence as they did elements of his sound. The British punk scene of the late 1970s, for example, often professed their hatred for the artificial pomposity post-1960s rock absorbed, with Bowie himself being a main offender. Still, though, even singers like the Sex Pistols’ Johnny Rotten mimicked Bowie in some ways (such as through his cropped haircut), while claiming to hate him.

Others were more effusive in their praise. Eighties pop idol Madonna once claimed that she wanted to become a pop star after seeing Bowie perform as Ziggy Stardust. Certainly, Bowie was a model for her, as well as other pop auteurs that followed, including Prince. When grunge arrived in the early 1990s, the debt to Bowie was subtle, if firm, with Nirvana covering “The Man Who Sold the World” on their legendary MTV *Unplugged* appearance just five months before singer Kurt Cobain’s suicide. The shock-rockers that followed grunge, which included both Nine Inch Nails (whom Bowie toured with) and Marilyn Manson (who took Bowie’s penchant for gender-bending pop culture reinterpretation) were unmistakable Bowie-ites.

In Bowie’s own country, his influence was both more obvious, and perhaps more superficial, especially with the late 1990s rise of the so-called Britpopers, which included bands Oasis and Blur. The latter especially took Bowie to heart, even giving Bowie and Brian Eno a songwriting credit on their homage “M.O.R.” With Bowie as the model for the pop star-as-autodidactic, Blur frontman Damon Albarn has expanded his musical interests into areas such as opera (*Monkey: Journey to the West*) and multimedia spectacles, like Gorillaz, a cartoon “band” projected on the stage while the real musicians play behind a scrim, à la the Diamond Dogs Revue.

“When it came out, I thought *Low* was the sound of the future,”²² Joy Division/New Order drummer Stephen Morris said. Like many, Morris wasn’t seduced so much by Bowie’s sound but by the *reach* of the sound and the experimentalism it implied. That is what Bowie has provided for so many others, from imitators like Gary Numan to recent upstarts such as the Arcade

Fire: not so much showing them a roadmap to the future, but that the future is there at all.

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David Bowie, 1967

Space Oddity, 1969

The Man Who Sold the World, 1970

Hunky Dory, 1971

The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders From Mars, 1972

Aladdin Sane, 1973

Diamond Dogs, 1974

Young Americans, 1975

Station to Station, 1976

Low, 1977

“*Heroes*” 1977

Scary Monsters (and Sugar Creeps), 1980

Let’s Dance, 1983

NOTES

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2. Hugo Wilcken, *Low* (New York: Continuum Books, 2005), pp. 115–16.
3. Cameron Crowe, “An Outrageous Conversation with the Actor, Rock Singer and Sexual Switch Hitter.” *Playboy*, September 1976.
4. Buckley, p. 16.
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Courtesy of Photofest.

Bruce Springsteen

Susan Godwin

HE'S THE BOSS

Bruce Springsteen first won fame in the 1970s as rock's blue-collar bard, a guitar-slinging true believer possessing an uncanny ability to articulate the drama, dignity, and heroism in the struggles of everyday life. Beyond his knack for articulating the dreams and disappointments of working-class people, Springsteen earned a reputation as one of rock's most transcendent live

performers, delivering marathon live shows that were both physically exhilarating and emotionally cathartic.

Springsteen's deeply felt songs and sweat-soaked concerts helped to forge an extraordinarily durable relationship with his rabidly devoted fan base. The strength of that bond was established early in his career, and has remained strong as he's progressed from cult status to worldwide superstardom.

Emerging during the musical doldrums of the early 1970s, long after the euphoria of the 1960s had worn off, Springsteen combined a distinctive stage persona and an original songwriting voice with a much-needed sense of musical history. At a time when disco, glam, and heavy metal offered listeners fantasy and escape, Springsteen injected an unmistakable dose of reality to rock and roll.

Although dismissed early on by skeptics as the latest in a long line of "new Dylans," Springsteen would soon create something worthy of imitation in its own right. His work has drawn from the rich histories of rock, pop, R&B, folk, and country to forge a powerful musical vehicle for a lyrical vision that is wholly Springsteen's own.

GROWING UP

Bruce Frederick Springsteen was born in Long Branch, New Jersey, on September 23, 1949, and raised in Freehold, a working-class town near the state's southern shoreline. Two younger sisters were subsequently added to the family. Bruce enjoyed a loving and mutually supportive relationship with his mother Adele, who sometimes worked as a secretary. But his interaction with his father Douglas was considerably more strained; it would later provide lyrical inspiration as well as fodder for his between-song on-stage monologues.

His father held a series of odd jobs, including stints as a factory worker, bus driver, and prison guard, and the family often struggled to make ends meet. Douglas Springsteen's limited choices, along with the desire to escape and the rage instilled by financial impotence, would have a profound effect upon his son's character and songwriting.

As a child, Bruce was constantly in trouble in parochial school, where he clashed with religious authority figures. He later recalled a nun stuffing him into a garbage can when he was in third grade, and, as an altar boy, being knocked down by a priest during Mass. His Catholic background would later appear as a recurring motif in his songwriting.

The young Springsteen was far more responsive to music than to religion. His first exposure to rock and roll came with Elvis Presley's 1957 appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, after which his indulgent mother bought him his first guitar and arranged for lessons. But Bruce's hands were too small to fit around the frets at the time, so music took a backseat until the Beatles' U.S. arrival in 1964, when it took hold of him for good. Going to sleep with his transistor

radio under his pillow, he eagerly absorbed the racially and stylistically integrated sounds of early 1960s Top Forty.

In his early teens, Bruce purchased his first grown-up guitar for \$18 at the local pawnshop. When he was sixteen, Adele took out a loan to buy him a \$60 Kent guitar, an event he would later memorialize in the song "The Wish."

In 1965, after a brief tenure in a local outfit known as the Rogues, the teen-aged Springsteen joined the Castiles, a high school combo that played at local events and teen dances, including Bruce's own class of '67 dance. In May 1966, the Castiles recorded a self-produced, little-noticed 1966 single, both of whose tracks, "Baby I" and "That's What You Get," were co-written by Springsteen and bandmate George Theiss on the way to the studio.

The closest the Castiles came to the big time was a handful of well-received gigs at the Cafe Wha? in Greenwich Village in late 1967 and early 1968, shortly before the band broke up. Meanwhile, Bruce's long hair and scruffy attire made him an easy target for local bullies, and increased friction with his conservative father.

After the Castiles' demise, Springsteen played in a power trio called Earth. He joined Earth during his brief tenure at Ocean County Community College; he dropped out of school after some fellow students began an active drive to have him dismissed for his rough appearance. Dropping out of school during the Vietnam War was serious business, since college students were exempt from the draft. The draft was no abstract threat; the Castiles' drummer, Bart Haynes, had been killed in action.

Bruce's next band, Child, was launched in 1969 and included organist Danny Federici and drummer Vini "Mad Dog" Lopez. When the members of Child learned of a Long Island outfit with the same name, the group was rechristened Steel Mill. A later addition was "Miami" Steve Van Zandt, a guitarist who'd learned to play bass in order to join the lineup.

Steel Mill's heavy blues-rock attracted an enthusiastic live audience along the Eastern seaboard, and won the band an especially strong following in the Virginia area. The group even ventured west in early 1970, playing several gigs in the San Francisco area, including an appearance at the legendary Fillmore ballroom. During that trip, at Fillmore impresario Bill Graham's invitation, Steel Mill recorded demo versions of some of Springsteen's songs in Graham's studio. Like the Castiles tracks, those recordings were quietly pressed up as a single and quickly forgotten, although they'd turn up years later on bootleg releases.

Bill Graham's short-lived interest aside, Steel Mill's regional popularity never threatened to translate into a recording career. Although the Jersey Shore was about an hour's drive from the music-industry center of New York City, it might as well have been on the other side of the world. The fact that Springsteen and Steel Mill were playing to hundreds, and sometimes thousands, of fans per night didn't make a difference.

Steel Mill wound down in early 1971, while the Jersey Shore scene was still reeling from the traumatic effects of the race riots that had taken place in

Asbury Park the previous summer. Springsteen then formed the short-lived Dr. Zoom and the Sonic Boom, a sprawling, anarchic fifteen-piece ensemble that included Van Zandt, Lopez, bassist Garry Tallent, organist David Sancious, and harmonica player/master of ceremonies Southside Johnny (whose later recording career with Southside Johnny and the Asbury Jukes would be midwived by Van Zandt and Springsteen).

Springsteen then tapped Van Zandt, Tallent, Sancious, and Lopez to launch the Bruce Springsteen Band. Consciously designed as a showcase for the more ambitious songs that Bruce was now writing, the lineup initially included a horn section and three female backup singers, before slimming down to more manageable quintet. The Bruce Springsteen Band played steadily on the Jersey Shore for a few months, but its leader put the group to rest in early 1972, instead embracing the lower overhead of solo acoustic shows.

The solo Springsteen signed a management and music-publishing contract with Mike Appel and his partner, Jim Cretecos. Appel and Cretecos were veteran New York songwriter/producer/music biz hustlers who'd had some success writing songs for the Partridge Family. According to legend, this momentous signing took place in a dark parking lot; it was a decision Springsteen would soon come to regret.

Appel was an aggressive manager, which was probably exactly what the shy Springsteen needed at the time. But Appel's bluntness almost cost his client his big break. On May 2, 1972, after bullying his way into the office of legendary Columbia Records A&R man John Hammond (whose previous signings included Billie Holiday, Bessie Smith, Aretha Franklin, and Bob Dylan), Appel reportedly blustered that he had an artist better than Dylan and wanted to see if Hammond was savvy enough to figure that out. The gentlemanly Hammond was appalled at the insult, but allowed Springsteen to play several songs for him anyway.

Despite Appel's lack of couth, Hammond was mightily impressed by Springsteen, and arranged for him to play a live audition that night at the Greenwich Village club the Gaslight, so that other Columbia executives could check him out. Hammond then took Springsteen into the studio to record some rough solo demos of his compositions. Hammond recalled being so excited that he later recalled writing "greatest talent of the decade" in the session log sheets.

In June 1972, Bruce Springsteen signed to Columbia Records. Hammond, who had read Springsteen's management and publishing contracts, grew concerned over provisions that gave Appel enormous control over the artist's career and copyrights. He had an attorney friend check it out, and suggested to Bruce that the deal be rewritten, lest it create trouble for him in the future. While Springsteen respected Hammond, he chose to ignore the red flag.

GREETINGS FROM BRUCE

Although Columbia had intended to market him as a folkish solo singer/songwriter, Springsteen was intent on being a rock and roller, and that meant

having a real band. For that purpose, he tapped the talents of his old Jersey Shore cohorts Garry Tallent, Vini Lopez, David Sancious, and saxophonist Clarence Clemons. Besides being an accomplished player and a worthy on-stage foil for Springsteen, the physically imposing Clemons (aka the Big Man) had proven his worth in the past for his ability to apply pressure when club owners were reluctant to pay up at the end of the evening.

Columbia fought Springsteen over his choice for his debut effort's cover design, which replicated a 1940s-style tourist postcard bearing the album's title, *Greetings from Asbury Park, N.J.* The artist's Jersey Shore roots were a crucial element in his early work. Asbury Park—a faded, economically depressed seaside resort town at the time—was where Bruce had honed his craft and formed many of his most enduring friendships. In the future, long after his music made him wealthy, he would still keep a home in his native state and raise his children there.

In his 1998 book of lyrics *Songs*, Springsteen revealed that he wrote most of the debut album “in the back of a closed beauty salon on the floor beneath my apartment in Asbury Park” and added that *Greetings* “was the only album where I wrote the lyrics first, setting them to music later.”¹

Greetings from Asbury Park, N.J. was released on January 5, 1973. Such standout tunes as “Blinded by the Light,” “Growin’ Up,” “Lost in the Flood,” and “Spirit in the Night” featured bigger-than-life characters and surrealistic, stream-of-consciousness lyrics, delivered in rapid-fire vocal bursts. That approach would contrast the more direct, observational songwriting style that Springsteen would employ in the future

Meanwhile, Columbia didn't quite seem to know what to do with their newcomer, employing a promotional campaign that played up to the “new Dylan” hype, much to Springsteen's irritation. When the company helped to win him a slot as the opening act on a summer tour with Chicago—the label's biggest act at the time—he was regularly greeted by hostile crowds.

In its initial release, *Greetings from Asbury Park, N.J.* was largely ignored in the marketplace. The album's first single, “Blinded by the Light,” flopped; the song would become a hit three years later in a bombastic cover version by Manfred Mann's Earth Band. In its first year of release, *Greetings* sold fewer than 12,000 copies, offering little to suggest that Springsteen was destined for big things.

After launching the album with a four-night stand at the Philadelphia club the Main Point, Springsteen toured extensively to support it, working to win new fans in small clubs and colleges along the East Coast. But a performance at a Columbia Records convention in Los Angeles went badly, creating an impression within the company that the previously golden-eared John Hammond (who had suffered a heart attack while at a Springsteen performance earlier that year) had stumbled in signing this second-rate Dylan wannabe.

Springsteen shifted songwriting gears for his second LP, *The Wild, the Innocent and the E Street Shuffle*, recorded over July and August 1973 and released on November 5. The album was a notable leap forward from *Greetings*, with

such compositions as “4th of July, Asbury Park (Sandy),” “Kitty’s Back,” and the suite-like uber-bar-band rave-up “Rosalita (Come Out Tonight)” paring down the first album’s nervous rush of lyrics into concise yet detailed dramas. “Incident on 57th Street” and “New York City Serenade” offered a gritty urban milieu that brought out Springsteen’s sense of drama and knack for character development.

The Wild, the Innocent and the E Street Shuffle also expanded upon its predecessor’s sound, with the addition of Danny Federici on organ, as well as an influx of jazz and soul influences that lent the album a funky multicultural sensibility that was also reflected in several of the album’s lyrics—and which contrasts the lean rock and roll approach that would soon make Springsteen famous.

The Wild, the Innocent and the E Street Shuffle received a fair amount of high-profile press notices, including a glowing review in the January 31, 1974, issue of *Rolling Stone*. Meanwhile, relentless gigging up and down the Eastern Seaboard helped Springsteen to expand his already rabid fan base, and win radio airplay in scattered markets including Cleveland and Philadelphia. *The Wild, the Innocent and the E Street Shuffle* moved about 80,000 copies during 1974—a significant step up from his debut, but not enough to break Springsteen out of cult status.

In February 1974, drummer Vini Lopez was fired amid criticism of his drumming style and fiery temper. As his replacement, Springsteen brought in Ernest “Boom” Carter, a friend of Sancious and a veteran of the Asbury Park scene.

The relatively lukewarm public response to the first two albums left Springsteen at a crossroads. If he failed to score a solid hit with his next album, it might spell the end of his recording career. It would take him two years—and a lifetime’s worth of creative anguish—to deliver his third album, but the wait would be worthwhile.

“ROCK ‘N’ ROLL FUTURE”

A May 1974 show at the Harvard Square Theater in Cambridge, Massachusetts—ostensibly just another college-town gig—would alter the course of Springsteen’s career. In the audience was rock critic Jon Landau, who at twenty-six was already the editor of *Rolling Stone*’s review section, as well as a columnist for Boston’s *Real Paper*. What Landau saw and heard that night sent him into a rhapsody in print for the latter outlet, which included the now-famous line: “I saw rock ‘n’ roll future and its name is Bruce Springsteen.”²

Landau, who’d had some prior recording experience producing albums by the MC5, the J. Geils Band, and Livingston Taylor, became so enamored of Springsteen’s music that he offered himself as a sounding board during the recording of the artist’s make-or-break third album. Appel, who had overseen

the production of the first two albums, reluctantly acceded to Springsteen's desire to involve Landau as co-producer of his next LP.

Springsteen and his sidemen (now known as the E Street Band) entered the studio in suburban Blauvelt, New York, to begin work on Bruce's third album in August 1974. But the sessions soon broke down, due to a combination of technical problems and Bruce's own temporary lack of focus, with only one track, "Born to Run," in the can.

Meanwhile, manager Appel sought to generate interest by leaking cassette copies of an early mix of "Born to Run" to radio stations that had been supportive of Bruce in the past. The action angered Springsteen and Columbia Records, but the unreleased song gained considerable airplay, ramping up public demand for the yet-to-be-recorded album.

Sancious and Carter decided to leave the band to launch the jazz-fusion group Tone; they played their final Springsteen date on August 14, 1974. One of the last gigs that Sancious and Carter played with Springsteen was the now infamous August 3 show on which Bruce was mismatched with Canadian songbird Anne Murray on a bill at the Schaefer Music Festival in New York's Central Park. Although Bruce was the opening act, most of the audience had come to see the local hero anyway, and filed out before headliner Murray took the stage. After that night, Springsteen vowed that he would never again be anyone's warm-up act—an audacious stance for a commercially unproven artist.

To fill the vacancies in his band, Springsteen took out an ad in New York's *Village Voice* and recruited pianist Roy Bittan and drummer Max Weinberg, whose most recent gig had been playing in the pit band of the Broadway musical *Godspell*. Bruce took his retooled lineup back to the studio in or around 1975 to resume work on the album, this time at the state-of-the-art Manhattan studio the Record Plant.

The painstaking recording of the album that would become *Born to Run* continued through July. Realizing that Columbia was finally behind him, Springsteen took advantage of the larger recording budget to indulge his perfectionist tendencies. The sessions became grueling marathons, with Springsteen painstakingly reworking and reconfiguring the material. One of the most labored-over songs was "Born to Run," before Springsteen decided to use the version they'd recorded previously.

It was during these exhausting sessions that longtime pal Steve Van Zandt officially joined the E Street Band as second guitarist. "As a producer, Bruce knew exactly what he wanted and he wasn't going to stop until he got it," Van Zandt later recalled. "He had this brilliant vision of marrying the past with the future and he had this song which summed up the entire rock 'n' roll experience. But the first two albums had been done more live, more spontaneous, and hadn't satisfied him, so maybe he thought he should try more modern methods."³

The protracted birth cycle and grueling studio sessions proved to be worth the extra trouble. Indeed, it was immediately apparent that *Born to Run*

represented a substantial leap forward on every conceivable level. For one thing, the album's majestically layered arrangements offered an updated variation on Phil Spector's grandiose Wall of Sound. For another, Springsteen's new compositions were leaner and less wordy than those on the first two albums.

The songs' mythic evocations of teenaged life lent themselves to the wide-screen sonic approach. While the material on his first two albums had celebrated those adolescent experiences, new songs like "Born to Run," "Thunder Road," "Backstreets," "Meeting Across the River," and the near-operatic "Jungleland" carried an air of parting, as if their writer understood, consciously or not, that he was bidding farewell to these themes. Springsteen and his retooled band delivered performances that were as dramatic as the songs.

"I'd written the lyrics sitting on the edge of my bed in this shack in Long Branch, New Jersey, thinking 'Here I come, world!,'" Springsteen later explained. "They're filled with that tension of trying to get to some other place."⁴

Springsteen launched *Born to Run* in mid-August with a five-night, ten-show residency at the 400-seat Greenwich Village club the Bottom Line. Columbia bought a quarter of the available tickets and packed the house with various taste makers, and arranged for a live broadcast on the popular album-rock station WNEW FM. Bruce and the band rose to the occasion, delivering a series of shows that remain a milestone in Springsteen lore. By now, his concerts were prone to run for upward of three hours, with set lists that would vary widely from night to night.

"Blowing minds was routine for us," Van Zandt later told *Rolling Stone*. "We had been doing it for ten years, and Bruce used all ten years of it in those shows."⁵

"It was our coming-out party," Springsteen observed. "Some sort of transformation occurred over those five nights. We walked out of that place in a different place."⁶

Dave Marsh, writing in *Rolling Stone*, proclaimed, "Springsteen is everything that has been claimed for him—a magical guitarist, singer, writer, rock 'n' roll rejuvenator . . . Like only the greatest rock singers and writers and musicians, he has created a world of his own. . . . His show is thematically organized but it's hard to pin down the theme: American *Quadrophenia*, perhaps. But Springsteen doesn't write rock opera; he lives it."⁷

Columbia Records' carefully orchestrated publicity campaign exceeded all expectations in late October, when both *Time* and *Newsweek*—America's two biggest weekly news magazines at the time—ran cover stories on Springsteen in the same week. The media coup ignited an instantaneous backlash, with the apparent hype turning off potential fans and longtime acolytes.

The air of hype followed Springsteen to his first-ever overseas performances. He arrived at the Hammersmith Odeon to find banners proclaiming, "Finally, London is ready for Bruce Springsteen." The mortified artist, still stinging from Columbia's new-Dylan campaign of a few years earlier, tore down the

offending banners, and he and his jet-lagged band went on to play a highly charged set that was finally released on DVD in 2006.

Backlash or not, *Born to Run*, released on August 25, 1975, was a smash. The album sold would sell a million units domestically by the end of 1975, and its title track made the Top Twenty of *Billboard's* singles chart. It also received near-unanimous raves from the major critics.

Greil Marcus, writing in *Rolling Stone*, wrote that “the guitar figure that runs through the title song [is] the finest compression of rock ‘n’ roll thrill since the opening riffs of ‘Layla’” and rhapsodized that

Born to Run is a magnificent album that pays off on every bet ever placed on Bruce Springsteen—a ’57 Chevy running on melted-down Crystals records. . . . We know the story: one thousand and one American nights, one long night of fear and love. What is new is the majesty Springsteen and his band have brought to this story. Springsteen’s singing, his words and the band’s music have turned the dreams and failures two generations have dropped along the road into an epic. . . . You may find yourself shaking your head in wonder, smiling through tears at the beauty of it all.⁸

Reviewing the album for *Creem*, seminal critic Lester Bangs wrote,

There’s absolutely nothing in his music that’s null, detached, or perverse, and even his occasional world-weariness carries a redemptive sense of lost battles passionately fought. Boredom appears to be a foreign concept to him—he reminds us what it’s like to love rock ‘n’ roll like you just discovered it, and then seize it and make it your own with certainty and precision. If I seem to OD on superlatives, it’s only because *Born to Run* demands them; the music races in a flurry of Dylan and Morrison and Phil Spector and a little of both Lou Reed and Roy Orbison, luxuriating in them and an American moment caught at last, again, and bursting with pride.⁹

DARKNESS

Born to Run had paid off magnificently on Bruce Springsteen’s long-standing promise, both musically and commercially. But trouble had been brewing behind the scenes, and the legal disputes that resulted threatened to derail Springsteen’s musical and career momentum.

As a power struggle between Mike Appel and Jon Landau intensified, Springsteen had increasingly come to rely on the latter for creative counsel. Landau’s input proved helpful in allowing Springsteen to achieve the epic sound that he envisioned, and the resulting boost to the artist’s confidence made him more willing to question his business relationship with Appel.

Although *Born to Run's* production was jointly credited to Springsteen, Landau, and Appel, Landau had become Bruce’s main confidant and his

principal studio collaborator, and was interested in becoming his manager as well. But Springsteen was initially hesitant to jettison Appel, the man who, as he saw it, had stuck by and fought for him when he had nothing.

Matters came to a head after journalist Dave Marsh, a longtime Landau associate who would later become Springsteen's official biographer, asked for permission to quote some of Bruce's lyrics in a book he was writing about Springsteen, and Appel refused. Springsteen was mortified to realize that he didn't actually control the rights to his own songs.

On July 27, 1976, Springsteen sued Appel for fraud, undue influence, breach of trust, breach of contract, and misappropriation of funds, seeking damages of a million dollars. When Appel countersued, the judge issued an injunction that prevented Springsteen from recording until the case was resolved. The conflict would be settled out of court ten months later—a lifetime in rock and roll terms, particularly for an artist working to capitalize on a major breakthrough.

When the legal dust finally cleared, Springsteen had won his freedom from Appel and signed a personal management contract with Jon Landau. Five days after reaching a settlement with Appel, Springsteen was back in the studio to start work on his long-delayed fourth album. But the next Bruce Springsteen LP, *Darkness on the Edge of Town*, wouldn't reach the public until June 1978, nearly three years after *Born to Run*'s release.

By then, the state of popular music had changed considerably. Rock had been temporarily overtaken in the marketplace by the slick decadence of disco. While Springsteen remained an artist of considerable prestige and commercial appeal, it would take several years for him to completely recover the career momentum that he'd lost in the crucial gap between albums.

On an artistic level, though, the highly anticipated *Darkness on the Edge of Town* didn't disappoint. In many ways, it was an even more ambitious effort, maintaining much of *Born to Run*'s grandiose sound but delving into deeper and darker lyrical territory. Where many of *Born to Run*'s adolescent characters grasped at moments of transcendence and escape, the older inhabitants of such *Darkness* numbers as "Badlands," "The Promised Land," "Racing in the Streets," and the heartbreaking title track wrestled with failure, disappointment, and regret while struggling to cling to what little they had. Springsteen still cared enough about his characters to lend a sense of nobility to their plight. The album's only source of uplift was in the pummeling energy of its performances, with Springsteen delivering his most impassioned singing to date and the road-tempered E Street Band clicking seamlessly into overdrive.

Some observers interpreted the album's bitter, angry undercurrent—manifested most clearly on the fiery "Adam Raised a Cain," which seemingly addressed Springsteen's fractious relationship with his father—as a reflection of the artist's recent career travails. Even the cover shot of *Darkness on the Edge of Town* showed a wary, circumspect Bruce, offering a marked contrast

to the playful urchin depicted on *Born to Run*'s sleeve. And, just in case there was still any doubt, in "The Promised Land" he flat-out declared that he was no longer a boy, but a man.

An emotionally complex effort that offered no easy answers but rewarded extended exposure, *Darkness on the Edge of Town* was no joyride down the New Jersey Turnpike. Although many fans still name it as their favorite Springsteen album, the less anthemic, more demanding collection didn't receive the immediate across-the-board critical acclaim that *Born to Run* had.

During the period that produced *Darkness on the Edge of Town*, the prolific Springsteen wrote and/or recorded many memorable songs that weren't included on the finished album because they didn't fit thematically. That he was more concerned with art than commerce is underlined by the fact that several of these compositions became hits for other performers. These included Patti Smith's reading of "Because the Night," the Pointer Sisters' version of "Fire," and 1950s rocker Gary U.S. Bonds's comeback hit "This Little Girl." Other outtakes from this period would be covered by Greg Kihn and Southside Johnny and the Asbury Jukes.

On September 23, 1979—his thirtieth birthday—Springsteen and the E Street Band were part of the all-star musical cast for one of a series of Madison Square Garden concerts to benefit the anti-nuke activist group Musicians United for Safe Energy. His performance, which was preserved for posterity in the documentary *No Nukes*, marked the first time that Springsteen had publicly embraced a high-profile political cause.

Rock for Humanitarian Relief: The Concert for Bangladesh and Live Aid

The benefit concert has been an important feature of the rock landscape since the mid-1960s. The first show ever presented by the legendary concert promoter Bill Graham was a 1965 benefit starring Jefferson Airplane that raised \$4,200 for the legal defense of the San Francisco Mime Troupe.

In 1971, famine struck the South Asian nation of Bangladesh in the aftermath of its struggle for independence from Pakistan. At the behest of India sitar master Ravi Shankar, George Harrison organized and headlined the Concert for Bangladesh on August 1, 1971, at New York's Madison Square Garden. More than 40,000 fans attended the two performances, which also featured Shankar, Eric Clapton, Ringo Starr, and Bob Dylan. In 1972, a triple LP of concert performances reached number one in the United Kingdom and number two in the United States followed by a feature-length documentary. At that time, bureaucratic obstacles raised by several governments prevented much of the money from being distributed to international aid organizations. In recent years, the CD reissue of the album and the DVD release of the film have kept a stream of artist royalties flowing to UNICEF, possibly amounting to \$15 million or more.

Live Aid was conceived by the Irish rock singer Bob Geldof as a vehicle for aid to famine victims in war-torn Ethiopia. It began in 1984 with a London recording session that produced the all-star benefit song "Do They Know It's Christmas?" The single went to number one in Great Britain (and many other countries) and raised millions for the campaign. It was followed by "We Are the World," an even bigger benefit hit recorded by a cast of forty-two American artists that topped the U.S. Hot 100 for four weeks. Geldof organized two massive concerts held simultaneously on July 13, 1985. U2, Queen, David Bowie, the Who, and Paul McCartney were the featured artists at Wembley Stadium in London while Bob Dylan, Madonna, Black Sabbath, and Lionel Richie performed at a Bill Graham-produced show at JFK Stadium in Philadelphia. More than a billion viewers in over 100 countries saw the Live Aid concerts and fundraising telethon via satellite technology. Early press reports estimated proceeds from Live Aid at \$60–70 million, which was channeled through such organizations as the Christian Relief & Development Association and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

Andy Schwartz

Springsteen's performance of the new song "The River" would prove to be one of the highlights of the *No Nukes* film. One on-stage moment that didn't make the final cut was when an annoyed Springsteen dragged noted rock photographer and former girlfriend Lynn Goldsmith out of the crowd and flung her into the wings.

"The River" would be the title track of Springsteen's next album, a twenty-track, two-LP set released in October 1980. While some of the songs had originally been written for *Darkness on the Edge of Town*, others pointed the artist in unprecedented new directions. The family drama and working-class milieu of "Point Blank" and "Independence Day" wouldn't be have been out of place on the earlier album, nor would the haunting title track, whose poignant portrayal of hopes dashed by circumstance offered a faint but crucial glimmer of redemption.

The River's most popular number was "Hungry Heart," a buoyant pop anthem that Springsteen had initially intended to offer to the Ramones. Instead, the tune gave its author his first Top Ten single, with the victory all the more sweeter for the contrast between the song's rousing chorus and its lyrics of restlessness and longing.

But *The River's* most stirring tracks, and the ones that pointed to Springsteen's future development as a songwriter, are the moody, dread-filled ballads "Stolen Car" and "Wreck on the Highway," which preview the dark introspection which would be the focus of his next record. The darker lyrical themes didn't keep *The River* from reaching the top slot of the *Billboard* chart.

In the spring and summer of 1981, Springsteen and band toured the United Kingdom and Europe, in their first overseas trip since the over-hyped

Hammersmith Odeon shows almost six years earlier. He was greeted by adoring audiences that were as receptive as those in the States.

By now, Springsteen had begun to take an active interest in political issues, devouring books on American history and covering Woody Guthrie's "This Land Is Your Land" onstage. During a road trip from Arizona to Los Angeles, Springsteen picked up a copy of wheelchair-bound Vietnam vet turned anti-war activist Ron Kovic's autobiography, *Born on the Fourth of July*. Coincidentally, a few days later, he ran into Kovic at the motel where they were both staying. That chance encounter, and Kovic's story, inspired Springsteen to turn the first night at a multi-night stand at the Los Angeles Memorial Sports Arena into a benefit for the Vietnam Vets of America.

