

Rock Music

I was the originator, I was the emancipator, I was the architect of rock 'n' roll. . . . When I made rock 'n' roll I got tired of the old people's music of that time. I did it because that's what I wanted to hear. I was tired of the slow music.

—ROCK SINGER/SONGWRITER/PIANIST LITTLE RICHARD (BORN IN 1932)



First Hearing

Little Richard's "Tutti Frutti" on iTunes

Listen to Little Richard's recording of "Tutti Frutti" and take notes about what you hear. Give some attention to the following:

- How would you describe the tempo?
- Can you detect the meter?
- What is the song about?
- Can you tell what instruments accompany the singing?
- Do you hear any repeated melodies or lyrics?

Keep these notes to compare with your impressions about the music after you study the information in this chapter.

Roots and Early Rock Performers

Rock music was born in the late 1940s and early 1950s out of a combination of blues, **rhythm and blues**, gospel, and country music. The styles of early rock music were varied. Some blues or rhythm-and-blues recordings that were particularly upbeat (fast) and energetic are now considered to be early rock. "Tutti Frutti," for example, follows the twelve-bar form of the blues, but the energy level created by the instruments and Little Richard's no-holds-barred vocal style make it as much rock and roll as blues. As Little Richard said in the quote that opens this chapter, "I was tired of the slow music."

Country music became part of early rock and roll when country musicians **covered** (rerecorded) blues songs. When those musicians tried to play the blues, their experience in playing country music changed the basic sound of the music. In comparison with blues musicians, country musicians tended to have a less relaxed approach to the rhythmic flow of the music; they often used slides to get from one note to another, and they used more repetition of short melodic patterns than improvisation in their instrumentals. An early



Musician Chuck Berry
© Lynn Goldsmith/Corbis

example of this can be heard in the early-to-middle 1950s recordings by Bill Haley. Haley had a Western swing band called the Saddlemen in 1951. They covered “Rocket 88,” a blues song that had been previously released by Jackie Brenston singing with Ike Turner’s band. Haley’s teenage audiences responded so well to it that Haley decided to change his image. He renamed the band the Comets, and they continued to record blues songs in their blues/country mixed style. Their cover of the blues song “Shake, Rattle and Roll” hit the top ten in 1954, assuring Haley that he was on the road to success. When Bill Haley and the Comets’ recording of “Rock Around the Clock” was used in the opening credits of the teen movie *The Blackboard Jungle* (1954), it catapulted to number one on the Billboard charts, and rock music suddenly gained national attention. Haley’s career continued with less success, but many other performers took up where he left off.

By 1955, Chuck Berry, an African American blues musician whose style included some characteristics of country music, recorded “Maybelline,” an old country song originally called “Ida Red,” to which he had written new lyrics. Its top-ten chart rating boosted Berry’s career to rock and roll stardom, a status he still enjoys today. Berry’s songs tended to be full of a lively spirit that reminded fans that rock and roll music was a great

change from the past. “Roll Over Beethoven” is a good example of his claim that rock music had surpassed the importance of “old” music by such composers as Beethoven and Tchaikovsky. Berry became known as the “Father of Rock Guitar” because his guitar style was copied by so many later rock musicians to follow him.

There was much racism in the 1950s, and although such African Americans as Little Richard and Chuck Berry sold enough records to have hits on the pop charts, there was a much bigger market for Caucasian musicians. Elvis Presley, whose good looks afforded him much of the same appeal as the popular actor James Dean, topped the charts nation-wide. Elvis Presley’s recording career began in 1954, when he signed with a very small record company, Sun Records, in Memphis, Tennessee. Presley’s early recordings at Sun popularized a style called rockabilly that combined “hillbilly” country music with blues influences. **Rockabilly** records were popular in the South, but the company owner and producer, Sam Phillips, did not have the money or connections to promote Presley’s career nationally. RCA bought Presley’s contract in 1956, and the manager they hired booked him on every television variety show in the country. Presley was a very strong and appealing performer, but for some TV producers Presley’s way of shaking his hips when he sang was too suggestive. The Ed Sullivan show, for example, would only film Presley above the waist. His singing, stage presence, and engaging personality made him an overnight star. He began his long and successful movie career in 1956, and from then on he became known as the “King of Rock and Roll.”

The Presley craze opened the floodgates for rock music and musicians. A number of other rockabilly musicians became popular, among them Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins, Buddy Holly, Roy Orbison, and Eddie Cochran. Other African Americans with blues and rhythm-and-blues backgrounds also gained national attention, including pianist/singer Fats Domino.

To many Americans, early rock music was a bit threatening and they still preferred to hear white pop-oriented singers. The pop singer Pat Boone made a cover recording of Little Richard's song "Tutti Frutti" that was a bigger hit than the original. Boone changed the lyrics, however, to remove the suggestion that he "rocks" with Suzy because such sexual references were not appropriate for Boone's clean-cut image. Of course, Little Richard received the writer's royalties for Boone's recording, so he didn't really mind. When asked what he thought about Boone's recording, Little Richard said he knew that kids had Pat's record to show their mamas, but they had his hidden in their bedroom drawers.



Featured Listening

Little Richard's "Tutti Frutti" on iTunes

"Tutti Frutti