Rock for Political Change: "No Nukes" and Farm Aid

The organizers of the Concert for Bangladesh and Live Aid were careful to avoid addressing the political conflicts that had created humanitarian crises in Bangladesh and East Africa. But some benefit concerts responding to local crises in the United States were implicitly critical of government policies.

In 1979, rock musicians Bonnie Raitt, Jackson Browne, Graham Nash, and John Hall organized MUSE (Musicians United for Safe Energy) to oppose the further spread of nuclear power plants following the near-disaster at Three Mile Island. In September, MUSE put together a series of five No Nukes concerts at Madison Square Garden with Bruce Springsteen, Tom Petty, James Taylor, and Gil Scott-Heron, among others. The shows also spun off the now-mandatory multi-disc live album and concert film, both called *No Nukes*. In 1982, a No Nukes rally drew over 600,000 protestors to the Great Lawn of New York's Central Park.

During the 1980s, many American family-owned farms were staggering under the combined pressures of high interest rates, increased foreign competition, and domestic overproduction. Independent farmers were selling out to large agricultural conglomerates or losing their land in bank foreclosures. Just weeks after Live Aid, Willie Nelson, Neil Young, and John Mellencamp joined forces with rural activists to create Farm Aid. The first show, assembled in just six weeks, was held on September 22, 1985, in Champaign, Illinois, before a crowd of 80,000 people and raised over \$7 million.

Farm Aid concerts have been held in a variety of locales and venues, mostly in the South and Midwest. Bob Dylan, Sheryl Crow, Waylon Jennings, B.B. King, Alan Jackson, Wilco, Phish, and the Dave Matthews Band are among the hundreds of artists who have performed at Farm Aid. In its first two decades, the organization distributed more than \$23 million to its own programs and to affiliated groups like the Nebraska Farmers Union and the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture.

ALONE IN NEBRASKA

Assembling songs for his next album, Springsteen laid down spare solo demos in the modest four-track studio he'd set up in his New Jersey home. But when he attempted to translate the material into a band context, the results failed to capture the naked, haunted quality that his stark demo recordings had conveyed so effortlessly. Springsteen eventually decided simply to release his demos in their raw original form.

The resulting album, *Nebraska*—mastered from the cassette that Springsteen had been carrying around in his pocket—was released in September 1982, and was quickly recognized by critics as one of the artist's bravest and most powerful works. Its stark performances, with Springsteen's lonely, aching voice usually accompanied by just guitar and harmonica, were perfectly suited to the songs' wrenching lyrics.

Nebraska—whose mood was signaled by its grim front-cover view of a desolate stretch of highway seen through a windshield—took Springsteen further down the uneasy road that he'd begun to explore with "Stolen Car" and "Wreck on the Highway." The songs were populated by emotionally and economically vulnerable Americans alienated by class prejudice and institutional injustice, as well as the consequences of their own misguided choices. The material reflected the influence of Springsteen's explorations into the work of such American authors as Flannery O'Connor and John Steinbeck, as well as his affinity for such rootsy musical iconoclasts as Hank Williams and Woody Guthrie.

The upbeat rock and roll numbers that had provided relief from some of the darker themes of *Darkness on the Edge of Town* and *The River* were gone on *Nebraska*. The songs' protagonists—the small-time hood of "Atlantic City," the unemployed auto worker turned reluctant killer of "Johnny 99," the guilt-stricken cop of "Highway Patrolman," the haunted driver of "State Trooper"—are largely powerless in the face of forces far beyond their control and/or comprehension.

Nebraska's chilling title track was narrated in first person from the point of view of a soon-to-be-executed multiple murderer who can't even articulate a reason for his crimes. The song was inspired by 1950s thrill-killer Charles Starkweather; the same case spawned director Terrence Malick's 1973 film *Badlands*, which coincidentally shared its title with an earlier Springsteen song.

Nebraska ends on a tentative note of hope with the melodically simple yet philosophically complex "Reason to Believe," a moving ode to the persistence of faith in the face of daunting odds.

As Springsteen later explained to Kurt Loder in a 1984 *Rolling Stone* interview, "*Nebraska* was about that American isolation: what happens to people when they're alienated from their friends and their community and their government and their job. Because those are the things that keep you sane . . . and

if they slip away . . . then life becomes kind of a joke. And anything can happen.”¹⁰

Following up the sales breakthrough of *The River* with a project as challenging as *Nebraska* was a risky career move. But it quickly paid off for Springsteen, demonstrating that his integrity trumped his commercial instincts and reinforcing his identity as a serious artist.

Nebraska also made it clear that Springsteen’s audience appeal wasn’t dependent upon mainstream exposure. Despite producing no hit singles and gaining relatively little radio play, the album sold surprisingly well, peaking at number three on *Billboard*’s album chart.

Nebraska was the first example of a pattern that Springsteen would repeat in the future, that of following his most popular releases with less commercial, more personal projects. The album also presaged the lo-fi explosion that would soon become a major force in the indie rock underground, as home recording gear became more affordable and commonplace.

While radio programmers were hesitant to embrace *Nebraska*, critics had no such reservations. “*Nebraska* comes as a shock, a violent, acid-etched portrait of a wounded America that fuels its machinery by consuming its people’s dreams,” Steve Pond wrote in *Rolling Stone*. “The style is steadfastly, defiantly out-of-date, the singing flat and honest, the music stark, deliberate and unadorned.”¹¹

SOLD AMERICAN

Springsteen was back rocking again on his next album, *Born in the U.S.A.*, released in June 1984. In contrast to the stripped-down *Nebraska*, *Born in the U.S.A.* boasted a state-of-the-art sound that lent a radio-ready sheen to such catchy tunes as “Glory Days,” “Cover Me,” and the synth-drenched “Dancing in the Dark.” But the album’s upbeat vibe wasn’t limited to its production. While “I’m on Fire” channeled some of *Nebraska*’s brooding lyrical intensity, “Bobby Jean,” “No Surrender,” and even the mournful “My Hometown” carried a guarded optimism, with bruised-but-not-beaten protagonists who felt like they still had something to fight for.

Born in the U.S.A.’s much-misinterpreted title track—partially inspired by attending a screening of *The Deer Hunter* with Ron Kovic—was the first-person story a Vietnam vet who returns home to shattered dreams and broken promises, including those of his government. Despite the song’s potently angry message, some less sophisticated listeners couldn’t hear past its fist-pumping chorus and misinterpreted it as a flag-waving nationalist anthem.

In September, syndicated right-wing columnist George Will wrote a column praising Springsteen, and apparently suggested to members of President Ronald Reagan’s staff that they seek Springsteen’s endorsement for Reagan’s reelection campaign. Reagan campaign staffers were politely rebuffed by Springsteen representatives when they invited Bruce to appear with Reagan at

a September 19, 1984, campaign stop in Hammonton, New Jersey. But that didn't stop Reagan from amending his standard stump speech by stating, "America's future rests in a thousand dreams inside your hearts; it rests in the message of hope in songs so many young Americans admire: New Jersey's own Bruce Springsteen. And helping you make those dreams come true is what this job of mine is all about."¹²

Springsteen had previously resisted commenting publicly on matters of electoral politics. But the Reagan campaign's brazen misappropriation of his message and reputation—particularly since the Reagan administration's policies embodied just the sort of institutional callousness that songs like "Born in the U.S.A." implicitly condemned—motivated him to speak up.

During a September 22 concert in Pittsburgh, Springsteen introduced "Johnny 99" by commenting, "The president was mentioning my name the other day and I kinda got to wondering what his favorite album musta been. I don't think it was the *Nebraska* album. I don't think he's been listening to this one." Later in the show, he spoke of visiting the Lincoln Memorial and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., and stated, "It's a long walk from a government that's supposed to represent all of the people to where we are today."¹³

In a subsequent interview with *Rolling Stone's* Kurt Loder, Springsteen elaborated, "You see the Reagan re-election ads on TV—you know: 'It's morning in America.' And you say, well, it's not morning in Pittsburgh. It's not morning above 125th Street in New York. It's midnight, and, like, there's a bad moon risin'."¹⁴

At around the same time, Springsteen reportedly spurned an offer of several million dollars for the use of "Born in the U.S.A." in a Chrysler car commercial.

Beyond the political shenanigans, *Born in the U.S.A.* became the commercial blockbuster that had long been predicted for Springsteen. It sold over 15 million copies in the United States alone, and spawned no fewer than seven Top Ten singles, the biggest being "Dancing in the Dark." The hugely successful tour that followed saw Springsteen finally playing the huge outdoor stadium gigs that he'd previously avoided. The massive venues tested Bruce's much-vaunted ability to bring an intimate atmosphere to large-scale shows, and most observers agreed that he passed the test.

The *Born in the U.S.A.* tour also marked the on-stage addition of backup singer Patti Scialfa and guitarist Nils Lofgren. While Scialfa was a veteran of the Asbury Park music scene, Lofgren possessed an extensive résumé that included an acclaimed, prolific solo career and some notable backup work with Neil Young. Lofgren had stepped in to replace Van Zandt, who had launched a new career leading Little Steven and the Disciples of Soul. Van Zandt was also the motivating force behind the all-star benefit project Artists United Against Apartheid, whose 1985 release "Sun City" (in which Springsteen was one of the featured vocalists) was the most musically compelling of the period's many charity recording projects.

It was also on the *Born in the U.S.A.* tour that Springsteen began using his expanded clout to lend support to causes he believed in. In addition to his friends in the veterans movement, he also met with labor, environmental, and civil rights activists at almost every tour stop, endorsing their organizations from the stage and allowing the groups to set up information booths on the premises.

The following year saw the release of Springsteen's first official concert recordings, *Live 1975–1985*, an epic five-LP collection that became the first box set to debut at number one on the *Billboard* album chart. Although the artist had long resisted efforts to get him to make a live album, the package's length and historical breadth was sufficient to do justice to his expansive live shows, and to convey the uplifting rush of the live Springsteen experience as well as its subtler nuances.

Just as Springsteen had followed the crowd-pleasing *The River* with the subdued *Nebraska*, the multi-platinum *Born in the U.S.A.* gave way to 1987's pensive, scaled-down *Tunnel of Love*. A set of reflective songs surveying the dramas, doubts, and insecurities of romantic love, the album was widely interpreted by listeners as commenting on his recent marriage to model/actress Julianne Phillips—a union that had raised the eyebrows of some fans, who worried that their working-class hero had gone Hollywood.

Tunnel of Love found Springsteen working on a more intimate scale than ever before, with such numbers as “Cautious Man,” “One Step Up,” and “Two Faces” portraying lovers who seemed as tortured and desperate as *Nebraska*'s criminal characters. *Tunnel of Love* sold three million copies at the time—a respectable showing, but only a fraction of *Born in the U.S.A.*'s sales. Apparently, most fans preferred their Bruce bigger than life. With the perspective of history, though, *Tunnel of Love* is now regarded by many as Bruce's most underrated album.

The tour that followed *Tunnel of Love* defied fan expectations almost as much as the album did. Beyond the retooled E Street Band lineup, Springsteen altered song arrangements and deleted several popular numbers from the set entirely.

Tunnel of Love's contemplative direction strongly suggested that Springsteen had reached a crossroads, both in his musical and personal lives. That observation would be confirmed by the five-year gap that would precede his next release of new material. During that time, Springsteen would end his two-and-a-half-year marriage to Phillips and marry Patti Scialfa, with whom he would relocate to California. Springsteen and Scialfa would start a family with the arrival of the first of their three children in 1990.

For fans, though, a much bigger family-related shakeup was Springsteen's dismissal, in the fall of 1989, of the E Street Band. For an artist planning to take an extended break from touring and recording, not keeping his large band on the payroll was a sensible business move. But many fans took the split personally.

Springsteen broke his extended silence in March 1992, simultaneously releasing two new studio albums, *Human Touch* and *Lucky Town*. Both were recorded in L.A. with session players rather than his beloved band, with Scialfa and Roy Bittan the only holdovers from the E Street Band. His new material reflected the influence of Bruce's new family life, largely maintaining a sunny disposition that represented a substantial shift from the internal struggles documented on *Tunnel of Love*.

Springsteen's new embrace of a happy, stable family life met with mixed reviews. Several critics suggested that he might have done better to judiciously edit the material into a more focused single album. The fans seemed to agree, with both discs meeting with disappointing sales figures.

A similar sense of anticlimax accompanied Bruce's return to the road, with a new, unnamed backup band that included Bittan and some lesser-known West Coast musicians. Springsteen's willingness to forsake the tried-and-true comfort zone of his longtime lineup may have been admirable, and the shows were consistently solid and energetic, but the E Street Band was a hard act to follow, and the general consensus was that his new sidemen's professionalism was no substitute for their predecessors' time-tested rapport.

Although the new band would prove short-lived, it was recorded for posterity on the live disc *Plugged*, recorded in September 1992 and released the following year. The album was the soundtrack from Springsteen's installment of MTV's *Unplugged* series; the amended title refers to Springsteen breaking the show's usual format by performing with an electric band. The set focused on songs from *Human Touch* and *Lucky Town*, adding the previously unreleased "Red Headed Woman" (the album's only acoustic performance) and a spirited take of "Light of Day," which Springsteen had provided for Joan Jett to perform in the 1987 film of the same name, but which he hadn't previously released himself.

If Springsteen was stung by the relatively cool reception that accompanied his return to active duty, he didn't show it. He continued moving forward into new projects, albeit without the obsessiveness that he had applied to his prior endeavors, balancing his roles as artist and family man.

If the dual release of *Human Touch* and *Lucky Town* had proved to be a somewhat underwhelming return, Springsteen soon managed to make a stronger impact with a single song. "Streets of Philadelphia," his contribution to the soundtrack of Jonathan Demme's 1993 drama *Philadelphia*, movingly captured the plight of the film's main character—a gay lawyer dying of AIDS—without resorting to melodrama or sentimentality.

GHOST HUNTING

In March 1995, Columbia released *Greatest Hits*, a haphazard best-of collection that was notable mainly for the fact that it gave Springsteen an excuse to reassemble the E Street Band to record some new tracks.

Far more satisfying was *The Ghost of Tom Joad*, released eight months later. A sequel of sorts to *Nebraska*, the album—whose title name-checked the hero of John Steinbeck’s classic Depression-era novel *The Grapes of Wrath*—found Springsteen alternating between solo acoustic tracks and band arrangements while maintaining the earlier disc’s stark, haunted atmosphere.

The Ghost of Tom Joad also revisited several of *Nebraska*’s lyrical themes, with such songs as “The Line,” “Balboa Park,” and the title number painting an even bleaker picture of an America oblivious to its poor and working-class citizens and openly hostile toward immigrants. The escape that Springsteen sang of early in his career is simply not an option for the people in these songs.

Springsteen supported *The Ghost of Tom Joad* with a tour of solo performances in theater-sized venues, where he faced the formidable challenge of keeping his notoriously demonstrative crowds quiet enough that his voice could be heard. The album won Springsteen his seventh Grammy, this time for Best Contemporary Folk Album.

Tracks was released in 1998, a four-CD, sixty-six-song collection of rare and previously unreleased material that Springsteen called “a sort of an alternate version of my life.”¹⁵ The set included numerous songs that have become fan favorites via their inclusion in live shows and/or bootleg releases over the years. *Tracks* was a testament to Bruce’s notoriously stringent quality control, since even his least remarkable castoffs had something to recommend them. It also helped to set the stage for Springsteen’s imminent artistic rebirth.

In March 1999, Springsteen was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Bruce dedicated his award to his parents, and thanked his recently deceased father, wryly noting that he might not have had anything to write about if it hadn’t been for their strained relationship. Springsteen’s fence-mending extended to bringing his long-estranged former manager Mike Appel to the Hall of Fame ceremony as one of his guests.

A month after his Hall of Fame induction, Springsteen launched a long-awaited reunion tour with the E Street Band (now including both Van Zandt and Lofgren) in Barcelona, Spain, where the group played for three hours without a break. The U.S. portion of the tour began with fifteen exuberant sold-out shows at New Jersey’s Continental Airlines Arena and ended with a triumphant ten-night engagement at New York City’s Madison Square Garden.

The Madison Square Garden shows were recorded and broadcast as an HBO TV special, and released on CD and DVD as *Live in New York City*. All three included the new song “American Skin,” Springsteen’s response to the then-recent shooting death of Amadou Diallo, an unarmed African immigrant, at the hands of New York City police officers.

Despite the song’s humane, thoroughly nonjudgmental stance, “American Skin” aroused the ire of Big Apple cops, some of whom reportedly refused to work security at the Garden shows. The head of New York’s Fraternal Order of Police even denounced Springsteen as a “f-ing dirtbag,”¹⁶ conveniently

ignoring the benefit shows that he'd played for the families of officers killed in the line of duty.

A similar sense of raw-nerved topicality pervaded Springsteen's 2002 release *The Rising*, his first studio album with the E Street Band in eighteen years. Released less than ten months after the September 11, 2001, attacks, the project was a moving meditation on loss, faith, and healing, with such songs as "Lonesome Day," "Empty Sky," "You're Missing," and "My City of Ruins" emphasizing the preciousness of life rather than lingering on the sadness and tragedy inherent in their subject matter. The reconstituted E Street Band rose to the occasion, playing with as much fire as ever, and new producer Brendan O'Brien's raw, loose production lent added urgency to the performances.

Many fans and critics regarded *The Rising* as Springsteen's most consistently inspired album since *Nebraska* two decades earlier. It also became his biggest-selling album of new material in a decade and a half, and would earn three Grammys including Best Rock Album.

The *Rising* tour included a record-setting ten-night stand at New Jersey's Giants Stadium, an unprecedented ticket sales milestone even by Springsteen standards. That was followed by a three-night run at New York's Shea Stadium. Bob Dylan was a surprise guest on the final night, with the two generational icons trading vocals on Dylan's "Highway 61 Revisited."

Springsteen had long been generous in lending support to social and political causes, playing benefit shows to support Vietnam veterans groups, anti-nuclear organizations, Amnesty International, and the Christic Institute. Yet he had always avoided endorsing candidates for political office, as he had when Democratic presidential candidate Walter Mondale had sought his support in the wake of the Reagan "Born in the U.S.A." fiasco.

Controversial Concerts: Live 8

Twenty years after the first Live Aid concert, on July 2, 2005, Sir Bob Geldof (who'd been knighted by the Queen of England for his pivotal role in Live Aid) mounted another series of international concerts called Live 8: a day of huge outdoor concerts in the capital cities of each of the world's eight wealthiest nations, whose heads of state would be gathered in Scotland on July 6 for the G8 (Group of Eight) economic summit.

Live 8 was intended not as a fundraiser for humanitarian relief efforts but as a kind of mass lobbying effort that would pressure the assembled leaders to place Africa-related issues—including debt relief, increasing foreign aid, and lowering trade barriers—at the top of the G8 agenda. In Great Britain, activists in the "Make Poverty History" campaign had been agitating around some of these issues for years. Many of them saw Geldof as a late arrival to their cause who was unwilling to bluntly criticize the policies of the G8 governments and whose concerts would deflect attendance and attention from a massive march and rally planned for July 2 in Edinburgh.

The rally drew a crowd of 225,000 even as the Live 8 concerts took place in cities including London (with Elton John, U2, Coldplay, and Madonna), Rome (with Duran Duran and Faith Hill), Berlin (with Green Day and Crosby, Stills, and Nash), and Philadelphia (with the Dave Matthews Band, Bon Jovi, and Stevie Wonder). The day's most historic set was played by Pink Floyd, whose four members performed together for the first time since 1981.

Some activists criticized Bob Geldof for not including more artists from Africa and of African descent on these shows, and for his welcoming stance toward corporate and political leaders like Microsoft's Bill Gates (who addressed the London concert), British Prime Minister Tony Blair, and U.S. President George W. Bush. In the weeks after Live 8, the G8 agreed to 100 percent debt relief for poor states from the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the African Development Bank; a rise in aid to \$50 billion a year by 2010, and a pledge to protect 85 percent of vulnerable Africans against malaria.

These pledges "will not make poverty history," said Charles Abugre of Christian Aid. "It is vastly disappointing." He and other critics pointed out that the increased aid would be spread throughout numerous countries, that debt payments were due to rise sharply, and that debt relief was conditional upon cuts in social spending by the recipient governments.

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But the first term of the George W. Bush administration was enough to force Springsteen to reconsider his long-standing policy. In 2004, he and the E Street Band joined a star-studded lineup including John Fogerty, John Mellencamp, R.E.M., Pearl Jam, the Dave Matthews Band, and the Dixie Chicks on the Vote for Change tour, in support of John Kerry's unsuccessful bid to unseat Bush. Springsteen even granted permission for the Kerry campaign to use the *Born in the U.S.A.* anthem "No Surrender." Springsteen also appeared at some Kerry rallies, performing acoustic renditions of the song.

In the spring of 2005, Springsteen released the low-key, mostly acoustic *Devils & Dust*. Like *Nebraska* and *The Ghost of Tom Joad* before it, the album featured a set of brooding, personal compositions whose emotional content and character detail gave them a literary resonance. "The Hitter," "Long Time Comin'," and "Maria's Bed" wrestled compellingly with hope and despair, while the title track tackled the Iraq war from the perspective of a confused soldier. Beyond its vivid songwriting, *Devils & Dust* differed from its spare precursors in its varied and expressive musical palette.

The album's political content and sexual imagery apparently put the kibosh on a proposed tie-in deal with the ostensibly hip coffee shop chain Starbucks. Even without that timely marketing gimmick, *Devils & Dust* entered the album charts at number one in ten different countries, including the United States and Britain.

Springsteen supported *Devils & Dust* with a solo tour. In contrast to the minimalist one-man shows that had accompanied *The Ghost of Tom Joad*, he

accompanied himself on electric guitar, piano, pump organ, autoharp, ukulele, and banjo, as well as acoustic guitar and harmonica. The sets included some startling reworkings of some of Bruce's best-loved tunes, as well as some surprising cover choices, for example, a heartfelt take on "Dream Baby Dream" by 1970s synth-punk pioneers Suicide.

Devils & Dust was clearly the work of a still restless artist more concerned with expanding the musical and thematic boundaries of his work than with maintaining his position as a superstar. That distinction was demonstrated once again by the April 2006 release of *We Shall Overcome: The Seeger Sessions*, a collection of traditional folk songs associated with activist folk-music icon Pete Seeger. The project's tone was simultaneously serious and celebratory, with expansive arrangements utilizing an eclectic eighteen-person band incorporating fiddle (from recent E Street Band addition Soozie Tyrell), horns, accordion, banjo, and pedal steel guitar. The album, and the tour that followed, embodied Springsteen's abiding respect for his musical roots as well as his long-standing streak of humanist politics—qualities that he shared with Seeger.

Three decades into his recording career, Bruce Springsteen was still conquering new territory and embracing new challenges. As Peter Evans observed in the *Rolling Stone Album Guide*, "With Springsteen growing older we see a chance that we missed with Elvis—that of a great American rocker confronting age with grace."¹⁷

Or, as Springsteen told *Rolling Stone's* DeCurtis in 1998, "I've created a long body of work that fundamentally expresses who I am. That's what I go out to present. That's the only way I know how to do it, and the way I approach it now isn't any different to when I started. . . . I try to do my best job, and think as hard as I can about the things that interest me, and write and perform as well as I can and then try to find the audience that's out there for it.

"Basically," Springsteen concluded, "I've been pretty consistent with my approach since I started. . . . You have faith in what you do. And then you do it."¹⁸

TIMELINE

May 16, 1966

Seventeen-year-old Bruce Springsteen makes his first studio recordings, cutting two original songs with his band the Castiles at Bricktown Studio in New Jersey.

January 23, 1971

Springsteen breaks up his band Steel Mill at the height of its popularity, following a farewell show at the Upstage Club in Asbury Park.

May 2, 1972

New manager Mike Appel brings Springsteen to meet with legendary Columbia Records talent scout John Hammond, who is so impressed that he arranges for Springsteen to perform that night at the Gaslight Club for other Columbia executives.

The next day, Springsteen and Hammond record a set of solo demos of Springsteen's compositions at CBS Studios in New York.

June 9, 1972

Bruce Springsteen signs with Columbia Records.

January 5, 1973

Columbia releases Bruce Springsteen's first album, *Greetings from Asbury Park, N.J.*

November 5, 1973

The second Bruce Springsteen album, *The Wild, the Innocent and the E Street Shuffle*, is released.

February 12, 1974

Springsteen fires the E Street Band's original drummer, Vini "Mad Dog" Lopez, replacing him with Ernest "Boom" Carter.

May 9, 1974

A Springsteen show at Harvard Square Theater in Cambridge, Massachusetts, inspires *Real Paper* critic Jon Landau, to write "I saw rock 'n' roll future and its name is Bruce Springsteen." Landau will later become Springsteen's manager.

September 19, 1974

Keyboardist Roy Bittan and drummer Max Weinberg join the E Street Band, replacing David Sancious and Ernest Carter, respectively.

March–July 1975

Springsteen records his third album *Born to Run* at the Record Plant in New York. The sessions include new E Street Band guitarist Steve Van Zandt and new co-producer Jon Landau.

August 13–17, 1975

Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band play a now-legendary sold-out five-night stand at the Bottom Line in New York City. One show is broadcast live on local station WNEW FM. The shows mark a turning point in Springsteen's transition from cult hero to mainstream star.

September 6, 1975

Springsteen's third album, *Born to Run*, is released.

October 27, 1975

Springsteen is featured simultaneously on the covers of *Time* and *Newsweek*. The unprecedented media exposure demonstrates Springsteen's growing prominence, but it will also engender accusations of hype.

April 29, 1976

Following a show in Memphis, Springsteen and Steve Van Zandt visit Graceland in an attempt to meet Elvis Presley. But after Bruce jumps the fence, he's ejected from the grounds by a security guard.

July 27, 1976

Springsteen files suit against manager Mike Appel. Appel countersues two days later, resulting in an injunction that will keep Springsteen out of the recording studio for the next ten months.

May 28, 1977

Springsteen and Mike Appel arrive at an out-of-court settlement, with Springsteen winning the right to return to the studio and sign a management contract with Jon Landau.

June 1, 1977

Springsteen begins recording his fourth album, *Darkness on the Edge of Town*.

May 23, 1978

Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band kick off their first tour of arena-sized venues in Buffalo, New York.

June 6, 1978

The long-awaited *Darkness on the Edge of Town* is released.

August 24, 1978

Springsteen appears on the cover of *Rolling Stone* for the first time.

September 23, 1979

On Springsteen's thirtieth birthday, he and the E Street Band perform at New York's Madison Square Garden as part of the all-star No Nukes benefit concerts. Springsteen introduces his new song "The River."

October 3, 1980

Springsteen begins a tour in support of the still-unreleased *The River*. The tour will find Springsteen and band playing their longest shows to date, with most performances running between three and four hours.

October 17, 1980

Springsteen releases the double LP *The River*, drawn from the over sixty songs recorded during the album sessions.

November 8, 1980

The River becomes Springsteen's first number one entry on *Billboard's* album chart.

November 15, 1980

The River's first single, "Hungry Heart," becomes Springsteen's first Top Ten hit, reaching number five.

December 31, 1980

Springsteen ends a three-night stand at New York's Nassau Coliseum with his longest concert to date, running over four hours and containing thirty-eight songs.

April 7, 1981

Springsteen's first extended European tour, encompassing thirty-three shows in ten countries, kicks off in Hamburg, Germany.

July 2, 1981

Bruce Springsteen and the E Street band inaugurate New Jersey's new Meadowlands Arena with a six-night stand. Springsteen's ability to fill the arena six times is one example of his increased audience draw.

August 20, 1981

Springsteen plays a memorable benefit concert for the Vietnam Veterans of America at the Los Angeles Sports Arena.

September 14, 1981

The final show of the *River* tour in Cincinnati also marks Steve Van Zandt's last show with the band, prior to his departure for a solo career.

January 3, 1982

In his bedroom at his home in Holmdel, New Jersey, Springsteen records several new songs on a four-track tape recorder. Although the spare solo recordings are intended as demos, they will ultimately form the basis of his next album, *Nebraska*.

June 4, 1984

Born in the U.S.A., for which Springsteen recorded over approximately 100 songs, is released.

June 29, 1984

The *Born in the U.S.A.* tour begins in St. Paul, Minnesota. The E Street Band now includes two new members, guitarist Nils Lofgren and backup singer Patti Scialfa.

July 7, 1984

Born in the U.S.A. reaches number one on the *Billboard* chart. It will remain at the top of the chart for seven weeks and in the Top Ten for eighty-five weeks, and produce seven Top Ten singles.

August 5, 1984

Springsteen and band play the first of ten sold-out shows at the Meadowlands in New Jersey.

September 19, 1984

President Ronald Reagan invokes Springsteen's name during a campaign speech in Hammonton, New Jersey. Three days later, Springsteen will respond during a concert in Pittsburgh.

January 28, 1985

Springsteen wins his first Grammy award when "Dancing in the Dark" is named best pop/rock single.

March 21, 1985

Springsteen kicks off a massively successful world tour with his first Australian shows, including an outdoor concert in Brisbane that marks his first stadium show.

April 4, 1985

Springsteen and band play their first dates in Japan.

August–September, 1985

Bruce plays eight sold-out shows at Giants Stadium in New Jersey's Meadowlands, which holds an audience of 80,000.

August 30, 1985

Bruce rejoins Steve Van Zandt to perform on Van Zandt's all-star anti-apartheid benefit single "Sun City."

October 2, 1985

Bruce Springsteen's globe-trotting *Born in the U.S.A.* Tour draws to a close at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum. The fifteen-month, 150-date outing found him performing at mammoth outdoor stadiums and indoor arenas.

February 1986

Bruce turns down a \$12 million offer from Chrysler president Lee Iacocca to use "Born in the U.S.A." in a TV commercial.

November 29, 1986

Bruce Springsteen's box set *Live 1975–85* enters the *Billboard* album chart at number one.

July 19, 1988

Touring in support of his new album *Tunnel of Love*, Springsteen performs for the first time behind the Iron Curtain, with a concert in East Berlin in front of a crowd of 180,000, his largest audience yet. The show is broadcast live on East German television.

July 23, 1988

Bruce plays three songs with a street musician on the streets of Copenhagen. The event is recorded on camcorder by a passerby.

September 2, 1988

Springsteen and the E Street Band launch Amnesty international's Human Rights Now! tour out at Wembley Stadium in London, along with Sting, Peter Gabriel, Yousou N'Dour, and Tracy Chapman. The tour will continue through Europe, Africa, Asia, North America, and South America over the next two months.

October 10, 1988

The Human Rights Now! tour ends with a show in Buenos Aires, Argentina, portions of which are later broadcast on TV worldwide.

September 23, 1989

Bruce celebrates his fortieth birthday at the Stone Pony in Asbury Park, where performs with most of the E Street Band.

October 18, 1989

Springsteen informs the members of the E Street Band that he plans to work with new musicians on his next album, effectively breaking up his longtime band.

November 16–17, 1990

Springsteen performs a pair of solo acoustic sets to benefit the Christic Institute, sharing the bill with Jackson Browne and Bonnie Raitt.

March 31, 1992

Two new Springsteen albums, *Human Touch* and *Lucky Town*, are released simultaneously.

May 6, 1992

Springsteen's new live band plays its first gig, a private show for Sony Music staffers at the Bottom Line in New York.

May 9, 1992

The new lineup makes its public debut, backing Springsteen on *Saturday Night Live*, which also marks Springsteen's first live U.S. TV appearance.

June 15, 1992

Springsteen's first tour with his new band kicks off in Stockholm, Sweden.

June 23, 1992

Springsteen plays the first of eleven shows at the Meadowlands in New Jersey.

September 22, 1992

Springsteen records a performance for MTV. Although the show, which will premiere on November 18, is part of the cable music channel's *Unplugged* series, Springsteen performs electric with his full band lineup.

June 25, 1993

Springsteen makes his first appearance on David Letterman's late-night talk show, performing "Glory Days" with the show's house band.

March 21, 1994

Bruce wins an Academy Award for his song “Streets of Philadelphia,” which he performs live on the Oscar awards show.

January 9, 1995

Springsteen reunites the E Street Band to record some new tracks for his upcoming *Greatest Hits* compilation.

February 21, 1995

Bruce and the reunited band takes the stage at Tramps in New York to film a video for the new song “Murder Incorporated” in front of an invited audience. The video shoot turns into an impromptu two-hour live set that includes much classic material.

September 2, 1995

The E Street Band reunites once again for the opening concert of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame museum in Cleveland.

October 10, 1995

Springsteen begins a low-key six-show stint as guitarist in old friend Joe Grushecky’s band the Houserockers.

November 21, 1995

Springsteen’s spare, folk-inspired album *The Ghost of Tom Joad* is released. On the same day, he begins a solo acoustic tour of small theaters in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

March 25, 1996

Bruce interrupts a European solo tour to perform “Dead Man Walkin’,” which he wrote and recorded for Tim Robbins’s film *Dead Man Walking*, at the Academy Awards show. Although nominated for Best Song, it does not win.

February 26, 1997

The Ghost of Tom Joad wins a Grammy for Best Contemporary Folk Album. Bruce performs the title song at the Grammy awards show.

November 10, 1998

The four-CD box set *Tracks*, assembled from Springsteen’s massive archive of unreleased songs, is released.

December 8, 1998

A press release announces Springsteen’s first tour with the E Street Band in nearly a decade.

December 10, 1998

Springsteen celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights with a solo set at an Amnesty International show in Paris.

April 9, 1999

Bruce Springsteen’s reunion tour with the E Street Band, which now includes both Steve Van Zandt and Nils Lofgren, commences with a three-hour show Barcelona, Spain.

July 15, 1999

The U.S. leg of the reunion tour begins with the first of fifteen sold-out shows at New Jersey’s Continental Airlines Arena. By the end of the run, Springsteen will have performed for over one million fans in that venue since its opening in 1981.

June 4, 2000

During a show at Philips Arena in Atlanta, Springsteen debuts the new song “American Skin,” inspired by the recent killing of an unarmed African immigrant by New York City police officers. Condemnations follow from NYPD members, who, despite having never heard the song, call for a boycott of Springsteen’s upcoming Madison Square Garden shows.

June 12, 2000

Having remained silent during the “American Skin” controversy, Springsteen performs the song at Madison Square Garden, as he will at all of the tour’s remaining shows.

April 7, 2001

Live in New York City, recorded at Madison Square Garden, premieres on HBO.

September 21, 2001

Ten days after the September 11 terror attacks in New York and Washington, D.C., Springsteen performs as part of a television special honoring the victims, debuting the new song “My City of Ruins.”

July 30, 2002

Springsteen’s 9/11-inspired album *The Rising* is released, with a promotional blitz that includes numerous TV appearances including a live performance on *The Today Show*.

August 7, 2002

The *Rising* tour officially begins at the Continental Airlines Arena.

October 1, 2003

The *Rising* tour concludes with three shows at New York’s Shea Stadium.

October 1, 2004

Springsteen and the E Street Band join the Vote for Change tour, an all-star effort in support of Sen. John Kerry’s presidential campaign. Springsteen will also perform acoustically at Kerry campaign rallies in Wisconsin, Ohio, and Florida.

April 21, 2005

Springsteen begins a solo tour in support of his album *Devils & Dust*. Unlike his acoustic tour a decade before, Springsteen plays a variety of instruments, including electric guitar.

November 15, 2005

The *Born to Run 30th Anniversary Edition*, including a remastered version of the album and a DVD of a 1975 London concert, is released.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Greeting from Asbury Park, N.J., 1973

The Wild, The Innocent and the E Street Shuffle, 1973

Born to Run, 1975

Darkness on the Edge of Town, 1978

The River, 1980

Nebraska, 1982

Born in the U.S.A., 1982

Live 1975–1985, 1986

Tunnel of Love, 1987

The Ghost of Tom Joad, 1995

The Rising, 2002

Devils & Dust, 2005

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Courtesy of Photofest.

Ramones

Scott Schinder

THE KINGS FROM QUEENS

The Ramones are generally acknowledged as the band that launched the punk movement. The New York quartet's self-titled 1976 debut album ignited an international musical revolution that drastically altered rock's direction, even if it took a decade and a half for that revolution to penetrate the American commercial mainstream.

Bursting onto a rock scene that had grown bloated, complacent, and self-important, the Ramones broke all of the rules of 1970s rock. Armed with three chords and four leather jackets, they played short, loud, manic-tempoed tunes, hammered home with brute, primitive force by guitarist Johnny Ramone's buzzsaw power-chord drone, bassist Dee Dee Ramone's throbbing bass pulse, and drummer Tommy Ramone's relentless pummeling.

Devoid of artifice and pretension, the Ramones stripped down to their most basic elements and often kicked into gear by Dee Dee's raw-throated drill-sergeant "one-too-free-faw" count-offs, the Ramones' songs nonetheless maintained a hook-filled sensibility rooted in the band members' love for the

vintage bubblegum and British Invasion pop they'd grown up with. The four-some's grounding in vintage Top Forty was further manifested in gangly front-man Joey Ramone's vaguely faux-British-accented vocals.

The band's sonic stance was matched with a unique sense of street-level surrealism that was manifested in the absurdist imagery and junk-culture aesthetic of their early lyrics and record sleeves. The Ramones wrote aggressively melodic ditties about pinheads and cretins, which they sometimes punctuated with unironic romantic tunes that revealed the tender heart beneath the band's rough exterior.

No band prior to the Ramones had done so much with so little. The musicians made an artistic virtue of their rudimentary chops, and Joey didn't allow his technical limitations to keep him from becoming a distinctive and supremely expressive vocalist. Despite his lack of conventional vocal chops, the gawky singer was adept at nailing the sincere sentiment that lurked beneath the twisted humor of his and Dee Dee's lyrics, which invoked existential confusion, mental illness, and romantic travail.

Just as their sound railed against all that had grown stale and stodgy in popular music in the mid-1970s, the Ramones' image was an equally radical jab at rock's status quo. The band members' original uniform of leather jackets, T-shirts, and torn jeans reclaimed rock's unpretentious roots at a time when many of the genre's major performers had become mired in excess and pretension.

The Ramones' anti-star stance, and the anybody-can-do-this message implicit in their music, helped to change rock from an arena-bound spectator sport into a participatory activity, opening the door for the countless punk, new wave, hard-core, and indie-rock combos that would follow.

The band's early notoriety turned these four misfits into unlikely leaders—first of the fertile and diverse downtown New York scene that they helped to jump-start, then for a transatlantic punk explosion, and ultimately as icons of a worldwide movement.

In their home country, the Ramones soldiered on for more than two decades, in pursuit of a commercial breakthrough that never quite arrived. In Britain and Europe, though, the Ramones' impact was immediate and apparent. The band's first London show became a pivotal event in sparking the British punk boom.

That the Ramones were able to sustain a two-decade career as a recording and touring act was particularly impressive in light of the various forces that threatened to doom the band to a limited shelf life. The less-is-more simplicity of their musical approach led many early observers to dismiss them as a one-trick pony, and their relative lack of commercial success didn't seem to augur well for a long-term future. Even less encouraging was the lengthy series of internal traumas that bedeviled the group, and the volatile chemistry that resulted in extended feuds between certain members.

Indeed, the four unrelated young men who shared a surname and a musical mission had little else in common, and the Ramones' interpersonal tensions

became the stuff of legend. Despite the bandmates' often strained relations, the Ramones managed to release fourteen studio albums and tour almost constantly between 1976 and 1996.

Their recorded output could be inconsistent, and their liaisons with big-name producers often yielded spotty results. But the four studio LPs with which the Ramones launched their career—*Ramones* (1976), *Leave Home* (1977), *Rocket to Russia* (1977), *Road to Ruin* (1978)—ensured the group's iconic status. Those albums constitute a body of work as original and influential as anything in rock and roll, rewriting the music's rules and creating a template that countless bands would follow thereafter.

The Ramones' seminal early work can safely be regarded as ground zero of the punk explosion, but it wasn't without precedent and it didn't come out of nowhere. In the late 1960s, the Velvet Underground explored sonic extremes and taboo lyrical subject matter, while the Stooges and the MC5 shattered notions of hippie-era peace and love with confrontational aggression. In the early 1970s, the New York Dolls courted mainstream outrage with garage raucousness, cartoon decadence, and transvestite chic, while a variety of iconoclastic cult combos in various regions—the Modern Lovers in Boston, Rocket from the Tombs in Cleveland, the Runaways in L.A.—pushed at other musical and thematic boundaries. And New York's own Dictators had pioneered some of the irreverent junk-culture aesthetic that the Ramones would help to popularize, and even managed to release a major-label debut LP a year before the Ramones did.

Regardless of who came first, it was the Ramones who crystallized punk's unruly attitude and musical aesthetic into an identifiable, accessible style that others could emulate and expand upon. While their British counterparts/acolytes the Sex Pistols may have been far more effective as media manipulators and social provocateurs, the Ramones' influence was longer-lasting and more far-reaching.

The four highly incompatible young men who became the Ramones came together in early 1974 in the middle-class Forest Hills section of Queens. All four were troubled misfits who'd found a measure of salvation and solace in music.

Tommy Erdelyi was born in Budapest, Hungary, and emigrated to the United States with his parents at the age of four. In 1964, under the spell of the Beatles, he began playing guitar and formed a teen combo, the Tiger 5, to play Fab Four tunes at parties and junior high school dances. Two years later, he befriended fellow Forest Hills High School student John Cummings, a quick-tempered bassist who'd served a two-year stint in military school, and whose tastes ran toward the harder sounds of the Rolling Stones, the Who, and the Yardbirds. The two joined up to form a new garage outfit, the Tangerine Puppets, named after a Donovan song of the same name.

Cummings's aggressive nature surfaced early on, for example, the live show during which he put down his bass in mid-song to beat up the group's singer

on stage. On another occasion, he interrupted a set to toss Tommy into the drum kit. Another night, while the band were headlining a talent show at Forest Hills High School, he hit the class president in the crotch with his bass.

The Tangerine Puppets got as far as recording a couple of demos and playing at the legendary Palisades Amusement Park, before breaking up in the summer of 1967.

A few years later, while working a construction job on an office building in midtown Manhattan, Cummings ran into his Forest Hills neighbor Douglas Colvin, who worked in the same building. The two got into the habit of meeting during their lunch hour, and bonded over their shared enthusiasm for the Stooges and the New York Dolls. They began talking about starting a new band, which they did after Cummings was laid off from the construction gig.

The Virginia-born Colvin was the son of a career army officer, and grew up largely in West Berlin, then still in the midst of post-World War II reconstruction. There, he observed the lingering shadow of Nazism, which would subsequently manifest itself in some of his more fanciful lyrics. During his childhood, Colvin learned the escape his turbulent home life by retreating into his imagination—and, eventually, into drugs. He also found inspiration in music, first picking up guitar at the age of twelve. A few years later, he moved to Queens with his divorced mother.

When he and Colvin decided to launch their combo, Cummings switched from bass to guitar. Unable to afford a Fender or Gibson ax, he purchased a cheap Mosrite—a considerably less prestigious brand—for \$50. Although the choice was initially a result of financial necessity, Mosrite guitars would become a cornerstone of the Ramones' sound, and Johnny's continuing use of the brand would create a new wave of sales for the company.

Joining Cummings and Colvin's new outfit on drums was another Forest Hills neighbor, Jeff Hyman, an awkward loner whose brother Mitch (later leader of the Rattlers and a member of rock critic Lester Bangs's combo Birdland) had once played in a band with Cummings. After his parents divorced during his childhood, Jeff found emotional sustenance in the bubblegum, girl-group pop and British Invasion rock that he heard on New York's vibrant Top Forty airwaves.

Hyman's early experiments with hallucinogens had earned him a stint in a hospital psych ward—an experience that would inspire more than one Ramones lyric—and had once spent a day in the notorious Manhattan jail the Tombs after being busted for peddling without a license. Jeff had taken up drumming in his early teens, and had made his first attempts at singing and songwriting in the Queens glitter band Sniper about a year before hooking up with Cummings and Colvin.

The new outfit's short-lived original lineup was Johnny on lead guitar, Dee Dee on rhythm guitar and lead vocals, and Joey on drums, plus a long-forgotten bassist named Richie Stern, who was kicked out after two days when he proved unable to keep up with the frantic tempos. The new combo got its

name after Colvin began calling himself Dee Dee Ramone, emulating Paul McCartney's use of the stage moniker Paul Ramon in the Beatles' early days. The others eventually followed suit, and the band became known as the Ramones.

Their shared stage name allowed these disaffected nobodies to build a collective identity. That image of solidarity was reinforced by the members' leather-and-jeans dress code, and by their early method of crediting their songwriting to the entire band rather than issuing individual writing credits. Johnny later claimed that the band's original motivation for writing their own songs was that they couldn't figure out how to play other people's.

The Ramones' first original composition was "I Don't Wanna Get Involved with You," followed by "I Don't Wanna Walk Around with You," which the band later confessed was more or less the same song. After coming up with "I Don't Wanna Be Learned, I Don't Wanna Be Tamed" and "I Don't Wanna Go Down to the Basement," the band broke its streak of song titles beginning with "I Don't Wanna" by penning "Now I Wanna Sniff Some Glue."

Beyond their goofy titles and cartoonish imagery, the Ramones' early songs reflected the band members' own early experiences with alienation, family dysfunction, substance abuse, and petty crime, filtered through a juvenile affinity for horror and war movies.

According to Joey, "Our early songs came out of our real feelings of alienation, isolation, frustration."¹

As Johnny explained, "We couldn't write about girls or cars, so we wrote songs about things we knew."²

"We were all kind of loners and outcasts—and that's our audience," said Joey. "We also shared this dark, black sense of humor that only a few people understood."³

By the time Joey, Johnny, and Dee launched the Ramones, Tommy Erdelyi had begun to build a successful career as a recording engineer, working at Manhattan's famed Record Plant on albums by the likes of Jimi Hendrix, Mountain, Herbie Hancock, and John McLaughlin. By 1974, Erdelyi and fellow Forest Hills High School alumnus Monte Melnick—who would later serve for most of the Ramones' career as the band's road manager and right-hand man—had opened a small rehearsal studio, Performance, in Manhattan, which became the embryonic Ramones' practice space.

Even then, Erdelyi recognized a unique quality in the inexperienced trio's hyperactive clatter, and informally signed on as their manager. "They were terrible, but they were *great*," he later recalled. "I could tell right away that they were exciting, interesting and funny. They kept coming back week after week and rehearsing and got better and better."⁴

The Ramones played their first official gig, a showcase at Performance, on March 30, 1974, with the band playing seven songs in front of about thirty friends who's paid \$2 each to get in. Dee Dee was so nervous that he accidentally stepped on, and broke, his bass.

Two months later, Dee Dee, who had trouble singing and playing bass simultaneously, surrendered frontman duties to Joey. When six months' worth of auditions failed to recruit an appropriate replacement drummer, the band drafted Erdelyi to man the skins. Although he'd never played drums in a band before, Tommy felt strongly enough about the Ramones' potential that he agreed to take the job.

Tommy soon developed an unschooled, propulsive drumming style that was perfectly suited to the explosive racket that his new bandmates were making. Beyond his percussive approach, Tommy also played a pivotal role in crafting the Ramones' attitude and personalities into an actual image, and building a mystique around these unlikely rock stars.

While the players had previously been frustrated in their attempts to emulate their favorite records, they developed their unique minimalist style once they learned to work within their technical limitations. Johnny built his style on furiously downstroked barre chords, playing with so much force that his fingers sometimes bled on stage, while Dee Dee's bass work stuck to the beat, with few melodic embellishments.

A key element in the development of the Ramones' sound was Johnny's disdain for guitar solos, which would lead to him playing only a handful of them over the next twenty-odd years. His simple but eloquent style would prove to be a touchstone for future generations of aspiring guitarists. But the fact that Johnny's style was simple didn't mean that it was easy, and it's worth noting that few if any of his acolytes ever matched his primitive genius. For the remainder of the band's existence, Johnny would pride himself on never improving his technique and maintaining the same inspired-amateur status that he had the band formed.

BOWERY BLITZKRIEG

At the time that the Ramones began, there were few venues in which an unconventional, uncommercial band could perform live. But the quartet soon found a home at CBGB, a grungy biker bar on the Bowery, a thoroughfare that was then known as the skid row of Manhattan's Lower East Side. Owner Hilly Kristal had opened the establishment in late 1973, dubbing it CBGB OMFUG, an unwieldy acronym for Country, Bluegrass and Blues and Other Music for Uplifting Gourmandizers. The club's early fare consisted mainly of country music and poetry readings. But Kristal would reassess his booking policy after the then-unknown Television asked for a gig in the spring of 1974, and Kristal gave them a regular Sunday night slot.

Punk: New York

The CBGB scene that brought forth the Ramones also incubated a host of other groups and solo artists exploring diverse styles of rock and roll under the catch-all

rubric of “punk rock.” Predating the Ramones, Television was the first of these new bands to appear at CBGB after founding members Tom Verlaine (guitar, vocals) and Richard Hell (bass, vocals) convinced owner Hilly Kristal to let the nascent group play there. In songs like “Friction” and “Marquee Moon,” Verlaine and Richard Lloyd created extended dual-guitar improvisations in a style that melded Stones-style 1960s rock with avant-garde jazz. Hell left and was replaced by Fred Smith prior to the recording of *Marquee Moon* (1977) and *Adventure* (1978), neither of which made the *Billboard* album chart. Nonetheless, Television dramatically expanded the range of possibilities for guitar-based rock music and exerted a palpable influence on bands ranging from U2 to the Strokes.

Founded by charismatic lead singer Debbie Harry and her longtime partner, guitarist Chris Stein, Blondie was the most commercially successful group to emerge from the CBGB scene. Harry and Stein recruited drummer Clem Burke, keyboards player Jimmy Destri, and bassist Gary Valentine, the latter an important contributing songwriter (later replaced by Nigel Harrison). Blondie was influenced by surf music and girl-group pop: their early songs—including “In the Sun,” “Sex Offender,” and Gary Valentine’s “(I’m Always Touched by Your) Presence, Dear”—injected these forms with post-modern irony and a playful spirit. In 1979, Blondie scored an international number one hit with “Heart of Glass,” and this disco-flavored track propelled the *Parallel Lines* album into the U.S. Top Ten. The band broke up in 1983, but Harry, Stein, Burke, and Destri reformed in 1998 and released two further studio albums. In 2006, Blondie was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

Talking Heads were led by singer/guitarist David Byrne, whose preppy look and anxious demeanor quickly endeared his band to the art-student segment of the CBGB audience. Byrne’s songs like “Psycho Killer” and “The Book I Read” combined suppressed emotions and literate lyrics with tunes of near-bubblegum catchiness. Drummer Chris Frantz and bassist Tina Weymouth formed the sparse but solid rhythm section, later bolstered by the arrival of Jerry Harrison on keyboards. The group released two albums of minimalist rock, *Talking Heads 77* (1977) and *More Songs About Buildings and Food* (1978), before gradually expanding its tonal palette with tribal rhythms and added funk instrumentation for *Remain in Light* (1980). “Burning Down the House” became Talking Heads’ first U.S. Top Ten hit in 1983, and the soundtrack of their concert documentary, *Stop Making Sense*, sold over 2 million copies during its 118-week run on the *Billboard* chart. Talking Heads disbanded in 1991 but were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2002.

Andy Schwartz

In the summer of 1974, the Ramones ran across a *Village Voice* ad for one of Television’s Sunday night shows at CBGB. They contacted Kristal who, not having much to lose, agreed to give them a shot. His decision to take a chance on the Ramones would turn CBGB from a little-noticed hole in the wall into a cultural landmark.

The Ramones played their first CBGB gig on August 16, 1974—just two weeks after Tommy picked up the sticks for the first time—and returned for another show the following night. Kristal, who maintained that he couldn't imagine anyone actually liking the Ramones, offered them a weekly slot anyway. By the end of the year, the band would have seventy-four CBGB performances under their belt.

The Ramones' combustible early live sets rarely ran longer than twenty minutes, into which time they'd cram fifteen or more tunes, with no between-song patter to interrupt the aural barrage. The only interruptions occurred when band members occasionally broke into heated on-stage arguments.

Joey often described the Ramones' first CBGB audience as consisting of the venue's bartender and his dog. But word of the band's assaultive performances spread, and soon their shows began attracting an enthusiastic assortment of downtown hipsters and artists, as well as a growing contingent of outsiders curious enough to brave the Bowery's unsavory reputation.

Soon, the Ramones were at the center of a vibrant, creative scene that encompassed cutting-edge acts as diverse as post-psychedelic guitar improvisers Television, provocative poetess Patti Smith, tightly wound art-rockers Talking Heads, ironic popsters Blondie, literate punk brats Richard Hell and the Voidoids, pioneering synth duo Suicide, raucous Cleveland transplants the Dead Boys, ex-New York Doll Johnny Thunders's elegantly wasted Heartbreakers, and countless less well-remembered bands. The scene was quickly dubbed punk rock, but the term was less a genre distinction than a convenient catch-all.

Although they were gigless losers just a few months before, the Ramones were soon a local sensation. Among the new friends that they made at CBGB was Arturo Vega, a Mexican-born artist who designed the band's logo—an irreverent variation on the U.S. presidential seal—and their merchandise. In addition to providing a crucial early source of income for the impoverished musicians, T-shirts bearing the now-famous eagle logo would play a significant role in spreading the Ramones' name—an invaluable asset for a band that couldn't get radio play in most of the country. Vega would become a valuable addition to the band's team, and would provide physical shelter when Joey and Dee Dee moved into Vega's loft around the corner from CBGB.

Early on, the CBGB scene stirred up enough word of mouth to merit a fair amount of media attention, including a feature in *Rolling Stone* and prominent pieces in the influential British music weeklies *Melody Maker* and *New Musical Express*.

The Ramones acquired their first manager in veteran journalist, record-company executive, and rock scenester Danny Fields. Fields's cutting-edge tastes allowed him to recognize the Ramones' uniqueness, and his music business connections offered the potential of the band actually getting a record deal.

In late 1974, Fields and the Ramones scraped up \$1,000 to record a modestly produced fifteen-song demo that contained most of the songs that would be comprised by the Ramones' first album. The demo was sent to every label that Fields and the band could think of; it was rejected or ignored by all of them.

But the media buzz surrounding the Ramones, and the CBGB scene in general, eventually became too loud for the music industry to ignore, and in June 1975, the band played auditions for the Sire, Arista and Blue Sky labels. It was Blue Sky Records head Steve Paul who was responsible for setting up an unannounced opening slot for blues-rock guitar hero Johnny Winter at the Palace Theater in Waterbury, Connecticut. Playing in front of audience who had no advance warning that they were on the bill, the Ramones were pelted with bottles and firecrackers, but refused to surrender the stage until their set was done.

The Johnny Winter incident was the first of a series of disastrous out-of-town gigs that demonstrated the width of the cultural gap that still separated the Ramones' hometown audience and the rest of America. Those shows found the band performing for audiences that ranged from mildly unfriendly to openly hostile, on oddly matched bills beneath such headliners as Peter Frampton, Blue Oyster Cult, and Toto.

By autumn, the Ramones had won a deal with Sire Records, a label that had been launched in 1966 by record company vet Seymour Stein and songwriter/producer Richard Gottshofer. For the first few years of its existence, Sire had concentrated mainly on licensing recordings from overseas. But Stein was now eager for the company to develop acts of its own, and was particularly enthusiastic about the burgeoning downtown rock scene.

The debut album, simply titled *Ramones*, was recorded early in 1976 for a minuscule \$6,400 and mixed in one ten-hour session. The sessions took place at Plaza Sound, a venerable facility located in Manhattan's grandiose art deco landmark Radio City Music Hall, with Sire A&R man Craig Leon producing and Tommy Ramone (credited as T. Erdelyi) as associate producer.

By then, the Ramones had so many original tunes that they simply chose the first thirteen they'd written. They recorded the tracks quickly, rarely doing more than two takes, and at one point cutting seven songs in a single day. The production was raw and largely unadorned, while nodding to some of the band members' favorite 1960s discs in the discreet separation of Johnny's guitar and Dee Dee's bass in separate stereo channels. Producer Leon did do some layering of instruments to fatten the sound, and also borrowed Radio City's gigantic Wurlitzer pipe organ to beef up a reading of Chris Montez's 1962 hit "Let's Dance," while adding glockenspiel, tubular bells, and jangly twelve-string guitar on the uncharacteristically swoony original "I Wanna Be Your Boyfriend." The tracks were recorded at such a high volume that when the album was mastered, the loudness actually damaged some of the mastering equipment.

Released in April 1976, *Ramones* was a brilliant distillation of the four-some's essence, an unyielding assault that was as catchy as it was aggressive. Its fourteen songs clocked in at just under twenty-nine minutes, with the mini-horror movie "I Don't Wanna Go Down to the Basement" the album's longest track at an epic 2:35.

From the bracing opening salvo of "Blitzkrieg Bop," with its rousing "Hey Ho! Let's Go!" chant, to the closing blast of "Today Your Love, Tomorrow the World," *Ramones* never lets up. The set introduced such essential Ramones anthems as "Beat on the Brat," "Judy Is a Punk," and "Loudmouth," while introducing the band's trademark bleakly humorous view of urban lowlife on "Now I Wanna Sniff Some Glue," "Chain Saw," and "53rd and 3rd." "Havana Affair" and "Today Your Love, Tomorrow the World" revealed a strain of tongue-in-cheek military and Nazi imagery that troubled some listeners, but which reflected Dee Dee's experiences growing up in post-World War II Germany. Meanwhile, "I Wanna Be Your Boyfriend" and "Listen to My Heart" revealed an unexpected romantic streak. Whether intentional or not, the decision to print the songs' minimalist lyrics on the album's inner sleeve was a brilliant conceptual stroke.

Although the songwriting was collectively credited to the entire band, as it would be on their next six albums, Joey and Dee Dee were responsible for most of the material. Joey wrote "Beat on the Brat," "Judy Is a Punk," and "Chain Saw," while Dee Dee provided "Now I Wanna Sniff Some Glue," "I Don't Wanna Walk Around with You," and "53rd and 3rd." The latter song was written, apparently from the bassist's own experience, about the male prostitution which took place at the Manhattan intersection of the title. Dee Dee also co-wrote "Blitzkrieg Bop" with Tommy, and "I Don't Wanna Go Down to the Basement" and "Loudmouth" with Johnny, while Tommy was responsible for "I Wanna Be Your Boyfriend."

Ramones—featuring an iconic black-and-white cover photo by photographer and CBGB door person Roberta Bayley, who was paid \$125 for the session—was met with enthusiasm from fans and rapturous praise from a handful of open-minded critics, and with derision or indifference from the rest of the world. Those who didn't immediately recognize the band's revolutionary vision generally vilified the album as a bunch of horrible noise that barely qualified as music.

Radio airplay for the album was virtually nonexistent, apart from a few adventurous stations in New York and on the West Coast. But the positive press and underground word of mouth was enough to push *Ramones* into the lower reaches of the *Billboard* Top 200.

Touring to promote the release outside of the New York area proved problematic for the Ramones, since at the time there were few venues—or booking agencies—sympathetic to this kind of music. The band worked with a series of agents, with little success, often leaving Danny Fields to scrape up out-of-town

engagements himself. The situation resulted in an endless string of dispiriting road gigs, with the group routinely facing uncomprehending audiences and irate club owners, but also gradually winning new converts in the process.

It was a very different story when the Ramones made their first visit to Britain, where their album had already sparked the imaginations of a generation of kids who would soon form the first wave of the British punk movement. The short tour kicked off with a two-night stand at London's Roundhouse on July 4 and 5, 1976. Although they were second-billed to influential proto-power-popsters (and Sire labelmates) the Flamin' Groovies, the Ramones' sets are widely credited for igniting the first sparks of British punk, which would catch fire that summer.

The Roundhouse shows found the Ramones playing in front of crowds that included members of nearly every major U.K. punk act, including the Sex Pistols, the Clash, the Damned, and Generation X, as well as future Pretender Chrissie Hynde.

Punk: London

In the United States, punk was a cultural and musical rebellion in which only a minority of performers directly addressed the issues of the day. But in the United Kingdom—where the national economy was in severe recession and unemployment was running high—punk assumed a greater social and political significance from the start. The Sex Pistols and the Clash were the two founding bands of British punk rock.

In their songs and their stance, the Sex Pistols challenged the accepted rules and habits of British society, with its hidebound class distinctions and residual monarchy. Guitarist Steve Jones, drummer Paul Cook, and bassist Glen Matlock (later replaced by the doomed punk icon Sid Vicious) comprised a basic but effective hard rock band influenced by the early Who, the Stooges, and the New York Dolls. But singer Johnny Rotten (né John Lydon) set the Pistols apart from all their contemporaries. He was a fearless front man whose glaring stage demeanor and open mockery of convention incited both adoration and outrage.

Promoters and club owners frequently barred the Sex Pistols from performing; their singles like "God Save the Queen" ("she ain't no human being") were banned from the radio but became Top Ten hits nonetheless. In October 1977, the group released its only official studio album, *Never Mind the Bollocks Here's the Sex Pistols*, followed in January 1978 by a memorably chaotic two-week U.S. tour that ended with the Pistols' breakup after their final show in San Francisco. In a tumultuous career that lasted little more than two years, the Sex Pistols left a deep and divisive mark on popular culture. They set off heated debates in the British mass media, even in the halls of Parliament, and inspired young people around the world to form their own punk bands. In-

ducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2006, the Sex Pistols refused to attend the organization's formal ceremonial dinner in New York.

The Clash was a more explicitly left-wing band than the anarchic Sex Pistols. Singer/guitarist Joe Strummer and bassist Paul Simonon founded the group, later completed by guitarist Mick Jones and drummer Topper Headon. Their first public performance, on a July 4, 1976, bill with the Sex Pistols, coincided with the Ramones' first U.K. appearance on the same date. Strummer and Jones quickly formed the composing core of the Clash. They created such furious early punk anthems like "White Riot" and "I'm So Bored with the USA," then gradually expanded the band's sound to incorporate reggae ("Lover's Rock"), rockabilly ("Brand New Cadillac"), and dance music ("Train in Vain," one of the most popular Clash songs). The Clash played benefits for Rock Against Racism and other activist groups, and their 1981 album *Sandinista!* took its title from the Nicaraguan socialist political movement.

The group struggled for U.S. airplay and acceptance before breaking into the Top Thirty in 1980 with the ambitious double album, *London Calling*. In 1982, *Combat Rock* reached number seven in the United States with sales of over two million copies, but Topper Headon's departure (due to heroin addiction) was followed by that of Mick Jones and the Clash finally disbanded in 1986. A reunion tour was under discussion in December 2002, when Joe Strummer died suddenly of a heart attack at age fifty. The 2000 documentary film *Westway to the World* recounted the turbulent, pathbreaking history of the Clash, whose members were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2003.

A. S.

In August, the Ramones played their first West Coast dates, including two nights at the Roxy in Los Angeles, again with the Flamin' Groovies. The Roxy shows would become touchstones for the emerging L.A. punk scene.

Six months after recording their debut, the Ramones were back in the studio to record their sophomore LP, *Leave Home*, which would be released in January 1977. Tommy co-produced with studio vet Tony Bongiovi, who had originally been his mentor in his Record Plant days.

With upgraded sound quality and marginally more sophisticated songwriting, *Leave Home* represented a subtle progression from its predecessor, with a somewhat more pronounced pop sensibility and even some understated production touches. Its fourteen songs included several that would become Ramones standards, notably the insistent sing-along mental-illness odes "Gimme Gimme Shock Treatment" and "Pinhead." The latter tune, inspired by the infamous 1932 cult horror film *Freaks*, introduced the durable "Gabba Gabba" chant and would spawn the band's durable "pinhead" mascot.

Elsewhere on *Leave Home*, "Now I Wanna Be a Good Boy" presented a convincing portrayal of adolescent existential confusion, while "Suzy Is a

Headbanger” offered another colorful punk-scene vignette, “You Should Never Have Opened That Door” maintained the band’s horror-movie fixation, while a manic cover of the Rivieras’ 1960s hit “California Sun” nodded to vintage surf rock.

Leave Home—whose title referred to the band breaking out of the CBGB scene—initially also included “Carbona Not Glue,” an ode to the illicit pleasures of huffing the household cleaning fluid of the title. The song was included on the initial pressing, but was deleted from subsequent editions out of fear that the Carbona company would sue over the use of its brand name in such a tawdry context. The song would be restored when the album was reissued on CD.

While *Leave Home* again grazed the lower reaches of the American charts, it was a genuine hit in England, then in the thrall of a rising wave of home-grown punk bands, many of which were using the Ramones’ inspiration as a jumping-off point to more explicitly confrontational and/or political music.

The Ramones’ overseas popularity was further demonstrated in the spring of 1977, when the infectious new single “Sheena Is a Punk Rocker” peaking at number twenty-two.

Punk: Los Angeles

In southern California, musicians were working in directions roughly parallel to those of the New York bands. In Los Angeles, X was the premier name on the scene that coalesced around a bare-bones Hollywood punk club called the Masque. The intertwining lead vocals of bassist John Doe and singer Exene Cervenka were reminiscent of earlier West Coast bands like the Jefferson Airplane, but propelled through short, sharp songs by the supercharged rockabilly guitar of Billy Zoom and DJ Bonebrake’s furious drumming. On the critically acclaimed albums *Wild Gift* and *More Fun in the New World*, X gave voice to southern California punk culture’s disenchantment with conspicuous consumption, Hollywood image-mongering, and a right-leaning American political order.

The Germs represented LA punk at its most musically untutored and socially alienated. Lead singer Darby Crash brought many of their live performances to the brink of disaster, but he was also a gifted writer of tortured, surreal lyrics. The Germs created a few classic independent singles and one remarkable studio album, 1980’s (*GI*), before they fell apart. On December 7, 1980, four days after a Germs reunion show that is reputed to have been one of the band’s best-ever live gigs, Darby Crash died of a heroin overdose at age twenty-one.

The Blasters, led by brothers Phil and Dave Alvin (on lead vocals and lead guitar), injected punk-rock energy into a repertoire of obscure 1950s rock and roll numbers and such evocative Dave Alvin songs as “American Music” and “Long White Cadillac.” Musicians from X, the Blasters, and other L.A. bands

passed through the ranks of the Flesheaters. Lead singer/lyricist Chris Desjardin yowled his way through dark tales of passion and betrayal that often took their titles from film noir and other B movies (cf. “A Minute to Pray, a Second to Die”).

The L.A. scene produced two of the most influential all-female bands in rock and roll history. First came the Runaways, who emerged from the pre-punk glam rock scene under the guidance of an older male producer and songwriter, Kim Fowley. The group could never dispel the air of cynical manipulation that came with Fowley’s involvement and neither of their two albums—*The Runaways* (1976) and *Queens of Noise* (1977)—made the *Billboard* Top 100, although guitarist/vocalists Joan Jett and Lita Ford went on to establish successful solo careers. The Go-Go’s, on the other hand, was a self-made female quintet with authentic L.A. punk roots. The band’s 1981 debut album, *Beauty and the Beat*, smoothed out their rougher edges and topped the *Billboard* chart for six weeks. It sold over two million copies and spun off “We Got the Beat,” at number two the highest-charting of the group’s four Top Twenty singles. Two more albums, *Vacation* and *Talk Show*, both reached the Top Twenty. The Go-Go’s broke up in 1985 but have reformed periodically for recordings and concert tours.

A. S.

LEAVING HOME

“Sheena Is a Punk Rocker” (an alternate mix of which was added to *Leave Home* when “Carbona Not Glue” was deleted) was featured on *Rocket to Russia*, released in November 1977. Considered by many to be the quintessential Ramones album, *Rocket to Russia*—co-produced by Tommy and Ed Stasium—was the strongest and most focused distillation yet of the band’s sound and sensibility, featuring their strongest, most hook-filled set of songs yet, and performances to match. The album also demonstrated some subtle progressions in the band’s song structures, as well as various percussive frills and some more complicated guitar parts, provided by Ed Stasium.

Rocket to Russia opened with the gleeful “Cretin Hop” and continued with the winsome “Rockaway Beach,” which made the band’s fondness for the Beach Boys explicit. Along with gleeful excursions into extreme psychiatry (“Teenage Lobotomy”) and unstable home life (“We’re a Happy Family”), the band successfully ventured into melancholy balladry with “Here Today, Gone Tomorrow” and “I Wanna Be Well.” Topping off the set are a pair of inspired cover versions, “Do You Wanna Dance,” previously a hit for Bobby Freeman and the Beach Boys, and the Trashmen’s immortal stupid-rock masterpiece “Surfin’ Bird.”

Almost as memorable as the songs was the loopy back-cover illustration by John Holmstrom, editor of New York’s *Punk* magazine and a longtime

Ramones supporter. The illustration was a perfect summation of the band's world-view, depicting their pinhead mascot riding the title missile, presumably toward the Soviet Union, with the world below populated by a plethora of flamboyant cartoon characters.

Rocket to Russia received the band's strongest reviews yet, along with some high-profile media exposure, including a major feature in *Rolling Stone*. By this time, most of the critics who'd initially been skeptical about the Ramones had been won over, as evidenced by *Rocket to Russia*'s sixth-place showing in the *Village Voice*'s annual critics' poll, behind the Sex Pistols' *Never Mind the Bollocks*, *Here's the Sex Pistols*, Elvis Costello's *My Aim Is True*, Television's *Marquee Moon*, Fleetwood Mac's *Rumours*, and Steely Dan's *Aja*.

Still, the Ramones' idiot-savant image persisted in the minds of many—a perception that rankled the band members. “People thought everything was an accident,” Tommy grouched to England's *New Musical Express*. “These four morons are really cute and they're doing something really neat, but obviously it's all an accident. First of all, it wasn't four morons. Second of all, none of it was an accident. And third of all, it's four talented people who know what they like and who know what they're doing.”⁵

Rocket to Russia also made some modest commercial strides in America, with the album reaching the *Billboard* Top Fifty and three singles—“Sheena Is a Punk Rocker,” “Rockaway Beach,” and “Do You Wanna Dance”—entering the U.S. Top 100. But the upswing would be short-lived. The Ramones would never again appear in the American singles chart, and the upward trend of the band's domestic record sales would soon be broken.

Rocket to Russia benefited from Sire's new distribution deal with Warner Bros. Records, a company far more sympathetic to Seymour Stein's left-of-center tastes than Sire's prior distributor, ABC. But the album's commercial progress still fell short of expectations, leading many to consider the possibility that the Ramones—and punk rock in general—might be doomed to cult status.

The Ramones welcomed 1978 with a New Year's Eve show at London's Rainbow Theatre; that show would later be released as the in-concert album *It's Alive*. A week later, they played a landmark show at New York's Palladium, with the Runaways (including future solo star Joan Jett) and Suicide as opening acts. It was the Ramones' first New York show in a theater-sized venue, and confirmed the band's increasing drawing power.

Although they were getting more prestigious bookings, the band members were still living hand to mouth, subsisting on a \$125 weekly salary. The situation was particularly hard on Dee Dee, who by then was contending with a \$100-a-day heroin habit.

Rocket to Russia marked the studio swan song of the Ramones' original lineup. Tommy Ramone, weary of the grueling tour regimen and wanting to focus on his production career, quit the band in the spring of 1978, but would stay on as co-producer of their next album, *Road to Ruin*. In later years, he

would produce albums for the Ramones-influenced likes of the Replacements and Redd Kross.

The Ramones considered several candidates as Tommy's replacement, including ex-New York Doll Jerry Nolan, Dead Boys member Johnny Blitz, Paul Cook of the now-defunct Sex Pistols, and Clem Burke of the not-yet-famous Blondie. But the job went to Marc Bell of Sire labelmates Richard Hell and the Voidoids. Bell had previously played with the early 1970s proto-heavy metal trio Dust and transsexual punk icon Wayne County.

Bell was rechristened Marky Ramone, and given three weeks to learn the band's new songs in time to begin work on their fourth LP *Road to Ruin* on May 31. He made his live debut as a Ramone less than a month later.

The change in drummers wasn't the only new development on *Road to Ruin*. The album, co-produced by Tommy and Ed Stasium, and released in October 1978, introduced some notable variations into the band's established formula, including such unexpected stylistic flourishes as guitar solos (most of them provided by Stasium), acoustic rhythm guitars, an honest-to-goodness ballad, and—perhaps most shockingly—two songs that ran longer than three minutes.

Such alterations may not seem earth-shaking in retrospect. But at the time they were debated at length by fans and critics, who agonized over whether the band was expanding its range or merely sacrificing its original edge. But despite its stronger emphasis on the band's pop elements, *Road to Ruin*—the first Ramones album to run longer than thirty minutes—was neither a gratuitous sellout nor a drastic reinvention.

Road to Ruin opened with the uncharacteristically midtempo "I Just Want to Have Something to Do," a tuneful meditation on anomie and ambivalence in which Joey manages to rhyme "Second Avenue" with "chicken vindaloo." Despite the presence of such credible punk raveups as "I Wanted Everything," "Bad Brain," and "I'm Against It," *Road to Ruin's* most memorable tracks were the ones that diverged farthest from the band's early sound, including the heartbreaking ballad "Questioningly," the twangy, countryish "Don't Come Close," the cranky ballad "I Don't Want You," and a heartfelt reading of the Searchers' British Invasion-era jangle-pop classic "Needles and Pins."

But *Road to Ruin's* most enduring track was the hyper-catchy "I Wanna Be Sedated," which invoked the physical and mental stresses of the band's hard-touring lifestyle. Its lyrics were inspired by a now-legendary mishap prior to a show at Passaic, New Jersey's Capitol Theater, when a makeshift humidifier exploded backstage, scalding Joey's face and throat. The singer valiantly went through with the show, before being rushed to a hospital emergency room.

Beyond its sound, *Road to Ruin* also sported some noticeably bitter lyrics that seemed to betray the band's commercial frustrations. That harder edge, as opposed to the playful spirit that dominated previous efforts, was noticeable on such tunes as Joey's "I Just Want to Have Something to Do" and Dee Dee's "I Wanted Everything."

Whether or not *Road to Ruin*'s sonic alterations had been a blatant bid for mainstream acceptance, the album failed to expand the Ramones' U.S. audience. The band would soldier on, but *Road to Ruin*'s disappointing commercial showing had a negative effect on morale, and that sense of frustration would fester for years to come. The Ramones would spend much of the next two decades attempting, with varying degrees of success, to recapture their original inspiration on record.

The Ramones' commercial status in America was such that the double concert LP *It's Alive*, which appeared overseas in April 1979, didn't even receive a Stateside release at the time (it would finally be issued in the United States in 1995).

Despite being a challenge for American fans to obtain, *It's Alive* was a definitive document, capturing the band at its peak as both a live act and a cultural phenomenon. The breakneck twenty-eight-song set offered an accurate representation of the band's exhausting live shows. *It's Alive* recapitulated most of the highlights from the first three albums, delivering a head-spinning summation of the Ramones' golden age in under an hour.

By now, the Ramones were working with a high-powered booking agency, Premier, which instituted a more strategic touring strategy that would save the band the indignity of opening for arena-rock dinosaurs in front of hostile crowds.

Military-school alumnus Johnny emerged as a prime motivator in the Ramones' transformation into a focused touring machine. If Joey and Dee Dee were the band's main creative forces, Johnny demonstrated an ability to instill discipline—including strict rules forbidding alcohol and drug use prior to shows—that proved invaluable to the Ramones' long-term viability as a live act.

The Ramones' next move was an unlikely stab at big-screen stardom in *Rock 'n' Roll High School*, a low-budget flick produced by veteran B-movie mogul Roger Corman (a fact that was a particular selling point for exploitation-film maven Johnny) and directed by up-and-coming auteur Allan Arkush.

The irreverent comedy had first been envisioned by Corman a few years earlier as *Disco High*, in an effort to exploit the then-current dance craze. The script subsequently went through a series of rewrites, including a heavy-metal variation and versions that would have featured Todd Rundgren or Cheap Trick. But director Arkush was a Ramones fan.

Rock 'n' Roll High School wisely used the Ramones as a quirky plot device, rather than trusting the first-time thespians with substantial amounts of dialogue. The script treated the musicians as iconic anti-heroes, while giving the musicians various bits of comic business that wrung laughs out of their established mythology. The plot, such as it was, involved teenaged Ramones freak and aspiring songwriter Riff Randell (played by perky B-movie icon P.J. Soles), who dreams of meeting the band while doing battle with wrathful, rock-hating

Miss Togar (cult-film veteran Mary Woronov), the new principal of Vince Lombardi High School.

For Ramones fans, though, *Rock 'n' Roll High School's* high point was its climactic concert sequence. Shot at the Roxy in Hollywood, the footage provides a valuable document of the group in its headbanging heyday.

Rock 'n' Roll High School spawned a soundtrack album that included two new Ramones studio tracks, the rousing title number, and the dreamy “I Want You Around” (which appears as part of a comic dream sequence featuring P.J. Soles and the band), plus a medley of five live tunes drawn from the concert scene, and a version of Ritchie Valens’s 1950s classic “Come On, Let’s Go” on which the Ramones back up their Sire Records labelmates the Paley Brothers.

While *Rock 'n' Roll High School* would eventually become a beloved cult item, it wasn’t a box office hit in its original release, and did little to push the Ramones toward household-name status.

UP AGAINST THE WALL OF SOUND

Rock 'n' Roll High School's title song would reappear in a new version on the next Ramones album, *End of the Century*. If *Road to Ruin* had been an attempt to translate the Ramones’ appeal in a manner that would be understandable to a mass audience, *End of the Century* was a high-concept project that must have seemed brilliant on paper yet proved problematic in practice.

Matching the Ramones with legendary producer Phil Spector certainly sounded like a good idea, at first anyway. An eccentric, unpredictable visionary whose legendary Wall of Sound production method had made him rock and roll’s preeminent visionary during the early 1960s, Spector produced many of the timeless girl-group classics that the Ramones revered. And Spector had already proclaimed the Ramones to be his favorite new band, so the match seemed like a natural one.

But the collaboration wasn’t the musical landmark that fans of the Ramones and Spector had hoped. For one thing, the producer was used to working with singers and studio session players, rather than self-contained groups. For another, his meticulous working methods, which involved the layering of multiple layers of instruments and voices, were the antithesis of the Ramones’ stripped-down recording approach. Spector’s painstaking approach proved frustrating for a band that was used to working fast.

Beyond those fundamental differences Spector, once one of America’s most innovative and prolific hit makers, had long ceased to be a major commercial or artistic force. Worse, the always eccentric “tycoon of teen” had become a volatile recluse with a retinue of bodyguards and a fondness for alcohol and firearms.

Although Spector initially expressed enthusiasm about working with the Ramones, the project soon ran into trouble. The recording sessions, by all

accounts, were rocky and fraught with tension, and band members later described feeling as if they were being held prisoner in Spector's L.A. mansion. The producer reportedly pulled a gun on Dee Dee at one point, and forced Johnny to play and replay the opening chord to "Rock 'n' Roll High School" for eight straight hours.

Furthermore, Spector's cluttered arrangements often conflicted with the band's spare sound. And his focus on Joey's vocals—on such tracks as a gloppy, string-drenched remake of Spector's 1964 Ronettes classic "Baby I Love You"—stirred resentment from other members. Spector's obsessive perfectionism assured that the project would be considerably more costly than any of the Ramones' prior releases, which had all been recorded efficiently and inexpensively.

Despite its troubled birth cycle, *End of the Century* boasted several instances in which Spector's sonic vision meshed comfortably with the Ramones' sound. The majestic opener "Do You Remember Rock 'n' Roll Radio?" was a heartfelt ode to vintage Top Forty radio that struck a winsome balance between the band's raucous drive and Spector's thick production, which augments the foursome with surging organ and saxophones.

Elsewhere on *End of the Century*, the band's efforts to break out of its familiar style yielded some worthy results, including "Danny Says," a poignant ballad about the loneliness of life on the road. Less successful were the rock tunes, whose energy was generally diluted by the gauzy production. Those included the Spectorized "Rock 'n' Roll High School," which paled in comparison to the soundtrack album incarnation; "Chinese Rocks," a Dee Dee-penned heroin anthem that sounded watered down in comparison to the version that Johnny Thunders and the Heartbreakers had recorded earlier; and "The Return of Jackie and Judy," a somewhat redundant sequel to "Judy Is a Punk."

Whether due to Spector's reputation, the Ramones' higher media profile or the advance expectations attached the project, *End of the Century* ended up becoming the highest-charting album of the Ramones' career, peaking at number forty-four in the United States. In England, where the band already had an established commercial track record, they achieved their highest-charting single when "Baby I Love You" reached the Top Ten.

But the apparent commercial momentum failed to pan out, and the band would spend much of the 1980s attempting to recapture their essence, while struggling to compete in a music scene dominated by slick, MTV-friendly pop.

While their record sales would remain unremarkable, the Ramones would continue to be in demand as a live act and maintain a busy international touring schedule for the remainder of their career.

But the Ramones' ongoing failure to gain commercial airplay or score a hit single in their home country—a career necessity in the years before college/alternative radio became a significant force—took a heavy toll on the group's already fragile morale. The situation helped to stir dissension, within the band,

whose fractiousness belied the Ramones' carefully maintained collective facade.

Beyond disagreements over musical direction, the band was plagued by the long-running feud between staunch liberal Joey and Republican control freak Johnny, who reportedly still resented the early decision to have Joey take over lead vocals from Dee Dee. Joey and Johnny's antagonism was amplified when Johnny "stole" Joey's girlfriend Linda, whom Johnny later married. Although they would continue to record and tour together, Joey and Johnny would not speak to each other for extended periods, and their estrangement would never be resolved.

Dee Dee Ramone, meanwhile, had his own issues to contend with. A long-time heroin user, he would struggle with addiction for the rest of his life, with multiple stints in rehab and various drug-related scrapes with the law.

After their unhappy experience with Phil Spector, the Ramones continued to work with outside producers, in the hope of scoring a commercial hit. For 1981's *Pleasant Dreams*, the band recorded with Graham Gouldman, a British Invasion vet who'd written "For Your Love" for the Yardbirds and "Bus Stop" for the Hollies, and subsequently scored hits of his own as a member of quirky 1970s popsters 10cc. Despite Gouldman's power-pop pedigree, and notwithstanding some appealing use of background harmonies, his production pushed *Pleasant Dreams* toward a sterile hard-rock sound. The resulting album was competent but lacking in spark. Its most memorable track was "The KKK Took My Baby Away," which Joey reportedly wrote in response to his disputes with Johnny.

The band would next tap pop veterans Ritchie Cordell and Glen Kolotkin to produce 1983's *Subterranean Jungle*. That album went a long way toward recapturing the heavier elements of the Ramones' sound (with Walter Lure of the Heartbreakers augmenting Johnny on guitar), while steering the band back towards their 1960s pop and bubblegum roots, with some of their catchiest originals in years and appealing covers of the Music Explosion's "Little Bit o' Soul" and the Chambers Brothers' "Time Has Come Today." Other highlights included "Psycho Therapy," which was accompanied by a promo video that MTV refused to play it until some of its more extreme imagery was removed.

Subterranean Jungle also saw another change in the Ramones' drum seat. Marky Ramone was fired near the end of recording due to his alcoholism, and was replaced on the remaining sessions by Heartbreakers drummer Billy Rogers. After the album's completion, the band hired a longer-term replacement in Richard Reinhardt, formerly of New York's Velvetten, who was initially credited as Richie Beau before graduating to billing as Richie Ramone.

In August 1983, the band received some unwanted headlines after Johnny was either attacked by or got into a fight with punk musician Seth Macklin. The incident left him critically injured with a fractured skull, forcing him to undergo emergency brain surgery. Despite the seriousness of his injuries,

Johnny was back in action within a few months, and his resilience would be referenced in the title of the Ramones' 1984 album *Too Tough to Die*.

While *Subterranean Jungle* had been an encouraging step in the right direction, it was *Too Tough to Die* that restored the Ramones to something resembling their original glory. With Tommy Ramone/Erdelyi and Ed Stasium returning as producers, the album was, to some degree, the Ramones' response to America's burgeoning hard-core punk scene, and did much to restore the band's musical credibility.

With *Subterranean Jungle*'s booming guitar riffs pared down to punk size and the beat ratcheted back up to supersonic speed, *Too Tough to Die* reclaimed the Ramones' original values of energy, catchiness, and brevity without resorting to retro pandering. It also featured the band's strongest set of songs since *Rocket to Russia*, with Dee Dee (who wrote or co-wrote nine of the album's thirteen songs) demonstrating a thoughtful, introspective edge on "I'm Not Afraid of Life" and an apocalyptic social conscience on "Planet Earth 1988." In a nod to the Ramones-influenced hard-core movement that had gained momentum in the 1980s, Dee Dee stepped up to the mic to lend his raw vocal stylings to "Endless Vacation" and "Wart Hog"; Sire chose not to include the latter song's drug-inspired lyrics on the album's lyric sheet.

"Howling at the Moon," produced by Dave Stewart of British hit makers Eurythmics, was a surprisingly effective one-off foray into slick synth-pop, with an unshakable sha-la-la chorus and urban Robin Hood lyrics.

Too Tough to Die found the Ramones reasserting their relevance and reclaiming their legacy. But the artistic resurgence would be short-lived, and the long-term renaissance that *Too Tough to Die* seemed to signal would never materialize.

The topical direction that had surfaced on *Too Tough to Die* continued with "Bonzo Goes to Bitburg," released overseas as a free-standing single in 1985. Recorded by Joey, Dee Dee, and ex-Plasmatics member Jean Beauvoir, the song was Joey's outraged response to President Ronald Reagan's controversial visit to a Nazi cemetery in Germany. Beyond its lyrical message, "Bonzo Goes to Bitburg" was a near-perfect Ramones single, with a big, soaring chorus buoyed by Spectroesque backing vocals.

Steven Van Zandt, former Bruce Springsteen guitarist and Beauvoir's sometime boss in Little Steven and the Disciples of Soul, was impressed enough by "Bonzo" to invite Joey to participate in Van Zandt's all-star anti-apartheid single "Sun City," released under the Artists United Against Apartheid. Fittingly, Joey's vocal contribution was a line that once again took Ronald Reagan's policies to task.

By the time "Bonzo Goes to Bitburg" turned up on the Ramones' 1986 release *Animal Boy*, it had been innocuously retitled "My Brain Is Hanging Upside Down," presumably in deference to Reagan admirer Johnny's political leanings. That compromise was indicative of the album's indecisive atmosphere. Rather than continue with *Too Tough to Die*'s punchy sound or

“Bonzo Goes to Bitburg”’s anthemic approach, *Animal Boy* (produced by Beauvoir) unwisely attempted to commercialize the band’s sound with synthesizers and 1980s production frills.

Like all of the Ramones’ lesser albums, *Animal Boy* had its moments, including the opening track “Somebody Put Something in My Drink,” Richie’s second Ramones composition. The song was inspired by an incident in which a stranger slipped LSD into the drummer’s gin and tonic, which resulted in Reinhardt being dragged away in a straitjacket. Other standouts were “She Belongs to Me,” a surprisingly sweet, sincere ballad co-written by Dee Dee and Beauvoir, and the surging, yearning anthem “Something to Believe In,” which spawned a clever video spoofing telethons and featuring an assortment of guest celebrities.

Nineteen eighty-seven’s *Halfway to Sanity* boasted a tougher sound and a more confident overall vibe, thanks in part to new producer (and guest guitarist) Daniel Rey, who’d been a member of the CBGB punk combo Shrapnel. Dee Dee once again provided some strong songwriting, including “I Wanna Live” and “Garden of Serenity,” on which the bassist channeled his personal dilemmas into compellingly crafted songs.

After completing work on *Halfway to Sanity*, Richie Ramone (who contributed two compositions to the album) abruptly quit following a salary dispute. Blondie’s Clem Burke, temporarily renamed Elvis Ramone, stepped in for a couple of shows, before Marky Ramone, now clean and sober, returned to the Ramones’ drum seat, where he would remain for the remainder of the band’s existence.

While the Ramones’ U.S. record sales remained unspectacular, the 1988 release of the career retrospective *Ramones Mania* gave some indication of a growing public awareness of the band’s historical importance. The compilation became the first Ramones album to be certified gold in the United States during the group’s lifetime.

Meanwhile, Dee Dee, having been introduced to hip-hop during a recent stay in rehab, took the unexpected step of attempting to launch a solo career as a rapper. After releasing the half-baked solo rap-punk single “Funky Man,” he renamed himself Dee Dee King and released the full-length *Standing in the Spotlight*. Despite occasional flashes of the artist’s customary lyrical wit, the album was dominated by weak rhymes, perfunctory music tracks and Dee Dee’s gravelly, awkward delivery. In a marketplace in which white teenagers had yet to embrace hip-hop in large numbers, *Standing in the Spotlight* barely registered, and now stands mainly as a souvenir of one of rock’s least rewarding identity crises.

Another boost in the Ramones’ notoriety came through their contribution of the Dee Dee/Daniel Rey–penned title song to the 1989 horror film *Pet Semetary*, based on the best-selling novel by avowed Ramones fan Stephen King. The track won a fair amount of airplay, but the increasingly unstable band wasn’t in much a position to capitalize on the attention.

Although disliked by some of the band's longtime fans, "Pet Semetary" was one of the brighter spots on 1989's patchy *Brain Drain*. Aside from the unironically idealistic "I Believe in Miracles" and the bittersweet holiday tune "Merry Christmas (I Don't Want to Fight Tonight)," the album, produced by punk/funk/jazz innovator Bill Laswell, was weighed down by uninspired material and rote performances.

MANIA AND RESPECT

In addition to being the Ramones' final studio album for Sire Records, *Brain Drain* was also their last to feature Dee Dee Ramone, the band's most prolific songwriter (he'd written or co-written half of *Brain Drain's* twelve songs). Dee Dee—who at the time had been having substantial success in keeping his drug demons at bay—quit in July 1989, just two months after *Brain Drain's* release.

Dee Dee was replaced by C.J. Ramone, aka Christopher John Ward, a Long Islander who'd recorded two albums as a member of the heavy metal band Axe Attack before embracing punk. At the time he got the Ramones gig, he was AWOL from the marines, and when he attempted to resolve his discharge status so he could join the band on tour, he found himself tossed into a military brig in Quantico, Virginia. He was released in time to play his first Ramones gig in September—at 8 in the morning—on the Jerry Lewis muscular dystrophy telethon.

C.J. made his Ramones recording debut with the 1991 concert disc *Loco Live*. In contrast to the essential *It's Alive*, the thirty-two-song *Loco Live* (featuring amusing liner notes by old friend Debbie Harry of Blondie) was more workmanlike than inspired. But it offered an accurate reflection of the solid international touring machine that the Ramones had become in the years since.

Loco Live also demonstrated how smoothly C.J. had stepped into the lineup, and how the young bassist—who'd yet to hit puberty when the Ramones released their debut album—had given the band a new shot of enthusiasm and adrenaline. Not only was his playing as solid as his predecessor's; he also proved himself adept at taking over Dee Dee's trademark count-offs.

Dee Dee would continue to battle addiction in his post-Ramones life, while recording and performing with a series of short-lived bands, including the Ramainz, which also included C.J. and Marky and specialized in performing the songs Dee Dee had written for the Ramones. In 1990, he made the news again when he was busted, along with twenty-five others, in a police drug raid in Manhattan's Washington Square Park—for buying a small amount of marijuana, of all things.

Dee Dee later wrote a pair of autobiographies, *Poison Heart: Surviving the Ramones* (aka *Lobotomy*) and *Legend of a Rock Star*, which featured

disarmingly forthright accounts of his experiences with addiction and mental illness, as well as the Ramones' turbulent inner workings. He also wrote a novel, *Chelsea Horror Hotel*, a fanciful punk ghost story featuring guest appearances by the ghosts of his departed pals Sid Vicious, Johnny Thunders, and Stiv Bators.

The Ramones continued to maintain an active touring schedule into the 1990s, while continuing to release new product on Radioactive, a new label run by Gary Kurfirst, who also managed Talking Heads and replaced Danny Fields as the Ramones' manager in the early 1980s.

When the Ramones weren't on the road, Joey was making the most of his status as beloved elder statesman of Manhattan's downtown rock and roll scene, promoting live shows and championing various young bands. The singer—who achieved sobriety in 1990—also became active in a variety of progressive causes, speaking out and playing benefit shows on behalf of environmental, AIDS, homelessness, and animal rights groups, and campaigning against censorship of rock lyrics.

The Ramones didn't release another new album until 1992's *Mondo Bizarro*, by which time some major changes had occurred in the rock landscape. Nirvana's massive commercial success—exactly the sort of breakthrough that had eluded the Ramones for their entire career—had established the prospect of crossing over from the hip underground to mass commercial success as a realistic possibility. In this atmosphere, the Ramones were acknowledged as respected innovators, building a renewed sense of excitement around their next release.

Although he was no longer performing with the Ramones, Dee Dee's presence was felt strongly on *Mondo Bizarro*, to which he contributed three new songs. The project once again reunited the band with producer Ed Stasium, who didn't attempt to recapture their original punk style or pander to the emerging alt-rock aesthetic. Instead, he gave the album a big, spacious sound that was well suited to the drama of the songs and the band's performances, as well as Joey's reinvigorated singing.

Although relatively slick-sounding by Ramones standards, *Mondo Bizarro* recaptured the trademark blend of riffs, hooks, and humor that first endeared the band to fans. While longtime admirers may have been put off by guest guitarist Vernon Reid's flashy pyrotechnics on "Cabbies on Crack," one couldn't help but embrace the song's nightmarish energy. Dee Dee's songs, "Strength to Endure," "Main Man," and especially "Poison Heart," demonstrated his ability to wring affecting songcraft out of his own harsh personal experience. "Strength to Endure" featured C.J. on lead vocal, giving the track a certain passing-of-the-baton momentousness.

Despite the changes in the alt-rock marketplace, *Mondo Bizarro* once again failed to change the band's commercial fortunes in the U.S., although it was highly successful internationally. But by the early 1990s, it was clear that the Ramones had achieved a level of public recognition that transcended their

record sales. One measure was the band's appearance, in animated form, on *The Simpsons*, performing a punk rendition of "Happy Birthday" to Homer Simpsons villainous boss Mr. Burns.

Mondo Bizarro's persuasive reading of the Doors' "Take It as It Comes" set the stage for 1993's all-covers *Acid Eaters*. An unmistakable retreat, but a reasonably enjoyable one, the album found the Ramones interpreting a dozen garage-rock and psychedelic nuggets, with a playful looseness that the band hadn't shown on record in quite a while. While most of the song choices—from such sources as the Rolling Stones, the Who, the Animals, the Troggs, Love, Jefferson Airplane, the Seeds, and Jan and Dean—weren't particularly adventurous, the band brought some unexpected twists to some of the more unexpected material, including a touching interpretation of Creedence Clearwater Revival's "Have You Ever Seen the Rain" and a punked-out take on Bob Dylan's "My Back Pages."

By the mid-1990s, America's mainstream rock audience was finally beginning to embrace punk rock in large numbers—or least a watered-down, commercialized variation of punk, as practiced by such younger acts as Green Day, the Offspring, and Rancid. Although those bands were pale echoes of the first-generation punk acts that they revered, their success in popularizing punk with younger listeners brought a new wave of recognition and acknowledgment for the Ramones' pioneering contributions.

"The '80s were a lonely time for us," said Johnny. "We were out there by ourselves. When the '90s came, you had this movement of punk bands again."⁶

So there was some cruel irony in the fact that this new outpouring of high-profile respect coincided with the Ramones' decision to call it quits. In 1995, they released the pointedly titled *¡Adios Amigos!*, announcing that they'd break up if the album didn't sell in massive quantities.

¡Adios Amigos! was an inconsistent but respectable effort, combining some memorable tracks with some blatantly derivative material recycling elements from their back catalog. More notable was the quality of the band's performances, which carried a level of intensity that suited the occasion. Much of the standout songwriting was provided by the not-quite-departed Dee Dee, who contributed "Makin' Monsters for My Friends" and "It's Not for Me to Know," plus "The Crusher," which had previously appeared in radically different form on the ill-fated Dee Dee King album. Joey's "She Talks to Rainbows" was a haunting ballad that showcased the singer's underappreciated skills as a pop craftsman, while the band turned Tom Waits's "I Don't Want to Grow Up" into a joyous, defiant statement.

When *¡Adios Amigos!* ended up spending an anticlimactic two weeks on the charts, the Ramones spent most of the second half of 1995 on what was billed as their official farewell tour. Although they'd planned to split up for good when that tour ended, an offer from the trend-setting traveling alt-rock festival Lollapalooza resulted in the Ramones performing on the sixth Lollapalooza tour in the summer of 1996.

The Ramones played their final show—number 2,263, by the band's count—at the Palace in Los Angeles on August 6, 1996. The group was joined on stage by various guests, including Pearl Jam's Eddie Vedder, Lemmy Kilmister of Motorhead, Chris Cornell of Soundgarden, and Rancid members Tim Armstrong and Lars Frederikson, as well as Dee Dee Ramone, who turned up to sing (and miss two verses of) his own "Love Kills."

Nineteen ninety-six saw the release *Greatest Hits Live*, a solid but somewhat redundant live disc recorded that February at a New York show, augmented by a pair of studio outtakes including the band's own version of Motorhead's tribute tune "R.A.M.O.N.E.S." The Ramones' extended good-bye continued the following year with the release of another live set, *We're Outta Here!*, recorded at their final show in L.A.

On July 20, 1999, Joey, Johnny, Dee Dee, Tommy, Marky, and C.J. convened at Manhattan's Virgin Megastore for an autograph signing to promote Rhino Records' two-CD Ramones anthology *Hey! Ho! Let's Go*. It would be the last time Joey would appear in public with any of his ex-bandmates. Having been diagnosed with lymphoma in 1995, he succumbed to the illness on April 15, 2001, at the age of forty-nine.

Joey Ramone's long-in-the-works solo effort, *Don't Worry About Me*, was released the following February. Recorded with, and completed by, frequent Ramones producer Daniel Rey, the album spotlighted Joey's skill at writing simple but effective pop tunes, while demonstrating how expressive his trademark whine could be. "Maria Bartiromo," named after the cable-news financial reporter, was inspired by Joey's late-blooming interest in the stock market, while "I Got Knocked Down" makes poignant reference to the singer's illness. *Don't Worry About Me* also showcased Joey's ear for outside material with amped-up reworkings of the bucolic Louis Armstrong pop standard "What a Wonderful World" and the Stooges' "1969."

It's a cruel irony that Joey, who'd always longed to see his band win recognition and respect, wasn't around to enjoy the honor when the Ramones were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in March 2002.

On June 5, less than three months after the band's induction, Dee Dee Ramone was found dead of a heroin overdose in his Hollywood home. He'd wrestled with drug addiction for most of his adult life, but never stopped making music.

A little more than two years after that, on September 15, 2004, Johnny Ramone died of prostate cancer, also in his adopted hometown of Los Angeles. Unlike his longtime bandmates, Johnny had pledged to retire from music after the Ramones' dissolution, reasoning that nothing he could ever do would be better.

Johnny's death came just as the Ramones were receiving another wave of recognition, thanks to the documentary *End of the Century: The Story of the Ramones*. The film was powerful testament to the band's spirit and influence, as well as a warts-and-all account of their troubled interpersonal relations.

Johnny, for instance, admits that he never called Joey during the singer's illness, but adds that he was depressed for weeks after the singer's death. (Actually, the guitarist kept tabs on the singer's condition through regular calls to Arturo Vega, who had remained on good terms with both.)

Also released at around the same time was *Hey Is Dee Dee Home*, an hour-long tribute by low-budget documentarian Lech Kowalski. Consisting almost entirely of interview footage that Kowalski shot with Dee Dee in 1992 for Kowalski's Johnny Thunders documentary *Born to Lose*, the film was a virtual monologue that provided a fascinating insight into Dee Dee's troubled life and times.

That three of the Ramones' four founding members passed away at a time when the band was finally receiving large-scale recognition is all too consistent with the bad timing that plagued the group during its existence. At the time of this writing, the Ramones' level of fame is, arguably, higher than it was at any time during the band's existence. Their vintage songs have appeared in TV ads for cars, soft drinks, cell phones, and athletic wear. Sales of Ramones merchandise—including the famous “presidential seal” T-shirt, which has been spotted on countless celebrities in the years since the band's demise—grow annually.

The Ramones' recorded legacy continues to be discovered by new generations of fans, thanks to a series of reissues and compilations on the Rhino label, the most recent being the lavish 2005 box set *Weird Tales of the Ramones*, packaged, appropriately enough, in a giant mock comic book. And their musical influence lives on in multiple generations of punk combos, several of whom have released song-for-song remakes of classic Ramones albums.

Once reviled by many mainstream critics, the Ramones are now routinely honored whenever rock magazines print surveys of rock's greatest songs and/or albums. In 2002 and 2004, respectively, *Spin* and *Rolling Stone* both voted the Ramones the second greatest rock and roll band of all time, behind the Beatles.

Although three of the founding members are no longer around to enjoy the honor, history has caught up with the Ramones and vindicated their musical crusade. The band that fought so long and hard to win respect and find an audience is now heard and loved by fans around the world. And the changes that the Ramones wrought upon rock and roll are now deeply woven into rock and roll's fabric.

It's been said that the Ramones saved rock and roll by making it fun again, and that's as good an epitaph as any.

TIMELINE

March 30, 1974

The Ramones make their public debut in front of a crowd of friends at Performance Studio in Manhattan.

August 16, 1974

The Ramones perform the first of numerous shows at the Bowery club CBGB.

April 16, 1976

The Ramones' self-titled first album, recorded at a cost of \$6,000, is released.

July 4, 1976

The Ramones celebrate the U.S. Bicentennial with the first show of their first British tour, at London's Roundhouse. The show, and the tour, will prove to be significant events in launching the U.K. punk movement.

November 26, 1977

The Ramones' third album *Rocket to Russia*, enters the *Billboard* album chart, where it will peak at number forty-nine. The album also spawns three Top 100 singles: "Sheena Is a Punk Rocker," "Rockaway Beach," and "Do You Wanna Dance."

December 31, 1977

The Ramones perform on at London's Rainbow Theatre. The show will be captured for posterity on the double album *It's Alive*.

April 25, 1979

Rock 'n' Roll High School, the Ramones' movie debut, premieres in Los Angeles.

May 1, 1979

The Ramones begin recording *End of the Century* with legendary producer Phil Spector.

January 26, 1980

The Ramones' Spector-produced remake of the Ronettes' "Baby I Love You" enters the British singles chart, where it will eventually reach number eight, becoming the biggest single of the band's career.

November 3, 1984

Too Tough to Die, which reunites the Ramones with co-producers Tommy Erdelyi and Ed Stasium, is released and widely acclaimed as the band's best work in years.

July 22, 1995

The Ramones release their final studio album *¡Adios Amigos!*.

August 6, 1996

The Ramones perform their final concert in Los Angeles.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Ramones, 1976

Leave Home, 1977

Rocket to Russia, 1977

Road to Ruin, 1978

End of the Century, 1980

Too Tough to Die, 1984

Hey! Ho! Let's Go! Anthology, 1999

Weird Tales of the Ramones, 2005

NOTES

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2. Dr. Donna Gaines, Rock and Roll Hall Of Fame 2002 Induction Essay for the Ramones; available online at www.kauhajoki.fi/~jplaitio/halloffame.html.
3. Bessman, p. 5.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 96.
6. Bill Werde, "Punks in the Hall: The Ramones and Talking Heads Battle Their Way from CBGB to Cleveland," *Village Voice*, March 13–19, 2002; available online at www.villagevoice.com/issues/0211/werde.php.

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U2

Susan Godwin

BOYS TO MEN

When they first appeared on the international musical landscape at the dawn of the 1980s, Ireland's U2 quickly established themselves as standing apart from the flood of eager young bands from the British Isles. Even when they were little-known newcomers, it was always clear that the Dublin quartet had big goals—not so much a desire for success and stardom as a deep-rooted need to express themselves and communicate with listeners on a grand scale. From the start, U2 was determined to be an *important* band.

Beginning as a scrappy do-it-yourself combo with a messianic streak, U2—frontman Bono, guitarist the Edge, bassist Adam Clayton, and drummer Larry Mullen Jr.—managed to maintain their grassroots appeal even after becoming one of the world's biggest rock acts, avoiding the standard rock trappings of drugs, sex, and scandal in the process.

The band's missionary zeal was initially manifested in a sweeping signature sound that merged punk's electric energy with an epic sense of drama, along with an idealistic lyrical sensibility that translated personal and spiritual journeys into compelling songcraft. The Edge built complex webs of sound over the muscular drive of the Clayton/Mullen rhythm section. In lead singer/lyricist

Bono, U2 possessed a frontman with a knack for grand gestures that played better in arenas than small clubs, and whose questing, idealistic nature was matched by a fiery sense of oratory.

While their fundamental earnestness opened U2 up to skepticism and ridicule, it also allowed them to forge a durable bond with fans, who maintained a deep emotional investment in the group even after it achieved superstar status. U2 believed deeply in rock's potential for internal and external revolution, and believed so deeply that they didn't care if doing so made them appear foolish.

Beyond their stature as a musical institution, U2 gained an unprecedented level of influence beyond the entertainment industry, thanks to the band's activism on behalf of a variety of causes championing social and economic justice. The loquacious Bono, in particular, emerged as a figure of genuine clout on the international political stage, using his public profile and personal powers of persuasion to gain access to the corridors of political power and exercise a benign influence upon world events.

In the 1980s, U2 built a dedicated audience through constant touring and a string of acclaimed releases. Unlike many of their contemporaries, the band was able to sustain their popularity in the decades to come, reinventing themselves as postmodern, self-consciously ironic state-of-the-art pop experimentalists.

All the while, U2 has seemingly reveled in its own contradictions, being openly religious in the secular world of rock, leavening their potential for pomposity via a self-deprecating sense of humor, and contributing their time and energy to numerous charitable causes while remaining unapologetically commercial.

U2's four members first came together in the autumn of 1976, while punk rock was still experiencing its birth pangs in New York and London, and the unruly new sound was beginning to filter into Dublin. Larry Mullen Jr., looking for others to form a band, posted a notice on a bulletin board at Dublin's Mount Temple comprehensive school, which had opened four years earlier as Dublin's first co-educational, non-denominational school. The respondents to Mullen's posting included Paul Hewson, David Evans, and Adam Clayton.

Although Clayton had briefly played in a band before coming to Mount Temple and Mullen had racked up some early touring experience drumming in a brass band comprised of local postal workers, the teenagers shared a general lack of musical experience. Despite their limited technical skills, the new bandmates possessed prodigious amounts of energy, enthusiasm, and drive—qualities that were arguably more essential in the punk-fueled atmosphere of the time.

Initially naming themselves Feedback and playing cover versions of Rolling Stones and David Bowie tunes, they soon changed their moniker to the Hype and began performing original compositions. The group initially included a fifth member, Evans's younger brother Dick, on guitar.

The musicians were also part of a larger social circle of independent-thinking, musically inclined local nonconformists. The self-styled community dubbed itself the Village, and its members were assigned offbeat nicknames based on their individual characteristics. Paul Hewson acquired his eventual stage name Bono Vox—pidgin Latin for “good voice”—after the phrase was spotted in a local advertisement for hearing aids. The quietly intense Dave Evans, meanwhile, was renamed the Edge, in recognition of his sharp mind and facial features.

The Village would soon spawn another band, the confrontational art-goth ensemble the Virgin Prunes, fronted by Villager Gavin Friday and featuring Dick Evans on guitar, along with the Edge, Clayton, and Mullen, who moonlighted with the Virgin Prunes on their early live performances.

Early on, Bono, the Edge, and Mullen, along with several other Village and Virgin Prunes members, became members of Shalom, a sect of Charismatic Christianity. Although the association with Shalom would eventually fracture when the sect’s leaders expressed disapproval of the musicians’ rock lifestyles, their embrace of Christianity would exercise a pivotal influence upon U2’s attitude and songwriting. U2’s members, however, would resist discussing their faith in public until they had two albums under their belts.

In 1978, Clayton, who’d graduated from school a year earlier than his bandmates, became the Hype’s de facto manager, and took on the task of forging contacts with various players in the insular Irish rock scene, in order to solicit career advice. Among those with whom the bassist finagled contact were such local luminaries as Boomtown Rats guitarist Gerry Cott, influential Dublin radio DJ Dave Fanning, and Thin Lizzy leader and Irish rock legend Phil Lynott.

One of those whom Clayton contacted was Steve Averill, aka Steve Rapid, lead singer of noted Irish punk combo the Radiators. Averill, who held down a day job with one of Dublin’s leading advertising agencies, suggested that the Hype’s name lacked subtlety and that the quartet should find a name that wouldn’t pin them down to a specific idea or image. A few days later, Averill suggested U2 as a possible new handle.

In addition to referring to the infamous American spy plane that had set off a Cold War crisis after it was shot down over the Soviet Union in 1960, the group’s new name was both a subtle double entendre and a snappy two-letter, two-syllable word that looked good in print and rolled off the tongue.

The fledgling combo achieved its first significant career break in early 1978, when they won a talent contest co-sponsored by Harp Lager and the *Evening Press* newspaper. In addition to a £500 cash prize, U2 won the opportunity to cut some demo tracks in CBS Records’ Dublin studios. But the session, the quartet’s first attempt at studio recording, was a disappointment, with the underprepared neophytes only managing to lay down rough versions of three of their original tunes before time ran out.

Another player in the local rock community who received a call from Adam Clayton was Paul McGuinness. The artist manager and sometime filmmaker

had been around the long enough to develop some definite ideas about how a homegrown baby band could sidestep the limitations of the small-time Dublin scene to achieve international success, and he was keen to find a young Combo to which he could apply those strategies. After seeing U2 play, he was intrigued enough to offer to work with them.

In November 1978, U2 recorded its first proper demo, with production help from McGuinness's friend Barry Devlin, a member of the revered Irish folk-rock band Horslips. The sessions produced demo versions of three early U2 originals, "Street Mission," "Shadows and Tall Trees," and "The Fool." Devlin also offered a useful bit of advice—that the band should avoid future tensions by sharing their songwriting credits and song publishing collectively.

Despite their expanding musical arsenal and their new manager's music-industry clout, the fledgling foursome initially had little success getting their career off the ground. With no interest from any of the English labels that McGuinness had approached with the demo tape, the band struck a deal with the Irish arm of CBS Records. That arrangement applied to Ireland only, allowing McGuinness to continue to seek an international deal with another company.

In October 1979, CBS released the three-song single *U2Three*, encompassing the A-side "Out of Control," along with "Boy-Girl" and "Stories for Boys" on the flip. Prior to its release, the band members had appeared on influential local DJ Dave Fanning's show and invited listeners to vote to choose the disc's A-side—a clever promotional gimmick that was an early indication of the marketing savvy that the band and McGuinness would employ to facilitate U2's rise.

The debut single was originally released in a numbered limited edition of 1,000—just enough copies to create a hit on the Irish charts, the better to boost McGuinness's sales pitch to labels in London. The single—which offered a sonic snapshot of the band at a formative yet compelling stage—quickly sold out and established the quartet as local heroes. Their status was further demonstrated in January 1980, when U2 finished in first place in five categories of the Irish music paper *Hot Press's* annual readers' poll. Early in 1980, U2 scored another Irish hit with their second CBS single, "Another Day."

But the group's success at home was slow to develop into wider career momentum. Their initial forays to London for live performances gained little public or media attention. A frustrated Paul McGuinness took the risky step of setting up a high-profile concert at Dublin's 2,000-capacity National Boxing Stadium. That brash move ultimately paid off when the band, playing in front of a crowd comprised largely of friends and invited guests, rose to the occasion and played an inspired set that led Bill Stewart, a visiting A&R man from Island Records' London office, to offer a recording deal on the spot.

English/Jamaican entrepreneur Chris Blackwell had founded Island as an independent imprint in the 1960s, and in the years since, the company had earned a reputation as one of England's most innovative, artist-friendly labels.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the company maintained a niche on rock's cutting edge by signing such iconoclastic acts as Traffic, Cat Stevens, Fairport Convention, Nick Drake, and Mott the Hoople. In the 1970s, Island had been instrumental in introducing reggae to British and American audiences, and in engineering Bob Marley's rise to international stardom.

IN LOVE AND WAR

May 1980 saw the release of U2's first Island single, "11 O'Clock Tick Tock," produced by Martin Hannett, best known for his innovative work with Joy Division and the roster of the iconoclastic Factory label. The single set the stage for the November release of U2's debut LP, *Boy*.

Hannett had originally been slated to produce *Boy*, but dropped out of the project after Joy Division's lead singer Ian Curtis committed suicide. Instead, U2 recorded the album with Steve Lillywhite, a young studio veteran whose résumé included significant releases by such British new wave acts as XTC, Ultravox, and Siouxsie and the Banshees. Lillywhite proved to be an ideal collaborator, possessing both the technical skills to focus the band's budding sound and the psychological insight to coax confident, swaggering performances out of the ambitious yet inexperienced players.

Musically, *Boy* combined infectious energy and atmospheric textures with a sweeping, epic sound that incorporated most of the elements that would soon make U2 one of the world's most popular rock acts. Bono's yearning voice soared forcefully over the Edge's ringing, effects-laden guitars, anchored by Clayton's propulsive bass and Mullen's spare, driving drumming.

Beyond its dynamic sound, *Boy* was notable for Bono's evocative, impressionistic lyrics—many of which were still being written and reworked during the recording sessions. The album's title gave some hint of the songs' thematic concerns, reflecting the wonder, dread, and confusion of adolescence and young adulthood. Appropriately, *Boy*'s most appealing quality was its consistent sense of youthful energy and optimism, along with an open-hearted idealism that distinguished U2 from their prematurely jaded contemporaries.

U2's fresh-faced appeal was encapsulated neatly on *Boy*'s lead-off track and first single, the rousing, insistent "I Will Follow." The song quickly put the band on the map in America, where it gained substantial album-rock radio exposure as well as play in the rock dance clubs that had begun to sprout up in various U.S. cities.

Boy's original cover art, designed by old friend Steve Averill, featured a stark portrait of six-year-old Peter Rowan. Rowan, whose face had previously been featured on the sleeve of the U2 *Three* single, was the brother of Virgin Prunes members Derek "Guggi" Rowan and Trevor "Strongman" Rowan, whose family lived across the street from Bono. Peter's innocent features were an apt personification of the band's meditations on the challenges of youth.

It was a daring move for U2 to package its debut album with a front cover that neither mentioned the band's name nor showed the faces of the band members. Beyond that, *Boy's* packaging received some unexpected criticism when some observers expressed concern that the image of the shirtless, vulnerable-looking Rowan promoted pedophilia. While those charges may not have had much merit, they may have had some influence on the decision of Warner Bros. Records, which distributed Island Records in the United States, to issue *Boy's* American edition with different cover art.

Boy instantly drew raves in the English music press, winning laudatory comparisons with such seminal acts as the Velvet Underground, Patti Smith, and Roxy Music. Meanwhile, U2 made some crucial early inroads in the United States. In the days before MTV and college radio emerged as promotional vehicles, the eager quartet—with the support of the prestigious booking agency Premier Talent—tirelessly toured the Stateside club circuit, playing all manner of thankless gigs, at one point sharing the bill with a wet T-shirt contest.

DIY: Rock from the American Eighties Underground

While MTV was becoming a dominant force in the mainstream of popular music, a new scene was coalescing in basements, practice rooms, and small clubs around the country. DIY (Do It Yourself) became the short hand appellation for a thriving underground scene of self-produced recordings, independent distribution, fanzines, and venues.

West Coast "hard-core" punk rock was one important segment of this scene, and Black Flag was its leading exponent. The group came together not in Hollywood but in such suburban towns as Hermosa Beach, south of Los Angeles. L.A. bands like X and the Blasters had roots in earlier styles of music, but the essence of Black Flag was a fury born of frustration and male aggression. Under the iron-willed leadership of guitarist Greg Ginn, the band's sound incorporated elements of heavy metal, prog-rock, and avant-garde jazz while its muscular lead singer, Henry Rollins, became a hard-core icon.

The anarchic ferocity of the music found its real-life equivalent in the riotous, stage-diving behavior of Black Flag's fans, which led in turn to the group being harassed by police and banned from many venues. Until Greg Ginn broke up the band in 1986, Black Flag toured relentlessly, even playing fan-promoted gigs in private homes, and issued their recordings through Ginn's own SST Records.

The Replacements were another leading light of the American 1980s underground. The Minneapolis-based quartet, fronted by singer/guitarist Paul Westerberg, started out in 1979 as a thrashing quasi-hard-core band. They gradually evolved into a more melodic but still forceful unit as Westerberg's songwriting drew on pop, rockabilly, and Stones-style hard rock. More accessible and less fearsome than Black Flag, the Replacements became a critics' favorite. After several releases on the independent Twin/Tone imprint, the group released its

major label debut, *Tim*, in 1985. The “Mats,” as they were affectionately known, came close to having an actual hit record in 1989 with “I’ll Be You” (from the album *Don’t Tell a Soul*) but disbanded two years later.

Independent labels thrived on the success of Black Flag, the Replacements, and other not-ready-for-MTV bands. SST, perhaps the most important American indie of the 1980s, released vital early recordings by the Minutemen, Meat Puppets, Sonic Youth, and Hüsker Dü. Slash Records, founded in 1978 as an offshoot of the leading L.A. punk fanzine (also called *Slash*), boasted an eclectic roster that included the Violent Femmes (punk-folk), the Gun Club (punk-blues), and Los Lobos (Chicano folk-rock). Some nominally “indie” imprints functioned as a kind of farm system for major labels, operating on lower budgets and with canny campaigns of artist development. Miles Copeland’s IRS Records partnered first with A&M and later MCA to sign and market the Go-Go’s, the Fleshtones, and Camper Van Beethoven. In 1987, IRS struck gold with the Top Ten album *Document* by R.E.M.—and this Athens, Georgia, quartet went on to become the most popular and long-lived band to emerge from the American DIY underground.

Andy Schwartz

U2 made its New York debut on December 5, 1980—three days before John Lennon’s murder—playing at the East Village club the Ritz. That show found the band, stuck in an ignominious opening slot, winning over an indifferent weeknight crowd and making a strong impression upon the handful of music-industry pros in attendance.

The group’s diligent roadwork and high-energy performances helped to build the beginnings of an enthusiastic American fan base. The grassroots buzz helped to push *Boy* into the lower reaches of the U.S. Top 100 early in 1981.

Although they’d won some acclaim and made some career headway with *Boy*, U2’s relatively modest success contrasted Bono’s somewhat immodest comments to *Rolling Stone* at the time. “Even at this stage, I do feel that we are meant to be one of the great bands,” the singer insisted. “There’s a certain spark, a certain chemistry, that was special about the Stones, the Who and the Beatles, and I think it’s also special about U2.”¹

While such grandiose pronouncements may have seemed presumptuous at the time, history would soon validate the singer’s cockiness.

U2 achieved its first British chart success with “Fire,” a non-album single released in the United Kingdom in June 1981. The song’s mix of personal insights and apocalyptic imagery underlined the Christian references that had begun to attract the notice of some critics. Although the band had yet to publicly address the issue, the fact that three of the four members were Christians was too tempting an angle for the press to ignore.

U2’s spiritual orientation—and the accompanying internal crises that led Bono, the Edge, and Larry to briefly consider retiring from music—was strongly

reflected in the group's sophomore album *October*, produced by Lillywhite and released in November 1981. Indeed, the album's opening track and first single "Gloria" found Bono singing in Latin and offering everything he has, apparently, to God. Meanwhile, "Tomorrow" seems to hint that the Second Coming is imminent.

October largely found the band working in the same musical vein as *Boy*, while introducing some of the atmospheric textures that would soon play a more prominent role in their sound. The album's lyrics had a stream-of-consciousness feel that was partially the result of Bono writing on the run—and, often, in the studio—due to the theft of a notebook containing all of the lyrics he'd been working on, while the band was on tour in America.

Despite the rushed circumstances of its creation, *October* was a slightly larger seller than *Boy* in the United Kingdom, where it reached number eleven on the album chart. It also expanded the band's audience in America, where a tour as opening act for the J. Geils Band—which U2 had reluctantly accepted—turned out to be an unexpected triumph, with the band rising to the occasion and regularly winning over the headliner's audiences. Those modest career strides aside, *October* was more of a holding pattern than a leap forward.

In 1982, the fledgling cable music video channel MTV began to emerge as an influential new force for promoting new artists. U2's promo videos for "I Will Follow" and "Gloria" found their way into MTV's rotation, and this new source of exposure helped to heighten public anticipation for the quartet's third album, *War*, which would become U2's breakthrough on both sides of the Atlantic.

MTV: Music on Television

In August 1981, the arrival of MTV (Music Television) on the American airwaves created a profound change in popular music. A division of Warner Communications, which also owned the Warner Bros., Atlantic, and Elektra record labels, MTV was a cable television network devoted to playing music videos.

Unlike any other TV network or most cable channels, MTV didn't have to pay the cost of producing the bulk of its programming. Instead, nearly all music videos were produced and paid for by record companies and functioned as advertisements for the album from which the song was taken.

Style-conscious English groups were among the earliest and most adept exploiters of MTV. The androgynous look and campy attitude of Culture Club lead singer Boy George, combined with his warm, mellifluous voice, made him a media sensation. In 1982, the reggae-tinged pop song "Do You Really Want to Hurt Me?" became the first of Culture Club's six consecutive U.S. Top Ten singles, each one accompanied by a much-played video. Duran Duran's bland but catchy dance-rock songs worked best as soundtracks to such extravagant clips as "Rio," which set the quintet in a world of luxurious

international travel and unabashed wealth decorated by beautiful women. Beginning in 1983 with their self-titled debut, Duran Duran scored six U.S. platinum or multi-platinum albums and two U.S. number one singles, "The Reflex" and "A View to Kill."

MTV proved indispensable to the career of Madonna, the biggest female pop star of her generation. Beginning in 1984 with her first U.S. number one hit, "Like a Virgin," Madonna enacted a decade-long series of poses, provocations, and image makeovers in the MTV spotlight. Madonna appropriated and personalized images from (among other sources) gay culture and classic Hollywood films in dazzling new small-screen creations that kept the singer one step ahead of her pop-music competitors.

MTV brought forth new behind-the-scenes talent to match the new wave of hit performers. The team of Lol Creme and Kevin Godley directed more than fifty music videos including classic clips by the Police ("Every Breath You Take") and Frankie Goes to Hollywood ("Two Tribes"). Major Hollywood directors were drawn to the music video form. John Landis directed Michael Jackson's fourteen-minute "Thriller" in 1983, a cross between a horror film and a *West Side Story*-style dance production number. In 1987, Martin Scorsese manned the cameras for Jackson's seventeen-minute "Bad," about a high school student who returns to his old neighborhood and falls prey to anti-social influences before all concerned break into another elaborately choreographed dance sequence.

Music video introduced new artists and reinvented familiar ones. Veteran jazz pianist Herbie Hancock had an MTV hit with his award-winning animated video "Rockit," directed by Godley and Creme. The self-mocking iconography of "Sharp Dressed Man" transformed Texas blues-rock trio ZZ Top with the aid of designer sunglasses, customized cars, leggy women, and the band's own impossibly long beards. Painters and sculptors also tried their hand at the new form. Pop Art legend Andy Warhol directed "Hello There" for the Cars; Robert Longo made "The One I Love" with R.E.M. and "Bizarre Love Triangle" with New Order.

Open for business around the clock, MTV became an indispensable tool of music marketing. "On the surface, [videos] advertise a song from a new album we're meant to purchase. But in a deeper and more pervasive sense, the clips are pitching us the personas of the performers. Music videos are crafted to hawk an image, an identity for the artist, which we then 'purchase' by relating to it."¹

A. S.

1. Jim Farber, "MTV: The Revolution Will Be Televised," *Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock & Roll* (New York: Random House, 1992), p. 647.

Released in early 1983, *War*, was both an artistic leap forward and a commercial one. The album featured an updated cover portrait of *Boy*'s cover

model Peter Rowan, whose grave expression gave some hint of the new album's darker lyrical contents.

War's most noticeable difference was the strongly political direction of its lyrics, including the album's most popular tracks "New Year's Day" and "Sunday Bloody Sunday." The former was inspired by the Polish Solidarity Movement, while the latter addressed the long-standing sectarian strife in the band's homeland, but their topical bluntness didn't keep them from becoming hit singles and MTV favorites. Elsewhere, *War* confronted the specter of nuclear war on "Seconds," which featured a rare lead vocal by the Edge, and wrestled with weighty spiritual issues on "Surrender."

Beyond its provocative lyrical themes, *War* boasted a majestic, expansive sound that showed the band playing with more force and focus than ever. The arrangements were expanded by the addition of such outside instruments as electric violin and trumpet, as well as backing vocals by Kid Creole's female vocal trio the Coconuts.

War entered the U.K. charts at number one on St. Patrick's Day 1983, and became the first U2 album to sell over a million copies in America. Its sales success allowed the band to graduate from playing clubs to performing in theater-sized American venues. The move to larger-scale shows was a timely one, since, even at this early stage, U2 had already evolved into a bigger-than-life live act. The band's sound was powerful enough to fill a large venue, while Bono had blossomed into a commanding sense of rock theater, as reflected in such trademark moves as his iconic brandishing of a white flag while performing "Sunday Bloody Sunday"—a bold move that could easily have been awkward and pretentious in other hands.

Bono's penchant for athletic stage antics almost resulted in disaster when, at the massive U.S. festival in California in May 1983, he climbed out on a canopy stretched across the scaffolding six stories above the stage, and the structure came close to giving way under his weight. The incident drew protests from the band's stage crew, resulting in the singer promising to curb his tendency to risk life and limb during shows.

On June 5, 1983, U2 filmed a concert at Colorado's Red Rocks Amphitheater, which spawned a full-length home video and an audio EP, both titled *Under a Blood Red Sky*. Due to the less-than-ideal recording conditions, the live disc actually featured only two tracks from the Red Rocks show, along with material from gigs in Boston and West Germany.

Under a Blood Red Sky entered in the British charts at number two, becoming the biggest selling live recording in U.K. history up until that point. In America, a clip of the band performing "Sunday Bloody Sunday" at Red Rocks—complete with Bono's white-flag march—received heavy MTV airplay and played a key role in establishing U2's public image.

In 1984, U2 launched a record label, Mother Records, distributed by Island. Mother's aim was to give young Irish bands a head start by releasing their first

singles, and then allowing them to move on to sign deals with other companies. The company's discoveries included such soon-to-be-successful bands as Hothouse Flowers and Cactus World News. But the challenges of motivating Island to promote records by artists in which it had no future stake, and the difficulty of getting the busy band members to sign off on Mother's business decisions proved impractical, and the label quietly shut down after a handful of releases.

PRIDE, FIRE, AND LIVE AID

Rather than following *War* with a similar set of socially conscious anthems, U2 took an unexpected, and somewhat riskier, turn on their next studio album. Splitting with original producer Lillywhite, they recorded with the production duo of Brian Eno, the former Roxy Music keyboardist who'd become both an influential solo artist as well as a producer for the likes of David Bowie and Talking Heads; and Canadian engineer/musician Daniel Lanois.

The result of the new partnership was *The Unforgettable Fire*, whose title was borrowed from an exhibition of paintings created by survivors of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the final days of World War II, which the band members viewed at Chicago's Peace Museum.

The Unforgettable Fire traded the punchy rock sound of its predecessors for a more experimental approach, emphasizing sustained atmospherics over rockist fireworks. The songs' arrangements emphasized the growing nuance and subtlety of the Edge's guitar work, whose distinctive textures enhanced the songs' cinematic qualities.

Lyrically, the album was largely inspired by the band's experiences traveling in America, surveying the gap between the country's idealized mythology and its reality. The collection produced U2's first U.S. Top Forty single in "(Pride) In the Name of Love," a stirring tribute to slain 1960s civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. whose anthemic chorus contrasted the subtle sound that dominated the album. *The Unforgettable Fire* also yielded a significant live showpiece in the six-minute "Bad," which poignantly addressed the issue of heroin addiction, a growing problem in the band's home country.

Despite its less overtly accessible direction, *The Unforgettable Fire* duplicated *War*'s sales success, entering the U.S. Top Ten after its release in October 1984. U2 supported *The Unforgettable Fire* with a massively successful world tour that spawned another live EP, *Wide Awake in America*.

In late 1984, Bob Geldof, the habitually outspoken lead singer of Ireland's Boomtown Rats, was moved by television news coverage of famine in Ethiopia to create a benefit project to help address the desperate situation. The result was Band Aid, whose seasonal single "Do They Know It's Christmas?" offered a historic assemblage of some of the British pop world's biggest names. Bono was prominent among the all-star supergroup, which also included Sting, Boy

George, Phil Collins, Paul McCartney, George Michael, Paul Weller, and Paul Young.

Rush-released in time for the 1984 Christmas season, “Do They Know It’s Christmas?” topped the pop charts on both sides of the Atlantic, selling over 50 million copies worldwide. Geldof then raised the stakes by staging Live Aid, an all-star transatlantic concert spectacle, on July 13, 1985, at London’s Wembley Stadium and JFK Stadium in Philadelphia, which was simulcast around the globe to raise even more funds for the cause.

Not surprisingly, U2 was one of the first acts to sign on for the concerts. Performing at Wembley—an outdoor venue far larger than those in which the band was used to performing—the band kicked off its abbreviated seventeen-minute set with a rousing “Sunday Bloody Sunday” and continued with an extended “Bad” that interspersed portions of the Rolling Stones’ “Ruby Tuesday” and “Sympathy for the Devil” and Lou Reed’s “Satellite of Love” and “Walk on the Wild Side.” During that medley, Bono took a spontaneous leap off the stage into the photographers’ pit in order to dance with a female fan. While the stunt cost the group the time to do its planned third number, “New Year’s Day,” it drove the Wembley crowd into a frenzy.

If there had been any doubt previously, their Live Aid performance officially served notice of U2’s new status as a world-class band. For a band that specialized in big gestures while maintaining an intimate connection with its fans, it was a perfect coming-out party.

In the autumn of 1985, U2 once again joined Bob Geldof and the Boomtown Rats, along with Elvis Costello, Van Morrison, and several Irish acts, for another high-profile benefit concert. The Dublin show, dubbed Self Aid For Ireland, was designed to raise awareness of that country’s dire unemployment situation.

Also in 1985, Bono became a part of Artists United Against Apartheid, a benefit project organized by E Street Band guitarist Steven Van Zandt to resist South Africa’s brutal system of racial segregation. Bono quickly wrote a new original song, “Silver and Gold,” for the album, and recorded it with help from Rolling Stones guitarists Keith Richards and Ron Wood.

In the summer of 1986, U2 joined the Conspiracy of Hope, a series of six stadium concerts across America to raise funds and awareness for Amnesty International, an esteemed organization that works to draw attention to the plight of political prisoners around the world. Others on the rotating Conspiracy of Hope bill included the Police, Peter Gabriel, Lou Reed, Joan Baez, and the Neville Brothers. For their Conspiracy of Hope performances, U2 did something they hadn’t done since their early Dublin days. They added cover material—namely, the Beatles’ “Help,” Bob Dylan’s “Maggie’s Farm,” and Eddie Cochran’s “C’mon Everybody”—to their set list.

The tour, which began on June 4, climaxed eleven days later with a live MTV broadcast from New Jersey’s Giants Stadium. The day before, the members of

U2 attended an anti-apartheid rally in New York's Central Park, where they joined Van Zandt onstage to perform "Sun City," the main song from the Artists United Against Apartheid album.

In March 1985, four months before U2's breakthrough performance at Live Aid, *Rolling Stone*—a reliable indicator of mainstream American tastes—featured U2 on its cover, accompanied by a headline anointing the group "Our Choice: Band of the '80s."

By 1987, U2 was poised for worldwide superstardom. The band's fifth album, *The Joshua Tree*, released in March of that year, proved to be another breakthrough, both commercially and artistically. The project, again co-produced by Eno and Lanois, offered rich soundscapes awash in emotion and craft. The album—named after a twisted tree that proliferates in the rocky deserts of the American Southwest—also found the band tapping into an array of American folk and blues influences.

Those qualities were manifested in a pair of yearning, dramatic singles, "With or Without You" and "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For." Both signaled U2's new status by reaching number one on the U.S. singles chart. Elsewhere on *The Joshua Tree*, the band's passion for current events was featured in "Bullet the Blue Sky," which surveyed the human toll of American intervention in Central America.

In addition to winning uniformly enthusiastic reviews, *The Joshua Tree* became the first U2 album to top the U.S. charts, as well as the band's third in a row to enter the British charts at number one. In England, it set a record by going platinum within twenty-four hours. By 1988, when it won a Grammy award as Album of the Year, it had sold 14 million copies.

The Joshua Tree's more pronounced American orientation coincided with the group's decision to bring along a camera crew and director Phil Joanou to document their U.S. tour. The result was *Rattle and Hum*, a feature film that combined concert footage with material featuring the musicians' off-stage explorations of American music and culture. The latter included a recording session at Memphis' Sun studios, where Elvis Presley gave birth to rock and roll, a performance with a Harlem gospel choir, and a duet with blues great B.B. King.

The film was accompanied by a double album that mixed live tracks and new studio recordings. Both the album and the film received the first consistently negative reviews of U2's career, with many critics finding the band's take on American roots music to be naive and/or patronizing. While critics dismissed the film as a rock-star indulgence and the album as an unfocused grab-bag, both were popular with audiences, with the soundtrack disc selling seven and a half million copies.

During an emotional homecoming concert in Dublin on New Year's Eve 1989, Bono told the audience, "We won't see you for a while; we have to go away and dream it all up again."²

That statement was widely interpreted as a suggestion that U2 was disbanding. Indeed, it reflected the internal crises and soul-searching that some of the band members were experiencing at the time.

THIS IS “POP”

Despite the breakup rumors, in 1990 U2 reconvened with Brian Eno and Daniel Lanois in East Berlin to begin work on what would become one of the band’s best-selling and most critically acclaimed works, *Achtung Baby*. Released in November 1991, the album—which Bono had described as “the sound of four men trying to chop down *The Joshua Tree*”³—succeeded in its intention of reinventing U2 for the new decade.

Achtung Baby retreated from the group’s obsession with America, instead drawing its principal inspiration from the dance, house, and electronica sounds that were then sweeping Europe. The record was densely textured, incorporating sequencers, bits of found sound, neo-psychedelia from the then-new English “rave” scene, and multiple layers of sound effects. The album’s retooled postmodern sound was matched by lyrics whose personal, even sexual, content was startling in comparison to the band’s prior work.

The reflective, understated ballad “One” diverged from *Achtung Baby*’s hyperactive mood, and its humanistic sentiment was widely embraced as a response to the growing AIDS crisis.

Achtung Baby’s radical reworking of U2’s established sound found favor with fans and critics. In addition to topping the *Billboard* album charts, the album spawned Top Ten hits in “One” and the surging “Mysterious Ways.”

If *Achtung Baby* had redrawn U2’s sonic parameters, the band’s transformation became complete when they took the album out on the road. At the start of 1992, U2 launched the wildly ambitious Zoo TV tour, a multi-media extravaganza that incorporated a video system priced at over \$3.5 million, with hundreds of screens flashing surreal clips by montage artists; an elaborate stage set featuring rebuilt Trabants, the infamous “People’s Car” of East Germany; and live satellite TV links to such far-flung locales like war-torn Sarajevo. The sensory overkill was intended to mock the decadent excess of arena rock—although some skeptics suggested that the band came dangerously close to becoming what it parodied.

During the shows, Bono adopted various flamboyant personae, specifically “The Fly,” an over-the-top rock-star caricature in huge black bug-eye shades; demonic lounge lizard “Mister MacPhisto”; and “Mirrorball Man,” an over-the-top television evangelist.

Another unique feature of the shows was Bono’s on-stage prank phone calls. The singer playfully tormented TV home shopping networks and sex-chat lines, requested delivery of thousands of pizzas to the concert venue, and attempted to get through the White House switchboard to contact

President Clinton. The show—which also featured a nightly electronic duet between Bono and a video image of Lou Reed on Reed’s “Satellite of Love”—made inventive use of the video clips compiled by the multi-media artists known as the Emergency Broadcast Network, including a video of *Naked Lunch* author William S. Burroughs reciting his poem “A Thanksgiving Prayer.”

For one show in Sydney, Australia, an indisposed Adam Clayton was too ill to perform, and was replaced at the last minute by his bass tech, Stuart Morgan.

The elaborate stage presentation required a dozen mobile trailers and a minimum of 200 crew members, and took over 40 hours to set up in each venue. Some of the band’s longtime fans were undoubtedly bewildered and/or disappointed, since irony was not what they had come to expect from the deeply sincere U2. But many more were dazzled by the unprecedented spectacle. When tickets went on sale in Los Angeles, Pacific Bell reported that 54 million phone call attempts were made in four hours as redial buttons were continually pressed. By the end of the tour, more than 5 million tickets had been sold.

The Zoo TV concept generated enough excitement to lead to serious discussions about launching Zoo TV as an actual cable television channel, in conjunction with MTV and PolyGram. But nothing came of those talks.

Prior to the European leg of the Zoo TV tour, U2 returned to the studio with the intention of recording a quickie EP as a companion piece to *Achtung Baby*. But the project quickly evolved into the full-length *Zooropa*, released in July 1993. Even more technologically obsessed than its predecessor, *Zooropa* relied heavily on sampling, expanding upon the tour’s themes of media overload. By layering the earthy vocals of guest star Johnny Cash over a synthesizer track on the bittersweet “The Wanderer,” U2 pointedly underlined the potential of technology, as well as its limits.

Zooropa apparently was a bit too demanding for many U2 fans. While it topped the *Billboard* charts for two weeks and won a Grammy as Best Alternative Music Album, it sold a relatively modest two million copies and failed to produce a hit single.

U2 mounted another ambitious tour to promote *Zooropa*, on which Bono’s alter ego the Fly metamorphosed into demonic lounge lizard MacPhisto. After finishing the tour in late 1993, the band took another extended break, reemerging in 1995, when they collaborated with R&B producer Nellee Hooper to record “Hold Me, Thrill Me, Kiss Me, Kill Me,” a glam-style contribution to the soundtrack of the film *Batman Forever*. Bono and the Edge also wrote the theme song for the 1995 James Bond thriller *Goldeneye*, sung by Tina Turner, while their bandmates Clayton and Mullen reworked the iconic theme song of TV’s *Mission Impossible* for the soundtrack of the 1996 feature film adaptation of the show.

In 1995, U2 once again broke away from their successful format to collaborate with Brian Eno on the album *Original Soundtracks, Vol. 1*, with the

result credited to the Passengers. One of the disc's biggest surprises was "Miss Sarajevo," on which Bono sang a duet with opera star Luciano Pavarotti. The low-key departure received a muted response from critics and the public. Among those who expressed dissatisfaction with the Passengers project was drummer Mullen, and the band promised that the next official U2 release would be a full-fledged rock record.

Despite U2's pledge to return to a harder sound, their next studio effort, the pointedly titled *Pop*, turned out to be something else entirely. For the occasion, the band teamed with a new pair of producers: the electronically inclined Flood, né Mark Ellis, who'd engineered *The Joshua Tree* and produced Nine Inch Nails and Depeche Mode; and Scottish club DJ turned producer Howie B, who'd worked with such cutting-edge U.K. acts as Soul II Soul and Massive Attack.

Pop once again challenged the expectations of U2 fans, bearing a heavier electronic and dance-music influence than its two predecessors. Beyond its heavy use of sampling and tape loops, the album found U2 making a conscious effort to alter its own sound. Mullen's drums were damped down, Bono relied less on his trademark falsetto, Clayton's bass was heavily processed, and the Edge explored an array of adventurous new guitar effects.

The band—which launched *Pop* with a surprise press conference at a K-Mart in Manhattan's East Village—felt that the album was something of a rush job, since their already-booked tour forced them to wrap up work on it before they were completely satisfied with the results. Despite those reservations, *Pop* met with positive reviews and respectable sales.

For their Popmart tour, which began in April, U2 once again raised the bar for elaborate on-stage eye candy. For the occasion, the band and its 200-strong crew transported an estimated 1,200 tons of equipment, including a huge mirrored lemon (which, appropriately enough, sometimes failed to function), a similarly massive olive, a hundred-foot-high "golden arch," and a giant video screen.

The tour became the second-highest-grossing of the year, second only to the Rolling Stones. But the \$80 million that Popmart took in was \$20 million less than what the band had spent to mount the extravaganza.

Following the *Pop* album and tour, the members of U2 took another hiatus from group activity. Late 1998 saw the release of *Best of 1980–1990*, the first in a series of best-of collections released in the wake of the band's lucrative new contract with PolyGram, which by then had absorbed Island Records.

While the group was taking a break, various band members took advantage of the opportunity to pursue other creative interests. Bono indulged his long-time interest in film by writing, co-producing, and making a brief on-screen appearance in the feature film *The Million Dollar Hotel*, directed by esteemed German filmmaker Wim Wenders and starring Mel Gibson.

The project, a surrealistic film noir set in an L.A. hotel filled with bizarre characters, was a rare failure for both Bono and Wenders, and was roundly

reviled by critics and ignored by audiences. Even its soundtrack album sank without a trace, despite the presence of new recordings by U2 and Bono. Critics dismissed the film as a pretentious, confusing vanity project, with one titling his review “Where the Streets Have No Shame.” Even star Gibson opined that the film made no sense.

Fortunately for Bono, he had plenty of other activities to distract himself from his celluloid misfire. In March 1999, he inducted Bruce Springsteen into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. It was Bono’s third such speech, following his prior Hall of Fame inductions of the Who in 1990 and the late Bob Marley in 1994. His induction speeches would earn Bono status as an in-demand musical toastmaster. He performed similar duties when Island Records founder Chris Blackwell was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 2001, and also delivered a memorable introduction of Frank Sinatra (on whose smash 1993 *Duets* album Bono had joined Sinatra to revisit his classic “I’ve Got You Under My Skin”) and when the Chairman of the Board received a lifetime achievement award during the 1994 Grammy awards show.

The Edge also did his bit for the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, inducting the Yardbirds in 2002 and the Clash in 2003.

Bono’s efforts at political activism would prove far more effective than his cinematic venture. He and his bandmates had previously shown their social conscience in their songwriting and by participating in Live Aid and other benefit projects. But in 1997 Bono began to throw himself headlong into taking a more hands-on role in campaigning on behalf of the world’s poor and voiceless.

The frontman proved adept at using his notoriety to exercise a benign influence upon world events, gaining unprecedented access to the corridors of power. On behalf of a group called Jubilee 2000, which campaigns for the cancellation of third-world debt, the singer went to Washington, D.C., and lobbied Congress, resulting in President Clinton and Congress agreeing in principle to cancel \$435 million worth of debt. Later, Bono and other Jubilee 2000 supporters visited Pope John Paul II at his summer home outside Rome.

Bono traced his interest in the issue of third-world debt to some harsh lessons he’d learned in the wake of Live Aid. “It was \$200 million we raised for Africa there,” he recalled. “And we were jumping around the place; we felt we’d cracked it.”⁴ That was before he found out that \$200 million was roughly equivalent to what Africa pays every week for the interest on debts owed to wealthier countries, including the United States.

Bono’s bandmates have at times expressed reservations about his political activities, and have admitted that his extracurricular activism has stirred tensions within the group. But they’ve also expressed admiration for the singer’s drive and ingenuity.

“We’ve grown up being a political band,” the Edge stated. “We never saw a need to separate religion and politics from everything we write about and

care about. We have always been well aware that steaming in on any issue was liable to get us into trouble, or just come off as uncool. My own real fear was that Bono was going to lead us into doing things that were desperately uncool and we would regret. But even though I have winced on his behalf, I've had more times when I've just been so proud of him and blown away with the success of what he's done."⁵

ANOTHER BEAUTIFUL DAY

U2 returned to band activity in time to greet the new millennium with *All That You Can't Leave Behind*, released in the autumn of 2000. Reteaming with Brian Eno and Daniel Lanois, the band reclaimed much of its classic sound, with nary a trace of the postmodern irony and electronic experimentalism of their 1990s work.

Along with the album's back-to-basics sound, many of the band's new songs—including the euphoric hit “Beautiful Day”—offered messages of hope and perseverance in the face of adversity. Another standout track was “Stuck in a Moment You Can't Get Out Of,” which Bono revealed he'd written about the apparent suicide of his friend, INXS lead singer Michael Hutchence.

In contrast to the relatively lukewarm public response to the experimentally oriented efforts *Achtung Baby* and *Pop*, *All That You Can't Leave Behind* was an unquestioned smash, topping the charts in over thirty countries and reaching number three in the United States, where the album earned won seven Grammys, including Song of the Year for “Beautiful Day.”

In a four-star review, *Rolling Stone* called the album

U2's tenth studio album and third masterpiece. . . . Their first masterpiece, 1987's *The Joshua Tree*, imagined cathedrals of ecstasy; their second, 1991's *Achtung Baby*, banged around fleabag hotels of agony. . . . [*All That You Can't Leave Behind*] represents the most uninterrupted collection of strong melodies U2 have ever mounted. . . . When Bono sings, his grief and his grandiosity seem to come from the same place in his heart. It's a reminder that what makes U2 so big isn't really their clever ideas, or even their intelligence—it's the warmth that all too few rock stars have any idea how to turn into music.⁶

From March to November, U2 returned to the road for its Elevation 2001 tour. The tour maintained a relatively intimate atmosphere—if indoor arenas can be called intimate in comparison to the outdoor stadiums the band had been filling previously. The band considered canceling the final part of the tour following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, but ultimately decided to let the show go on. By all accounts, the tour had a unifying effect on the band, reenergizing the members' relationships with each other and with their audience.

Beyond its positive effect on band morale, *Elevation 2001* also became the year's most commercially successful concert tour. But it also became something of a personal ordeal for Bono, whose father Bob Hewson was slowly dying of cancer. Unwilling to give up any moment he could share, Bono took on the physically and emotionally demanding task of flying to his dad's bedside after every European show.

"It was a very odd time," he later recalled. "I used to leave stage, immediately get on a plane home and get in to Dublin. I would have one glass of Bushmills to steady my nerves, then go in. I slept beside my father with the sound of the audience ringing in my ears during his dying days."⁷

In the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, Bono participated in the recording of a multi-star remake of the Marvin Gaye classic "What's Going On?" Originally intended to raise funds for AIDS relief, the project was retooled to benefit both that cause and the United Way's September 11 Fund.

After the tour ended, U2 traveled to New Orleans for a high-profile appearance during the halftime show of Super Bowl XXXVI, playing a three-song set that reached an emotional climax with "Where the Streets Have No Name." The names of those killed in the September 11 attacks were projected onto two giant backdrops, which were released and fell to the ground at song's close.

In 2003, U2 garnered an Academy Award nomination for "The Hands That Built America," which they wrote and performed for Martin Scorsese's *Gangs of New York*. The band performed the song—which won a Golden Globe award in the same category—on the Seventy-Fifth Annual Academy Awards show, but the Oscar ultimately went to Eminem's "Lose Yourself."

U2 reunited with Steve Lillywhite for their next album, *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb*, which also incorporated production contributions from previous collaborators Brian Eno, Daniel Lanois, Flood, and Nellee Hooper. Released in November 2004, the disc found the band largely dispensing with dance beats and electronic gimmickry in favor of a scrappy rock approach that harked back to the foursome's early sound. It also offered some deeply personal lyrics shaded by the loss of Bono's father.

The band had actually begun the project with veteran producer Chris Thomas, but switched gears when the sessions stalled. While *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb* moved U2 back toward an organic rock sound, the band employed some digital methods to help promote the album.

In a move that alienated some fans, U2 teamed up with Apple computers, allowing the manufacturer to use *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb*'s infectious first single "Vertigo" in a television commercial for the company's iPod MP3 players. In conjunction with that promotion, Apple issued a special-edition iPod pre-loaded with the entire U2 catalog, with a color scheme that echoed that of the new album and with the band members' autographs embossed on the back. The campaign coincided with the release of *The Complete U2*, a

digital “box set” of 400 songs, including B-sides, rarities, and various live and unreleased material, available for download from Apple’s online music store.

How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb predictably hit the top of the *Billboard* charts and quickly achieved platinum status. The album garnered eight Grammy Awards, including Album of the Year, Rock Album of the Year, (“Sometimes You Can’t Make It on Your Own”), and Best Rock Song (“City of Blinding Lights”), bringing the band’s Grammy total to twenty-two.

At around the same time that *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb* was restoring U2’s identity as a rock band, speculation began to arise about Bono receiving a nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize, in recognition of his efforts fighting AIDS in Africa and working to eliminate third-world debt. As a vehicle for his charitable efforts, Bono formed a non-profit organization called DATA (Debt AIDS Trade Africa).

July 2, 2005, found U2 back on stage, performing as part of Live 8, an ambitious, star-studded concert event instigated by Bob Geldof. The international simulcast was timed to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of Live Aid, and to coincide with the G8 summit—an annual political and economic meeting of the world’s largest industrialized nations—the following week. U2 played in London’s Hyde Park, one of ten venues around the world to host Live 8 performances.

Live 8’s aim was to focus public attention on the G8 summit, and to put pressure on the summit’s participants to address the economic plight of the world’s poorest nations. The effort led to the G8 leaders making a commitment to double aid to Africa by 2010, and to forgive the debts of eighteen of the continent’s poorest countries.

In December, Bono—who had thrown his support behind an expansive anti-poverty campaign named “One,” after the U2 song—was awarded a prestigious Person of the Year award by *Time* magazine, sharing the honor with Microsoft billionaire/philanthropist Bill Gates and his wife Melinda. The magazine cited Bono “for being shrewd about doing good, for rewiring politics and re-engineering justice, for making mercy smarter and hope strategic and then daring the rest of us to follow.” *Time* also noted that in the course of his efforts, the overachieving rock star had “charmed and bullied and morally blackmailed the leaders of the world’s richest countries into forgiving \$40 billion in debt owed by the poorest.”⁸

Early 2006 saw U2 visiting Latin America, although the band would have to cancel subsequent tour dates in Asia and Australia due to an illness in their extended family. In February 2006, while in Santiago, Chile, in February, the Chilean president-elect presented U2 with Amnesty International’s 2005 Ambassador of Conscience Award. At the end of 2006, Bono was awarded an honorary knighthood by England’s Queen Elizabeth, in acknowledgment of his philanthropic efforts.

After a quarter-century of providing their fans with musical and moral uplift, U2 retains its sense of mission. As Bono told *USA Today* in 2000,

“There is a transcendence that I want from rock. . . . I’m still drunk on the idea that rock and roll can be a force for change.”⁹

Or, as the rarely interviewed Larry Mullen put it,

We want to do things that nobody else has done before, and we will do whatever we have to do to achieve that. We’re never satisfied. We never feel like we’ve made our greatest record. We always feel we can do better, we can be better, and that’s constant. After every record, we sit down and go, “OK, what was wrong with that? What was right with it?” And next time around, we fix it. We constantly do that, and that’s why U2 survives. . . . Being big means shit to us. It’s being great that we want, and that’s what we strive for.”¹⁰

TIMELINE

May 6, 1960

A U-2 spy plane piloted by U.S. Air Force Captain Francis Gary Powers is shot down over the Soviet Union, setting off an international incident. Four days later, Paul Hewson, aka Bono, is born at Dublin’s Rotunda Hospital.

March 20, 1978

The recently formed Dublin combo the Hype change their name to U2.

April 28, 1978

U2’s first-ever press interview appears in Dublin’s *Hot Press*.

May 25, 1978

Paul McGuinness becomes U2’s manager.

September 1979

The first U2 release, the three-song single *U2Three*, is issued by CBS Records in Ireland.

October 5, 1979

U2 makes its television debut with a performance at the Cork Opera House, broadcast on the Irish RTE network.

January 1980

U2 finishes in first place in five categories of *Hot Press*’s annual readers’ poll.

March 23, 1980

U2 signs with Island Records.

October 20, 1980

U2’s debut album, *Boy*, is released in the United Kingdom.

December 6, 1980

U2 play their American debut at the Ritz in New York.

March 3, 1981

Boy is released in the United States.

February 28, 1983

U2’s third album, *War*, debuts at number one in the United Kingdom.

June 5, 1983

U2 performs at Denver's Red Rocks Amphitheater. The performance will become the band's first live home-video release.

December 1983

U2 is named Band of the Year in the *Rolling Stone* critics poll.

August 1, 1984

The U2-run label Mother Records opens for business.

July 13, 1985

U2 performs at the Live Aid charity concert at London's Wembley Stadium.

June 4, 1986

U2 performs on the opening date of Amnesty International's all-star Conspiracy of Hope benefit tour.

March 9, 1987

U2 releases *The Joshua Tree*, which will soon become a number one album around the world.

April 27, 1987

U2 appear on the cover of *Time* magazine, which touts them as "U2: Rock's Hottest Ticket." They are only the third band to be given a *Time* cover.

May 16, 1987

"With or Without You" becomes U2's first number one hit in the United States.

March 2, 1988

The Joshua Tree wins two Grammy Awards, for Album of the Year and Best Rock Performance.

October 27, 1988

The U2 documentary *Rattle and Hum* makes its world premiere.

October 30, 1989

Bono makes his first-ever live solo appearance at a benefit show at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin.

December 31, 1989

U2 concludes a tour with a four-night stand at Dublin's Point Depot. The final show is broadcast on radio, reaching 500 million listeners, and includes comments from Bono that are interpreted by many fans as an announcement of the band's possible breakup.

June 20, 1990

Bono joins David Bowie on stage at a Bowie concert in Cleveland, Ohio.

February 29, 1992

U2's Zoo TV tour kicks off at the Lakeland Arena in Florida.

March 27, 1992

On stage during one of the band's Zoo TV shows in Detroit, Bono orders 10,000 pizzas for the audience, but the pizzeria he calls is only able to deliver 100 to the venue.

August 28, 1992

During a syndicated radio interview in New York, American presidential candidate Bill Clinton converses with U2 via phone.

January 20, 1993

In Washington, D.C., Adam Clayton and Larry Mullen Jr. team up with R.E.M. singer Michael Stipe for a rendition of the U2 hit “One” at MTV’s 1993 Rock and Roll Inaugural Ball for newly elected President Clinton.

April 25, 1997

U2 kick off their year-long PopMart tour, which features the most elaborate staging of the band’s career.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Boy, 1981

October, 1982

War, 1983

The Unforgettable Fire, 1984

The Joshua Tree, 1987

Achtung Baby, 1991

All That You Can’t Leave Behind, 2000

How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb, 2004

NOTES

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Courtesy of Photofest.

Nirvana

Susan Godwin

FROM THE MUDDY BANKS OF THE WISHKAH

Nirvana certainly wasn't the first band to graduate from the indie-rock underground to the major-label big leagues, nor was it the first punk act to win fans from the rock mainstream. But with the multi-platinum success of their 1991 album *Nevermind*, the Seattle trio single-handedly brought the punk and do-it-yourself ethos to millions of teenagers across the country and around the world.

The musical revolution that had been launched by the Ramones and the Sex Pistols in 1976 had expanded and evolved in the decade and a half that followed. But alternative rock remained largely a grassroots movement, sustained through a nationwide (and international) network of independent labels, college radio stations, small clubs, fanzines, independent record stores, and an ever-growing constituency of fans whose left-of-center tastes weren't being served by the corporate music industry. While major labels had successfully marketed numerous indie-bred bands, there was some doubt as to whether any of those acts possessed the potential to break through to multi-platinum superstardom.

By the dawn of the 1990s, mainstream rock was dominated by slick, content-free corporate rock and lightweight, soft-centered pop-metal. But that music had little personal significance for the youthful demographic often referred to as Generation X—kids who' had grown up in the shadow of AIDS, with the institutionalized callousness of the Reagan era, and with an awareness that they were part of the first generation of Americans unlikely to do better than their parents.

Nirvana was the right band at the right time. The angst and anxiety of their generation were reflected in Kurt Cobain's alienated lyrics and anguished vocal wail, and in the trio's grinding yet catchy sound. On their 1991 album *Nevermind* and its indelible hit anthem "Smells Like Teen Spirit," Nirvana married punk's primal energy with infectious pop songcraft to make music that seemingly embodied the era's tortuous contradictions.

Even before his self-inflicted death made him twentysomething forever, Cobain was a readymade icon—charismatic yet ambivalent, dynamic yet tortured by anger, hurt, and self-doubt. If he ultimately failed to come to terms with his role as anti-rock star, and was torn apart by his efforts to resolve the conflicts between art and commerce, Nirvana's musical legacy and cultural impact speaks for itself.

Kurt Donald Cobain (b. February 20, 1967)—the first of two children born to homemaker Wendy Cobain and her auto mechanic husband Don—grew up in Aberdeen, Washington, 100 miles southwest of Seattle. Although once a prosperous seaport, Aberdeen by then was an economically depressed, culturally deprived logging town whose main industry had been devastated by automation.

Although born into modest economic circumstances, Kurt's early childhood was, by all accounts, a happy and stable one. Those who knew him then describe him as a bright, creative child. He showed an aptitude for music early on, and loved the Beatles and the Monkees. Kurt's musical inclinations were encouraged by his mother, whose brother and sister played in local bands, and who allowed Kurt to take drumming lessons in the third grade. He also showed a definite talent for drawing and painting.

Kurt also experienced a variety of health problems early in life, including hyperactivity, persistent bronchitis, and even a minor case of scoliosis (curvature

of the spine). Like many children of his age group, Kurt was treated for hyperactivity with Ritalin, an amphetamine-like stimulant. Still, those who knew him generally portray Kurt as a sunny, upbeat child, at least until his parents divorced in 1975.

By all accounts, Kurt's personality changed drastically after the split. He became withdrawn and sullen, and his growing awareness of his artistic temperament made him feel increasingly alienated from other kids his age. He spent a year living with his mother and her new, mentally unstable boyfriend in Aberdeen, before landing with his father in nearby rural Montesano, Washington. Relations with Don and his new wife and stepchildren deteriorated, leaving Kurt to be shuttled among various friends and relatives during his teens.

Don Cobain did play a significant, if inadvertent, role in laying the groundwork for his son's musical future, via the influence of his collection of LPs by such hard-rock acts as Black Sabbath, Led Zeppelin, and Aerosmith.

For Kurt's fourteenth birthday, Wendy's brother Chuck bought him a secondhand electric guitar. He gave up the drums, and took enough guitar lessons to learn to play AC/DC's "Back in Black." He became fascinated with the punk and new wave groups that he read about in *Creem* magazine. But since he couldn't hear those bands on the radio and their records weren't available in Aberdeen, he often had to be content with making a cathartic racket on his guitar, conjuring up his own version of what he imagined the music sounded like.

A fortuitous friendship was formed after Kurt was pressured by his father into joining the town's Babe Ruth league baseball team. Although he spent most of his time on the bench and did whatever he could to avoid playing, Kurt connected with a rock-obsessed teammate named Matt Lukin, who was also a classmate of his at Montesano High. Lukin played bass with the Melvins, a local trio whose heavy, sludgy sound would later establish them as founding fathers of the grunge scene.

Cobain soon also befriended the Melvins' leader, Buzz Osborne, with whom he shared an art class. It was Osborne who would actively initiate Cobain to the world of punk rock. Buzz made some punk compilation cassettes for Kurt, the first song on which was "Damaged II" by California punk icons Black Flag. Cobain later counted the experience of hearing the song as a landmark moment. "It was like listening to something from a different planet," he said. "I sensed that it was speaking more clearly and more realistically than the average rock 'n' roll lyric."¹

In August 1984, Cobain, Lukin, and Osborne traveled to Seattle to attend a Black Flag show. The experience was so transformative for Kurt that he was moved to sell his entire record collection—which then included albums by Journey, Foreigner, and Pat Benatar—for \$12.

At Aberdeen High, Kurt found himself at a loss to establish lasting friendships or connect with a peer group. He settled in with the school's stoner

crowd, mainly because they were ostensibly into rock music. He eventually became the target of intense bullying, in particular due to a friendship with an openly gay student.

It wasn't a big surprise when Kurt Cobain quit high school in May 1985, just a few weeks before the end of his twelfth-grade year. Before dropping out, he'd begun to notice fellow student Chris (né Krist) Novoselic. Novoselic was the son of Croatian parents who'd emigrated to the United States two years before his birth. He was born in Compton, California, and spent most of his childhood in Gardena, before the family relocated to Aberdeen, where his new surroundings turned him into an instant outsider.

Although Kurt never actually met Chris during their school years, he couldn't help but take notice of Novoselic's six-foot, seven-inch height, his twisted sense of humor, and his propensity for bizarre and sometimes drunken behavior.

Two people with whom Novoselic connected at Aberdeen High were Matt Lukin and Buzz Osborne, who helped to convert him to punk, just as they did with Cobain. It was through their mutual Melvins connection that Kurt Cobain and Chris Novoselic eventually met and became friends.

After leaving high school, Kurt went through an extended period during which he was directionless and frequently homeless, spending time crashing at his mother's house, staying with friends' families, and sleeping on various couches, porches, cars, and in Novoselic's van—and, at one point, under the North Aberdeen Bridge. He worked various menial jobs, including a stint as a janitor at his own former high school. The only job that he enjoyed was teaching young children to swim at the local YMCA. With various friends, he also engaged in various acts of small-time vandalism, and specialized in painting graffiti calculated to antagonize or confuse Aberdeen's redneck townies.

By late 1985, punk and hardcore had come to dominate Cobain's musical interests, and he began taking steps to form a band to play the songs he had been writing. He began rehearsing his compositions with Melvins drummer Dale Crover playing bass and friend Greg Hokanson on drums; Kurt christened the trio Fecal Matter. The lineup made its live debut in December, opening for the Melvins at a nearby beach bar.

Cobain and Crover later traveled to Seattle to record demo versions of seven of Kurt's compositions (including the future Nirvana numbers "Downer" and "Spank Thru") on his aunt Mary's home four-track home recorder. The rough, relatively primitive recordings revealed some of the aggressive riffing and thrashy tempos that would figure in Nirvana's future sound, but little of the melodic sensibility. A subsequent lineup with Buzz Osborne on bass and ex-Melvins drummer Mike Dillard rehearsed briefly but never performed in public.

The following May, Kurt performed a set in Olympia, Washington, reciting his poetry over improvised music played by Osborne and Crover. The short-lived

trio was named Brown Towel, but the promoter misheard Osborne over the phone and billed the band as Brown Cow. It was at around this time that Cobain reportedly used heroin for the first time.

Cobain and Novoselic eventually forged a close friendship. They first played together in the Stiff Woodies, an informal Melvins side-project in which Chris sang and Kurt played drums, and the two briefly attempted to start a Creedence Clearwater Revival cover act called the Sellouts. In early 1987, they launched a more serious outfit to play Kurt's songs.

Completing the as-yet-unnamed combo was drummer Aaron Burckhard, who'd been part of the extended group of friends and hangers-on who surrounded the Melvins. Driven largely by Cobain's boundless enthusiasm, the trio began rehearsing and playing at local parties under various names, including Skid Row, Pen Cap Chew, Bliss, and Ted Ed Fred. At first, they mainly played songs from the Fecal Matter tape, but Kurt quickly began coming up with new tunes.

In April 1987, as Skid Row, the trio performed live on KAOS, the radio station of Olympia's Evergreen State College. Their set included several songs that would appear on the first Nirvana album, and turned out so well that the band would use it as their demo for several months. That fall, Kurt relocated to Olympia to move in with a girlfriend, and Chris moved to Tacoma, leaving Aaron Burckhard behind in Aberdeen.

In January 1988, Cobain and Novoselic joined Dale Crover and recording engineer Jack Endino to record and mix ten Cobain originals in six hours at Endino's Seattle studio Reciprocal Recording, whose affordability had made it a favorite of local bands. Endino was guitarist/leader of the influential Seattle band Skin Yard, and his studio skills had already established him as something of a godfather to an emerging generation of young, heavy Northwest bands; his recording credits included work with Green River, Mudhoney, Soundgarden, and Screaming Trees. The session was paid for with \$152.44 that Kurt had earned in his janitorial job.

By now, the Pacific Northwest had begun to emerge as a vibrant hotbed of indie-rock activity, with Seattle at the epicenter of a new wave of loud, long-haired combos whose attitude was informed by punk but whose music was equally influenced by heavy metal. Ground zero for grunge was Seattle's Sub Pop Records, a savvy indie label launched in 1986, and which had already begun to make an underground splash with such bands as Mudhoney, Soundgarden, and Tad.

Pearl Jam: Spin the Black Circle

In the summer of 1991, the two most important bands in what became known as "alternative rock," both based in Seattle, released new albums within a few weeks of each other. The first was *Ten*, the Epic/Sony debut album by Pearl Jam, and the second was *Nevermind* by Nirvana.

Pearl Jam's surging two-guitar sound was more classic rock (à la the Who and Led Zeppelin) than punk rock, and the expressive baritone of lead singer Eddie Vedder invested his sometimes obscure lyrics with genuine emotion. In contrast to the 1980s glam-rock bands like Mötley Crüe, the members of Pearl Jam dressed like surfers or mountain bikers, signifying their artistic sincerity and lack of pretense. *Ten* remained on the *Billboard* chart for nearly five years and eventually sold over 12 million copies in the United States alone, making Pearl Jam the biggest American rock band of the 1990s.

This sudden success caused conflicts within the group, which stuck together nonetheless through several more multi-million selling albums including *vs.* (1993) and *Vitalogy* (1994). Pearl Jam made adept use of the Internet to consolidate its fan base and to market a steady stream of "official bootlegs" of its live concerts. Eddie Vedder became an outspoken critic of the Bush administration, and the band played numerous benefits for causes ranging from the victims of Hurricane Katrina to the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of America.

Pearl Jam outlived the Seattle grunge scene from which it had emerged to become a kind of twenty-first-century version of the Grateful Dead, with ever-changing set lists, left-liberal politics, and a legion of faithful fans who snapped up tickets for every tour. In the spring of 2006, the group made a resounding return to the commercial arena as the self-titled *Pearl Jam* became its eighth studio release to reach the *Billboard* Top Five.

Andy Schwartz

TOP OF THE SUB POP

Jack Endino played the band's new demos for Sub Pop co-founder Jonathan Poneman. Poneman loved the tape, although Bruce Pavitt, his partner in the label, was initially resistant. Cobain, meanwhile, sent copies of the demo to every independent label he knew, but received no response.

When Dale Crover moved to San Francisco with the Melvins in March 1988, he recommended Dave Foster, a friend from Aberdeen, as his replacement. Foster was capable enough, but his hot-tempered personality and mainstream musical tastes caused instant friction with his new bandmates. When Foster, after a few months in the band, spent two weeks in jail after assaulting a man his girlfriend was cheating with, Cobain and Novoselic began rehearsing with Aaron Burckhard again. But Burckhard was soon out once more, after getting busted for drunk driving.

Nirvana found a more reliable replacement in Chad Channing, an elfin drummer who shared Cobain's childhood experiences with hyperactivity and Ritalin, and who, like Kurt and Chris, came from a broken home. Channing, whose solid, straightforward drumming style would help to push the band in

a less cluttered, more melodic direction, made his debut with the group in May 1988.

Channing had only been a member for a month when Nirvana returned to Reciprocal Recording with Endino to record their first official release, a seven-inch single issued in November as the first installment of Sub Pop's new subscription-only series of limited-edition seven-inch vinyl releases. Although Kurt didn't know much about Sub Pop at the time, he figured that the label was cool because its roster included Soundgarden, whom he loved.

Oddly, Nirvana's debut A-side was not a Cobain composition, but an amped-up cover of "Love Buzz" by the Dutch band Shocking Blue, best known in the United States for their 1970 hit "Venus." Although some interpreted the choice as an expression of Kurt's affection for Melvins leader Osborne, the song was actually Novoselic's idea. The single version of "Love Buzz" kicked off with a truncated version of a sound collage that Cobain had assembled from various children's records.

Although "Love Buzz" wasn't an original, the track contained several sonic elements that would emerge as Nirvana trademarks, including the use of alternating quiet and loud passages, as well as Kurt's distinctive scream. The disc's B-side was the Cobain original "Big Cheese."

By this point, the Seattle indie-rock scene was beginning to gain significant national attention, thanks in large part to Sub Pop's low-budget promotional savvy. The Sub Pop singles club, which Nirvana inaugurated with "Love Buzz," would prove to be a key element in building mainstream interest in the label and its home city.

Cobain smashed his guitar on stage for the first of countless times at the end of a show on October 30, 1988, at Evergreen State College. He subsequently got into the habit of buying cheap guitars at pawnshops while on tour, specifically for the purpose of smashing them at that night's show.

In late 1988, Nirvana returned to Reciprocal to cut Nirvana's first album, *Bleach*, again with Jack Endino producing. Not released by Sub Pop until June 1989, *Bleach* caught Nirvana still in its formative stages, evolving some promising ideas but largely following the established grunge format rather than forging a distinctive musical or lyrical voice.

Thanks to some catchy guitar riffs and Cobain's already impressive ability to scream in tune, *Bleach* (which included three tracks rescued from the January demo session with Dale Crover on drums) was generally more impressive for its sound than its substance, although standout tracks like the dense "Blew" and the bittersweet mid-tempo "About a Girl" suggested the levels of insight and songcraft that Cobain would subsequently achieve.

Bleach's dense, claustrophobic sound was well suited to its lyrical contents. Cobain (who, for no particular reason, spelled his name Kurdt Kobain in the album's credits) maintained that the pared-down, minimalistic lyrics had no personal significance, but it's hard not to relate the images of suffocating

small-town life in “School,” “Swap Meet,” and even the cartoonishly vulgar “Floyd the Barber” to his own teenage experiences. Elsewhere, the harsh self-examinations of “Negative Creep” and “Scoff” were early manifestations of the unsparing introspection that he would pursue more intensively in the future.

Bleach was well received within the U.S. indie-rock community, gaining substantial college airplay and selling an impressive 35,000 copies. It also gained considerable attention in Britain, thanks in large part to Sub Pop’s canny courting of the influential U.K. music press. But Cobain and Novoselic were annoyed by some of Sub Pop’s promotion, which tended to paint the band members as unschooled backwoods hicks.

To a large degree, *Bleach* had conformed to the already-familiar parameters of the grunge sound. But the album did offer some early hints of the more personal and distinctive approach that Nirvana’s subsequent work would reveal. The track that pointed most clearly to Nirvana’s future direction, was “About a Girl.” With its subtly insistent hook, Cobain’s nuanced vocal, and his oblique but affecting lyrics, the song manifested a sense of vulnerability and longing that made it stand out from *Bleach*’s more aggressive workouts, previewing the more complex emotional territory that Cobain would soon be tackling on a regular basis.

Although he didn’t play on *Bleach*, second guitarist Jason Everman was included in the album’s credits and cover art. Although he didn’t join the band until after recording was completed, Everman contributed to the project via his loan of \$606.17 to finance the sessions. Everman was added to Nirvana early in 1989, when the prospect of touring to support the album caused Cobain some concerns about his ability to sing and play simultaneously.

Nirvana celebrated *Bleach*’s release with a June 9 show dubbed Lamefest ’89, as the opening act on a bill that also included Mudhoney and Tad. The show—at Seattle’s Moore Theater, the largest venue to host a grunge event up to that point—was a landmark event for the Seattle scene, and an early omen of the alt-rock explosion that was to come.

Nirvana then embarked on a low-budget twenty-six-date tour that forced the band to endure marathon drives while making no more (and frequently less) than \$100 per night. Despite the decidedly modest conditions, they found that having a full album out—and being on a label with growing underground cachet—instantly boosted their prestige, and suddenly the band was playing in packed clubs.

The punishing tour schedule also exposed the mismatch in personal temperament and musical orientation between metalhead Everman and the rest of the band. Although the presence of a second guitarist had helped Cobain to relax and thus improve his own guitar work, Everman’s presence became increasingly superfluous, and after six months, Nirvana was a trio again.

In October 1989, Nirvana made its first trip overseas, enduring a grueling forty-two-day, thirty-six-show tour of the United Kingdom and Europe with

Sub Pop labelmates Tad. The tour was as spartan as the band's Stateside treks, with all eleven musicians (including Tad's 300-pound-plus leader Tad Doyle) and crew shoehorned into a single van. While the traveling conditions were fairly miserable, Nirvana was greeted with full houses and rapturous fan responses. Among the tour's highlights were sold-out gigs in Berlin a few days after the Berlin Wall came down.

In December, the independent Tupelo label issued the four-song Nirvana EP *Blew*, which combined the *Bleach* tracks "Blew" and "Love Buzz" with a pair of new originals recorded with producer Steve Fisk at a relatively luxurious twenty-four-track Seattle studio. The new songs were the buoyant, riff-driven "Stain" and the melodic "Been a Son." The latter tune's lyrics, about a young girl's awareness that her parents had been hoping for a boy, again demonstrated Cobain's budding propensity for unflinching introspection.

When Nirvana went to Madison, Wisconsin, in April 1990 to record demos for their proposed second Sub Pop album with veteran producer Butch Vig at his Smart Studios, Cobain's growing dissatisfaction with Chad Channing bubbled to the surface. Kurt would later claim that his on-stage guitar-smashing habit began as a manifestation of his frustration with Channing's drumming. Channing played his final show with Nirvana in Boise, Idaho, the following month, at the end of a lengthy U.S. tour.

By now, growing major-label interest in Nirvana, combined with mounting frustrations caused by Sub Pop's promotional limitations and financial problems, had influenced Cobain and Novoselic to decide to leave the cash-strapped hometown indie for a larger company.

In August, Nirvana, with Dale Crover sitting in on drums, played eight West Coast dates opening for Sonic Youth. The tour coincided with the release of another Sub Pop single, whose A-side, "Sliver," had been recorded during a dinner break in a Tad session, with Jack Endino producing and Mudhoney's Dan Peters on drums. The song was written from the point of view of an unhappy young boy who's been left with his grandparents by his mom and dad. The B-side was "Dive," drawn from the band's demo sessions with Butch Vig but stylistically a throwback to the band's *Bleach*-era sound.

Beyond its affecting, vulnerable lyric, "Sliver" was also the catchiest song Nirvana had yet released. "I decided I wanted to write the most ridiculous pop song that I had ever written," explained Cobain, who said he'd been listening to a fair share of R.E.M. and the Smithereens, as well as the legendary Tacoma garage band the Sonics, at the time. "It was like a statement in a way . . . I wanted to write more songs like that."²

THE MISSING PIECE

On September 22, 1990, Nirvana performed before its largest audience to date—approximately 15,000—at Seattle's Motor Sports International Garage,

sharing the bill with the Melvins, the Dwarves, and the Derelicts. Mudhoney's Dan Peters sat in on drums, in his only public performance with the band.

In the audience that night was Dave Grohl, who'd flown out to Seattle to try out for Nirvana's vacant drum seat after mutual friend Buzz Osborne had put him in touch with Kurt and Chris. Grohl had his audition a few days after the Motor Sports gig, and was invited to join on the spot.

Prior to Nirvana, Grohl had toured and recorded as a member of the notable Washington, D.C. punk/hard-core band Scream. Grohl was born in Warren, Ohio, and had grown up primarily in Virginia, the son of a high school English teacher mother and a journalist father. His parents divorced when he was just six years old and, like Cobain, Dave did unhappy stints living with each parent, before being shuttled between a series of other relatives.

A rock convert from an early age, Grohl took guitar lessons at age twelve, and before long was playing in neighborhood combos. An early new wave enthusiast, he was turned on to punk rock in the summer of 1982 by a female cousin, who took him to see such acts as Naked Raygun, Rights of the Accused, and Channel 3. His affinity for punk didn't keep the personable Grohl from being voted vice president of his freshman class at high school in Alexandria, Virginia. The duties of his office included reading the morning announcements over the school's public-address system, during which he took the opportunity to expose the student body to the music of the Circle Jerks and Bad Brains.

Grohl had made his recording debut as drummer in the speed-riffing punk outfit Mission Impossible, which in 1985 occupied half of a six-song split single on the tiny Sammich label. When that group broke up, Grohl joined hard-core/postpunks Dain Bramage. When he was invited to join Scream, the sixteen-year-old quit high school and didn't look back.

The addition of Grohl instantly gave Nirvana the rhythmic discipline they'd previously lacked. Grohl's Bonham-strength pounding also added a new level of energy to the band, and his stylistic versatility opened up many new musical options.

"Dave added so much more diversity," said Cobain. "Not only did he have perfect metronome timing, he hit really hard. He was able to go in between all the dynamics that we wanted to experiment with. It was just perfect. Plus he sang backup vocals and I'd wanted that forever."³

After joining Nirvana, Grohl relocated to Seattle and moved into Cobain's squalid apartment, where the two new bandmates lived mainly on corndogs and macaroni and cheese. Their mutual poverty was briefly interrupted a few weeks later when Nirvana jetted off for a series of dates in the United Kingdom, where they were now playing to packed venues holding a thousand people.

The increasing music-industry buzz that surrounded Nirvana led to the band signing with Gold Mountain, the high-powered management firm that handled the careers of such above-ground stars as Bonnie Raitt and Belinda

Carlisle, but whose roster also included New York indie icons Sonic Youth, whose members were long-standing Nirvana supporters.

Sonic Youth had recently moved from the indie world to the corporate coffers of Geffen Records' new DGC imprint. It was widely assumed at the time that one of Geffen's motivations for signing the uncommercial but widely respected Sonic Youth was to shore up the company's hip credibility and establish it as an attractive destination for other underground acts with greater sales potential.

Although several majors had actively courted the trio, Nirvana eventually opted for Geffen/DGC, signing with the company in April 1991. At the time, they aspired to sell as many records as Sonic Youth.

As "Sliver" had suggested, Nirvana was moving in a more melodic, emotionally expansive direction. Cobain had long harbored a desire to make music that merged the propulsive heaviness of Black Sabbath with the pop melodicism of the Beatles. But instead he'd pushed Nirvana to work within the conventions of the Sub Pop sound. It wasn't until he heard the Pixies' 1988 album *Surfer Rosa*, with its blend of squalling guitars, screaming vocals, and melodic song structures, that Cobain felt confident enough to pursue his original instincts without worrying about how his scenemates might react.

Prior to beginning work on its first DGC album, Nirvana had met with such notable producers as David Briggs (best known for his work with Neil Young), Don Dixon (R.E.M., the Smithereens), and Scott Litt (R.E.M., the dB's). But Vig, with whom they had already collaborated successfully, was ideally suited to Cobain's vision of fusing infectious pop songcraft and savage punk noise. Although he'd built a reputation for his studio work with such aggressive indie acts as Tad, Killdozer, and Smashing Pumpkins, Vig had also maintained a career as a pop-rock musician, playing drums in such melodic pop-rock acts as Spooner and Fire Town (he would subsequently achieve pop stardom of his own as a member of Garbage).

With a recording budget of \$65,000—modest by major-label standards but far more lavish than anything the band had previously had access to—Nirvana traveled west to begin recording their first major-label album *Nevermind* with Vig at Los Angeles's Sound City studio in May and June 1991.

While Nirvana was engaged in pre-album rehearsal sessions, Cobain reconnected with Courtney Love, a much-traveled veteran of various indie scenes and more recently leader of the band Hole, which was about to release its debut album *Pretty on the Inside*. Kurt and Courtney had briefly met in 1989, but when they reconnected at a Butthole Surfers/Redd Kross/L7 show at L.A.'s Palladium just before recording on *Nevermind* began, sparks flew.

According to Michael Azerrad's 1993 Nirvana bio *Come as You Are*, Courtney expressed her interest in Kurt by punching him in the stomach, and Cobain responded by wrestling her to the ground. Aside from that confrontation, and Novoselic's sixteen-hour stint in jail after being pulled over for driving while intoxicated, the *Nevermind* recording sessions generally went smoothly.

The band found it stimulating to be away from their usual surroundings, and their rapport with the easygoing Vig made for a relatively easy transition to mainstream recording. Although the producer sometimes had trouble getting Cobain to do multiple takes, the band was so well prepared that this didn't become a major problem. The resulting collision of spontaneity and craft would make for a bracing hybrid that amplified Nirvana's best and most distinctive qualities.

Although Nirvana's prior recording efforts had emphasized live-in-the-studio performances, *Nevermind* subtly employed a considerable amount of state-of-the-art technical trickery to achieve more polished results without sacrificing the band's sense of raw energy. While Vig used such common tactics as editing and combining different live takes, commercially astute mixer Andy Wallace employed an arsenal of sonic frills in an effort to increase the album's commercial appeal. Wallace, whose involvement doubled the project's studio budget, ran the tracks through a variety of effects boxes to sweeten and enhance their sonic presence, and added digital reverb and samples to Grohl's drum tracks.

The band reluctantly went along with the audio trickery at the time, but the issue would come to be a source of guilt and embarrassment for Cobain in the future. But the fripperies would be far less apparent on the finished album than the quality of the songs and the raw commitment of the performances. Cobain's singing, in particular, had achieved a level of visceral intensity that had only been hinted at in the band's previous work.

THE YEAR PUNK BROKE

In the summer of 1991, after finishing work on *Nevermind*, Nirvana played a series of West Coast dates with Dinosaur Jr., who'd preceded them in moving from the indie-label world to the corporate major leagues. They then joined their mentors Sonic Youth on a soon-to-be-historic European tour, during which they shared festival stages across the continent with such indie stalwarts as Mudhoney, Babes in Toyland, Gumball, and Dinosaur Jr. They also found time to indulge a growing fondness for drunken backstage destruction.

The two-week trek was documented by indie filmmaker Dave Markey in the documentary *1991: The Year Punk Broke*. In addition to capturing a pivotal moment in rock history, when the indie sound and sensibility was just about to break into mainstream culture, it also captured Nirvana's playful side. In one humorous backstage scene, Cobain plays Kevin Costner to Sonic Youth bassist Kim Gordon's Madonna in a spoof of a scene from the Material Girl's then-recent tour documentary *Truth or Dare*.

1991: The Year Punk Broke also features footage from Nirvana's famed August 23 performance at the England's Reading Festival. The set included impassioned renditions of material from the still-unreleased *Nevermind*,

and ended abruptly when the leather-jacketed Cobain catapulted himself onto the unsuspecting Grohl's drum kit. That leap, which resulted in a dislocated shoulder for Cobain, would stand as an iconic moment in Nirvana's history.

For Nirvana, the sense of community and camaraderie they experienced during the European trek was exciting and empowering. "Every time I look back at the best times in this band, it was right before *Nevermind* came out," Cobain later said.⁴

Nevermind was released on September 24, 1991, and slipped into the nation's CD bins with moderate fanfare, with DGC initially manufacturing a relatively paltry 46,000 copies of the album.

The album's combination of nasty, distorted guitars and modern production sheen offered a sharp, vibrant contrast to *Bleach*'s monochrome blur. The production tinkering couldn't dilute the songs' insistent infectiousness or the trio's formidable instrumental chemistry, which had finally clicked into place with the addition of Grohl's potent pounding.

Cobain's lyrics were often composed of seemingly disconnected, haphazardly arranged fragments, as compelling in their form as in their substance, and their openness to interpretation seemed to broaden their resonance with his new audience. The songwriter's choked, screaming vocals added cathartic urgency to his expressions of anger, pain, and confusion.

"Every song doesn't have a specific theme," Cobain stated at the time. "It's all these ideas incorporated into every song. It's just that every song is about everything—everything that I like and love with as much passion as I can give it."⁵

Nevermind's opening salvo (and first single), "Smells Like Teen Spirit," quickly emerged as both the album's initial calling card and a bracing generational anthem. Boasting one of the most attention-grabbing intros in rock history, the track begins with a lone, strumming guitar before abruptly erupting into an infectiously turbulent barrage of noise and melody, punctuated by the band's trademark (and soon to be much-imitated) low-key passages. Those who heard it at the time couldn't help feeling that the song signified something bigger than just a new rock album.

Cobain had written "Smells Like Teen Spirit" just a few weeks before it was recorded, and hadn't considered the song to be particularly special, although he and Novoselic did worry that fans might dismiss it as a Pixies rip-off. As it turned out, more listeners noted the tune's melodic resemblance to Boston's 1976 hit "More Than a Feeling"—a similarity that Nirvana would acknowledge by occasionally adding the Boston number to their set lists.

Elsewhere on the album, Cobain's troubled consciousness found expression on such pummeling yet haunting tunes as "In Bloom," "Lithium," "Drain You," and "Territorial Pissings" (the latter pointedly begins with Novoselic singing a fragment of the Youngbloods' 1960s folk-rock hit "Get Together"). The mid-tempo "Come as You Are" balanced an inviting lyric with an undercurrent

of sonic menace, while the churning “Breed” recalled the band’s early Melvins influence.

Its reputation as a modern punk touchstone aside, *Nevermind* is also notable for its two quietest songs, “Polly” and “Something in the Way.” The former features evocative lyrical snippets that force the listener to share the perspective of the song’s sexual predator protagonist, while the latter employs space and quiet, brushed by the strains of cello, to bring the album to a beautifully nodding conclusion.

Nevermind’s first pressing accidentally omitted the album’s hidden closing track, the grinding seven-minute vamp “Endless, Nameless,” which the band had improvised in the studio when their early attempts to cut “Lithium” ran astray. The piece is preceded by an extended silence that follows the official album-closer “Something in the Way,” startling listeners who’d let the CD end and forgotten to take it off.

The contradiction-embracing spirit of *Nevermind*’s musical contents was echoed by its provocative cover image, a shot by underwater photographer Kirk Weddle of a baby swimming toward a dollar bill suspended on a fishhook. The image offered a powerful manifestation of the band’s awareness of the irony of its new major-label status, while indicating that they also possessed a sense of humor about their predicament.

Nevermind quickly took off commercially, largely on the strength of “Smells Like Teen Spirit,” and sold out its first pressing, briefly causing a shortage in retail stock of the album. The song was almost instantly proclaimed an anthem for the teen/young-adult age group that the media had become fond of referring to as Generation X.

“I’ve always felt that the song was an observation of a culture mired in boredom amidst relative luxury,” Novoselic opined in his 2004 book *Of Grunge and Government: Let’s Fix This Broken Democracy*. “In other words, many have the means to make their own way but choose not to do so. The lyrics don’t convey a literal message guiding people toward a sense of liberation. It’s simply a comment on a condition.”⁶

The literal meaning of “Smells Like Teen Spirit” was less important than its emotional urgency. With no lyric sheet included in the album package, listeners were hard-pressed to identify exactly what Cobain was singing, which only added to the song’s mythic allure.

The song’s iconic status was underlined by its promotional video, which became a heavy-rotation fixture on MTV. Directed by Sam Bayer but reedited by Cobain, the clip’s images of dry-ice fog, cheerleaders, and flannel-shirted teens moshing in a high-school gymnasium updated music-video clichés for the grunge era.

Nevermind crashed into the *Billboard* album chart’s Top Ten in late November, when it was simultaneously certified gold and platinum by the RIAA.

The band was forthright about its desire to make an impact beyond the indie world, claiming a willingness to play ball with the mainstream in order

to achieve their artistic goals. Cobain observed, “No one, especially people our own age, wants to address important issues. They’d rather say, ‘Nevermind, forget it.’ On one hand, we’re not a political band—we’re just some guys playing music—but we’re not just another mindless band asking people to forget it either.”⁷

Rage Against the Machine: Take the Power Back

In the 1990s, a time of relative political placidity in American society, the L.A.-based band Rage Against the Machine was determined to be a voice for revolutionary change. On their self-titled debut album, released in 1992, the instrumental power trio of Tom Morello (guitar), Tim Commerford (bass), and Brad Wilk (drums) combined with the exhortatory lyrics of vocalist Zack de la Rocha to create an exciting and hugely powerful fusion of hard rock and hip-hop. Rage’s explosive energy made them a difficult act for any other to follow, and the band became arena headliners as their album went on to sell over one million copies.

Rage made its political agenda clear from the start. The group played benefit concerts that raised significant sums for the campaigns to free imprisoned Native American activist Leonard Peltier and to save black revolutionary Mumia Abu-Jamal from the death penalty. Other performances benefited the causes of Tibetan cultural freedom and women’s reproductive rights (Rock for Choice). Rage’s second album, *Evil Empire*, shot to number one upon release in May 1996. It included the Grammy Award–winning song “Tire Me,” and a second track, “People of the Sun”—inspired by the Zapatista movement in southern Mexico—that became a memorable music video. The band’s last album of original material, *The Battle of Los Angeles*, was released in November 1999 and entered the *Billboard* chart at number one.

The three-year gap between albums was indicative of the persistent tension between the quiet, self-effacing Zack de la Rocha and the verbose Harvard honors graduate Tom Morello. De la Rocha left the group in October 2000 and his musical output since then has been sporadic. In 2003, Zack collaborated with producer DJ Shadow on “March of Death,” a fiery musical protest against the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Morello, Commerford, and Wilk joined forces with ex-Soundgarden lead singer Chris Cornell to form Audioslave—a more melodic and less politically oriented group whose second album, *Out of Exile*, topped the *Billboard* chart in 2005.

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Despite such confident statements, soon after *Nevermind*’s release, Cobain began to publicly question some of the production and mixing choices that had determined the album’s finished sound. “I’m constantly feeling guilty in ways,” he admitted in *New Route* magazine. “It’s not that I’m totally unsatisfied with

the production, but it still makes me feel like I've probably offended my own beliefs as a self-proclaimed punk rocker. A few years ago, I would have hated our band." It wouldn't be the last time he'd express ambivalence over Nirvana's career direction.⁸

It became clear early on that *Nevermind's* sales breakthrough was more than just a career achievement for one band. Instead, it was a high-profile victory for a movement that had long been bubbling beneath the surface of popular culture. While hip college-age audiences had supported independent and left-of-center music, the fact that millions of ordinary teenagers across the nation were now listening to a punk band bred in the grassroots indie world signaled a seismic shift in mainstream musical tastes—and occasioned a substantial change in the signing practices of major-label A&R departments.

"It was just the right album at the right time," Cobain later observed. "People were tired of Warrant. It just got old."⁹

The start of 1992 found "Smells Like Teen Spirit" climbing into the Top Ten of the *Billboard* pop singles chart, and *Nevermind* knocking Michael Jackson's much-anticipated *Dangerous* album from the top position on the trade publication's album chart. For any observer of pop-music trends, it was hard to miss the symbolism of this event. Just as Jackson's sleek state-of-the-art R&B had defined the pop zeitgeist of the 1980s, Nirvana's explosive outbursts were the sound of the 1990s.

As Lorraine Ali observed in *Newsweek*, Nirvana "didn't just make Michael Jackson seem as over as the '80s, they made a mockery of Skid Row, Poison, the declining Guns N' Roses and the other rockers with more hair than your mall-rat sister."¹⁰

In an interview with *Spin* magazine, Cobain also revealed his misgivings about the way in which the demographics of Nirvana's fan base had changed since the band's commercial ascent. "I don't necessarily want to go back and play clubs, but I would like to get rid of the homophobes, sexists, and racists in our audience," he said. "I know they're out there and it really bothers me."¹¹

Nirvana's January 11 performance on NBC-TV's *Saturday Night Live*—for which fans began lining up that Friday afternoon in hopes of securing tickets—marked one significant mainstream milestone. The *SNL* performance was something of a punk-era equivalent to Elvis Presley's and the Beatles' historic appearances on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. In addition to playing explosive versions of "Smells Like Teen Spirit" and "Territorial Pissings," the band vigorously upended their equipment through a wail of Cobain's guitar feedback.

It was during the week of the *SNL* appearance that much of the Nirvana camp came to recognize the extent of Cobain's growing heroin habit, and the impact it was having on the band. Kurt would later claim that the original impetus for his heroin use was self-medication, to help him cope with the chronic and extreme stomach pain that he'd been experiencing for years.

It was at around this time that Courtney Love, who had also been using heroin, learned that she was pregnant. Following the *Saturday Night Live* broadcast, she and Cobain moved into an apartment in L.A. together.

On February 2, 1992, *Nevermind* was certified triple-platinum for U.S. sales of three million. The same month, the band played a well-received tour of Pacific Rim countries, concluding with a pair of concerts in Hawaii. During the Hawaiian stopover, Kurt Cobain and Courtney Love were married in a small ceremony on February 24.

In conjunction with the tour, the six-song Nirvana EP *Hormoaning* was released in Australia and Japan. Along with the “Smells Like Teen Spirit” B-sides “Aneurysm” and “Even in His Youth,” the disc also paid tribute to the band’s influences with a quartet of covers, encompassing “D-7” by seminal Northwest punks the Wipers, “Turnaround” by new-wave conceptualists Devo, and “Son of a Gun” and “Molly’s Lips,” a pair of tunes by Scottish indie-popsters the Vaselines. The latter three tracks were culled from a 1990 session the band had cut for broadcast on legendary English DJ John Peel’s BBC program.

As *Nevermind* continued to rack up stratospheric sales, Cobain’s personal life became subjected to increasingly intense scrutiny. Fans and journalists speculated about rumors surrounding his drug use, his emotional stability, and his marriage to the volatile, sharp-tongued Courtney Love. The talk only increased when Cobain was hospitalized after collapsing in a Belfast hotel in June 1992.

In early August, a feature about Cobain and Love appeared in *Vanity Fair* magazine, and implied that Love had used heroin during her pregnancy. Love and Cobain denied the allegations, and reportedly threatened and harassed the piece’s author, Lynn Hirschberg.

On August 18, 1992, Courtney gave birth to a healthy baby girl, Frances Bean Cobain, but the blessed event was followed by a *Los Angeles Times* article alleging that Love had been receiving methadone treatment two weeks before her daughter was born.

As the rumor mill continued to rage back home, the new father made a triumphant return to the Reading Festival, this time in a headlining slot. For Cobain, the high-profile event offered an opportunity to mount his own response to the current media frenzy.

Clad in a hospital gown and a blonde wig, a frail-looking Kurt was rolled onto the Reading stage in a wheelchair. The singer struggled to the mic to sing a snatch of the Bette Midler ballad “The Rose,” before collapsing backward in a sprawl. Cobain’s ability to parody his personal pain in such a high-profile forum belied his image as angry young mope-rocker. With Cobain’s Norma Desmond act out of the way, Nirvana tore through an energized set that included “All Apologies,” a bittersweet new tune slated for the band’s projected third album.

But the fallout from Kurt and Courtney's recent negative media coverage wasn't over. Los Angeles child-care authorities soon stepped in—as a result of the *Vanity Fair* article, Cobain believed—and briefly took custody of the newborn Frances.

As public interest in Nirvana—and in the newlyweds—continued to grow, the focus of much of the media coverage shifted from chronicling a new rock revolution to telling a more conventional story about drugs and the destructive personalities of the two unlikely celebrities. In December 1992, in one of several attempts at damage control, the Cobain family posed proudly on the cover of *Spin*, which trumpeted Artist of the Year honors for Nirvana.

The various dramas surrounding Nirvana helped to keep the band from mounting a high-profile U.S. tour to capitalize on *Nevermind*'s success, and delayed the making of a follow-up studio album. Instead, fans clamoring for more Nirvana music got the rarities compilation *Incesticide*, released in December 1992.

Although assembled from various B-sides, outtakes, demos, and BBC sessions, the collection nonetheless maintained a remarkably high level of quality. Despite the fact that Nirvana was still a new band with only two full-length albums under its belt, the amount of material available for *Incesticide* was striking. Beyond Cobain's mildly disturbing cover painting and his revealing, unsettling liner notes, the collection included the *Blew* EP track "Stain," much of the import-only *Hormoaning* EP and four previously unreleased tracks from the January 1988 demo session with Dale Crover.

ARGUING WITH SUCCESS

In early 1993, as Nirvana prepared to enter the studio to begin work on its third album, *In Utero*, Cobain revealed that he had music for a dozen new songs, but that his notebooks of new lyrics had been destroyed, along with some treasured guitars, in a plumbing accident in his apartment while the group was touring in Europe.

Disregarding the commercial pressures facing any band following up a blockbuster album—let alone one anointed the Voice of a Generation—the band chose to avoid *Nevermind*'s production polish to make a raw, honest punk album.

For the task, they chose indie recording icon Steve Albini. In addition to leading the esteemed noise outfits Big Black, Rapeman, and Shellac, Albini was an uncompromising lo-fi studio ace whose unadorned recording philosophy concentrated on conveying the dynamics of a rock band playing in a room. His no-frills approach had made him Albini an in-demand engineer (he generally refused to be credited as "producer") for such prominent alt-rock acts as Tad, Helmet, the Jon Spencer Blues Explosion, and the Pixies, whose beloved *Surfer Rosa* Albini recorded.

At the time, Nirvana's decision to work with Albini and eschew the stealthy studio gadgetry that had helped *Nevermind* to penetrate the mainstream consciousness caused considerable consternation at Geffen/DGC. Some observers theorized that the band was consciously trying to shed its mass audience, a charge that Cobain vigorously denied.

Nirvana's third album *In Utero* was recorded and mixed with Albini in two weeks during February 1993 at Pachyderm Studios in rural Cannon Falls, Minnesota, where the band was booked under the pseudonym the Simon Ritchie Bluegrass Ensemble (Simon Ritchie being Sid Vicious's real name). Despite the skimpy time frame, the sessions were finished ahead of schedule, thanks to the trio's intensive rehearsals and Albini's disciplined work ethic.

Although the band was reportedly initially happy with what they'd cut with Albini, their record company was apparently less impressed. *ChicagoTribune* critic Greg Kot reported that high-placed Geffen executives had claimed to him that the album was unreleasable; Cobain later confirmed that Nirvana's Geffen A&R rep, Gary Gersh, and the band's management were unhappy with the recordings. Albini later theorized that Gersh had tipped off Kot in attempt to exert pressure on Cobain to have the tracks remixed.

For whatever reason, Cobain and Novoselic subsequently revised their opinion of the recordings, and reportedly asked Albini to remix the tracks. When Albini demurred, R.E.M. producer Scott Litt was brought in to remix a pair of tracks, "All Apologies" and "Heart-Shaped Box," also the album's first two singles. (Litt also remixed a third track, "Pennyroyal Tea," although his version was released only on the single version of the song.) The remainder of the album used Albini's original mixes, but mastering engineer Bob Ludwig did substantial sonic tinkering to boost the presence of the vocals and bass, much to Albini's annoyance.

In retrospect, the pre-release hand-wringing over Albini's production seems less a reflection on the album's musical quality than an indication of how much money was riding on its success. Removed from the original controversy, *In Utero* is a bracingly powerful effort that presents Nirvana's salient qualities in an appropriately edgy sonic context. If its sound was alienating to some listeners, it wasn't outrageously inconsistent with the band's prior output.

In interviews, Cobain resisted the notion that Nirvana had, in effect, chosen to record an album with one creative hand tied behind their collective back simply to make a point.

Even if the band's intention had been to bolster their indie street cred, to atone for Cobain's guilt over *Nevermind*'s commercial compromises, or simply to alienate their more casual fans, *In Utero*'s most subversive element wasn't its production but the songs themselves. The material largely downplayed the previous album's anthemic choruses in favor of emotional and melodic subtlety, and the songs' emotionally naked lyrics are well served by the pared-down musical settings.

The lashing “Serve the Servants” opens the album. In light of subsequent events, it’s hard not to read the bleak, resigned lyrics of such songs as “Heart-Shaped Box,” “Rape Me,” and the heartbreaking closing track “All Apologies” as presaging Cobain’s self-inflicted death. But even if he had lived, *In Utero* would still carry an unmistakable air of farewell.

Upon its September release, *In Utero* sold in healthy quantities, but substantially less than its predecessor, which might well have been the case even if the band had made a carbon copy of *Nevermind*. A subsequent U.S. tour—the band’s first since *Nevermind* took off—was reasonably well attended overall, but met with some disappointing turnouts.

The accusations of Nirvana being deliberately uncommercial were seemingly refuted by the fact that the band acceded to Geffen’s request to ship an altered edition of *In Utero*, with its cover art toned down and “Rape Me” retitled “Waif Me,” to such conservative retail chains as Wal-Mart and K-Mart, so that fans in small towns would still be able to purchase the album.

In Utero’s troubled, turbulent vibe seemed to reflect the mood within the band. Cobain had suffered a heroin overdose on May 2, although that fact was not revealed to the public at the time. The following month, Love called police to the family’s Seattle home after Cobain threatened suicide. Cobain had a second overdose in July, just prior to a show to preview the *In Utero* songs at New York’s Roseland Ballroom.

When Nirvana began touring behind *In Utero* in the fall of 1993, the band was an on-stage quartet once again, with the addition of second guitarist Pat Smear to the lineup. Although a new face to most Nirvana fans, Smear was already a punk icon when Kurt Cobain was going through puberty. As a member of the seminal quartet the Germs, he’d been an important presence on the L.A. punk scene, before the band’s singer Darby Crash died of a heroin overdose in 1980.

Smear made his Nirvana debut when the band returned to *Saturday Night Live* in September. When a forty-five-date North American tour kicked off in October, the lineup was further augmented by classically trained cellist Lori Goldstone, whose textures meshed surprisingly well with the band’s harder edges.

As the band toured and rumors continued to circulate, fans and press continued to speculate about the state of Cobain’s health. In a cover story in the November of *Details*, Cobain claimed that he had been off heroin for a year.

During a pause in the tour in November, the band stopped off in New York for a one-off acoustic performance on MTV’s *Unplugged*. The show’s stripped-down format proved to be a fortuitous vehicle for Cobain’s songs and the band’s instrumental rapport, accentuating the introspective, melancholy elements of such tunes as “About a Girl,” “Come as You Are,” “Pennyroyal Tea,” and “All Apologies.”

In addition to revealing Novoselic’s capable accordion chops, the *Unplugged* set also featured a guest appearance by Curt and Cris Kirkwood of the beloved

Meat Puppets, who joined in to play three of their own tunes. The set also included memorable covers of the Vaselines' "Jesus Doesn't Want Me for a Sunbeam," David Bowie's "The Man Who Sold the World," and Leadbelly's "Where Did You Sleep Last Night."

Casual fans may have been surprised by the twentysomething combo's choice of the latter number, a decades-old blues standard. But Cobain was a committed Leadbelly fan, and had already recorded a version of the song with Screaming Trees frontman Mark Lanegan on Lanegan's 1990 solo album *The Winding Sheet*. So it's not surprising that Cobain's haunting, possessed reading of "Where Did You Sleep Last Night" was one of the *Unplugged* set's highlights.

November also saw Nirvana contribute to another, somewhat less demanding MTV-related project by contributing a track, "I Hate Myself and Want to Die," to the tie-in album *The Beavis and Butt-Head Experience*. Despite its worrisome title, the song was more self-deprecating than desperate.

In a January 1994 *Rolling Stone* cover story titled "Success Doesn't Suck," Cobain confirmed that the song was intended as a joke, which was one reason that the band left it off *In Utero*. Much of the *Rolling Stone* piece found Cobain working to dispel his image as a tortured, addicted, withdrawn contrarian.

Also in January, Nirvana entered Seattle's Robert Lang Studios to record "You Know You're Right," a new song that they'd been playing on tour. It was the band's first recording session since completing work on *In Utero* a year earlier. It would also prove to be their last.

R.I.P.

On March 1, Nirvana played what would be their last live show at Terminal Ein in Munich, Germany. After the performance, Kurt became ill and was diagnosed with bronchitis and laryngitis. Canceling several shows, he flew to Rome to receive medical treatment and spend time with his wife and daughter. On the morning of March 4, Cobain was rushed to the hospital after suffering an overdose of the tranquilizer Rohypnol combined with alcohol. After being hospitalized for five days, Cobain returned to Seattle.

Although management and the record company assured the press that the overdose had been accidental, many within the Nirvana camp confirmed that Cobain had attempted suicide. On March 18, Love called the police to their Seattle home after Kurt locked himself in a room, threatening to kill himself.

On March 26, Kurt was reported as "restored to full health and looking forward to touring the U.K." But by March 30, the British tour was off and Cobain was admitted to the Exodus Recovery Center in Marina Del Rey, California. After three days at Exodus, Cobain abruptly left the facility and returned to his home in Seattle.

Cobain then seemed to vanish from the radar of his family, bandmates, friends, and business associates, who were unable to contact him. His mother contacted police to file a missing persons report.

On the morning of April 8, 1994, the body of twenty-seven-year-old Kurt Cobain was discovered above the garage of his Seattle home by Gary Smith, an electrician who'd entered the house to install a new security system. Authorities later estimated his death to have occurred three days before his body was found, and ruled it to be the result of a self-inflicted gunshot wound. Medical examiners discovered heroin and Valium in his bloodstream.

The news of Cobain's death was accompanied by a level of public grief and mourning that the music world had not witnessed since the murder of John Lennon fourteen years earlier. While radio stations blanketed the airwaves with Nirvana music, the media descended upon Seattle, ready to lionize Cobain as a tragic spokesman for his generation.

The first Nirvana release following Cobain's death arrived in November 1994. *MTV Unplugged in New York*, the fourteen-song album version of the band's television performance, avoided accusations of exploitation through the understated power of its musical contents. Indeed, the album's restrained, emotion-charged performances carried an appropriately bittersweet tone in light of the tragedy that followed its recording.

MTV Unplugged in New York debuted at number one on the *Billboard* album chart, selling more than 310,000 copies in the first week of release and later earning the band a Grammy Award in the Best Alternative Music Performance. The *Unplugged* version of "About a Girl" became a popular radio hit, and its stand-alone clip became an MTV favorite.

While Cobain's death is generally accepted to have been the result of suicide, various alternate theories regarding the cause of his death have arisen. Most of these have centered around the premise that the incident was actually a murder staged to look like a suicide. The most prominent manifestation of this was filmmaker Nick Broomfield's documentary *Kurt and Courtney*, which probed some of the darker aspects of the couple's relationship and raised the possibility that the death was a paid hit.

For Cobain's most devoted fans, though, the impulse is to remember what he and his band gave them, not the manner in which he was taken from them.

"I miss Kurt Cobain and Nirvana for the same reasons everybody else does," Kurt Loder wrote on MTV.com on the tenth anniversary of the artist's death.

Apart from their music, which I think will live as long as there are ears attuned to hear it, and their live shows, which were titanic, they exuded something rare: a near magical musical power that can unite people in ecstasy or anguish, but in any case unite them, and maybe, make their lives seem a little richer and more exciting, more filled with possibility, a little more worthy of living.¹²

AFTER THE END

In the years following Cobain's death, his bandmates have followed divergent career paths. Krist Novoselic (who had reverted to the original spelling of his given name following a 1993 trip to Croatia) formed Sweet 75, an eclectic musical venture pairing him with Venezuelan vocalist Yva Las Vegas, which released one grunge-free album for DGC in 1997. In 2002, he recorded an album as a member of Eyes Adrift, a supergroup power trio that also included Curt Kirkwood of the Meat Puppets and ex-Sublime drummer Bud Gaugh.

But Novoselic has focused much of his post-Nirvana energies upon social activism. He has been involved in regional politics in Washington state, worked on behalf of pro-choice and gay rights organizations, and worked to raise awareness about the plight of women and children in the conflict-torn former Yugoslavia. In 1995, Novoselic founded Joint Artists and Music Promotions Political Action Committee (JAMPAC), an advocacy organization for Washington state's music community.

Novoselic also combined his musical and political interests to team with Soundgarden's Kim Thayil and Dead Kennedys leader Jello Biafra to form the No WTO Combo, whose performance accompanied protests of during the World Trade Organization's 1999 conference in Seattle. In 2004, he authored the book *Of Grunge and Government: Let's Fix This Broken Democracy*, a combination memoir and practical guide to political activism.

Dave Grohl, meanwhile, quickly reinvented himself to carve out a durable and commercially successful post-Nirvana musical career. Having established his songwriting and singing credentials with "Marigold," released in the United Kingdom as a B-side on Nirvana's "Heart-Shaped Box" single, Grohl adopted the group identity of Foo Fighters. After recording the first Foo Fighters album by overdubbing all of the instruments himself, he expanded the act into a full-fledged quartet with Grohl singing and playing guitar.

Grohl has also found time to lend his drumming skills to a variety of acts ranging from classic-rock icon Tom Petty to prominent alt-rock outfits Killing Joke, Nine Inch Nails, Queens of the Stone Age, and ex-Minutemen bassist Mike Watt, on whose 1995 solo effort *Ball-Hog or Tugboat?* Grohl was briefly reunited with Kris Novoselic.

Meanwhile, Nirvana's posthumous legend continued to grow, fueled by the distance of history and a trickle of posthumous releases. In 1996, DGC released *From the Muddy Banks of the Wishkah*, a sixteen-song live album spanning the band's career. Even without an active band to promote it, the live disc reached the top slot on the *Billboard* album charts.

2002's *Nirvana* was a single-CD compilation that distilled a selection of key tracks from the band's history. The disc's most anticipated selling point was the previously unheard "You Know You're Right," the new original that the band had recorded less than three months before Cobain's death.

A few years earlier, Novoselic had begun research for a proposed box set of rare and unreleased tracks covering Nirvana's entire existence. The archival project was originally intended for a 2001 release in conjunction with *Nevermind*'s tenth anniversary. But legal disputes between Love and the surviving Nirvana members delayed the collection's release. It was finally issued in 2004 as the lavishly packaged, lovingly annotated three-CD/one-DVD box set *With the Lights Out*. The package went platinum and reached number nineteen on the *Billboard* album chart—an impressive showing for a high-priced box set.

More than a decade after Kurt Cobain's passing, Nirvana's best work retains its musical and emotional resonance, while the changes that the band wrought remain deeply ingrained upon the face of popular music as well as the music industry. If the advent of "alternative rock"—a term that has grown so nebulous as to be almost meaningless—has opened the doors for much mediocre music, it has also greatly expanded the audience for adventurous and left-of-center rock. And, while Cobain was never able to enjoy the fruits of his success, the music that he made during his lifetime continues to enlighten and inspire.

TIMELINE

December 1987

Kurt Cobain, Krist Novoselic, and drummer Aaron Burckhard form the first lineup of Nirvana in their hometown of Aberdeen, Washington.

January 23, 1988

With Dale Crover of the Melvins filling in on drums, Nirvana records a ten-song demo with producer Jack Endino at Endino's Seattle studio Reciprocal Recordings. The demos will soon win the band a deal with Sub Pop Records.

October 30, 1988

Kurt smashes his guitar on stage for the first time.

November 1988

Nirvana's first Sub Pop single, "Love Buzz"/"Big Cheese," is released.

June 1989

Sub Pop releases Nirvana's first album *Bleach*, which the band supports with a month-long club tour.

October 23, 1989

Nirvana plays its first overseas show, in Newcastle, England.

September 25, 1990

Drummer Dave Grohl, formerly of Washington, D.C., band Scream, joins Nirvana.

April 17, 1991

Nirvana plays "Smells Like Teen Spirit" in public for the first time.

April 30, 1991

Nirvana signs with Geffen/DGC Records.

August 1991

Nirvana open for their heroes Sonic Youth on a European festival tour, documented in the film *1991: The Year Punk Broke*.

September 20, 1991

Nirvana launches their *Nevermind* tour in Toronto.

September 24, 1991

Nevermind is released by DGC.

October 12, 1991

Nevermind is certified gold.

January 11, 1992

Nevermind hits number one on *Billboard's* album chart. The same day, Nirvana performs on *Saturday Night Live*.

February 24, 1992

Kurt Cobain marries Courtney Love in Waikiki, Hawaii.

April 1992

Nirvana appears on the cover of *Rolling Stone*.

August 18, 1992

Frances Bean Cobain is born.

September 21, 1993

In Utero is released.

November 19, 1993

Nirvana tapes an all-acoustic *MTV Unplugged* performance at Sony Studios in New York.

January 7, 1994

Nirvana plays its last U.S. show at the Seattle Arena.

February 6, 1994

Nirvana embarks on a tour of Europe.

March 1, 1994

Nirvana performs at Terminal Ein in Munich, Germany. It will be their final show.

March 4, 1994

Kurt is hospitalized in Rome, following a suicide attempt.

April 8, 1994

Kurt Cobain is found dead of a self-inflicted shotgun wound.

April 10, 1994

Thousands of fans turn out for a Cobain memorial service in Seattle.

SELECT DISCOGRAPHY

Bleach, 1989

Nevermind, 1991

Incesticide, 1992

In Utero, 1993

MTV Unplugged in New York, 1994

From the Muddy Banks of the Wishkah, 1996

Nirvana, 2002

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2. *Ibid.*, p. 145.
3. “Kurt Speaks: An Exclusive 1994 Interview,” VH-1, available online at www.vh1.com/artists/interview/1458484/11042002/nirvana.jhtml.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Mike Gitter, “Nirvana: A Steady Current of Mistrust and Contempt for the ‘Average American,’” *East Coast Rocker*, October 9, 1991.
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12. Kurt Loder, “Days of Thunder,” *MTV.com*, April 2004; available online at www.mtv.com/bands/n/nirvana/news_feature_040325.

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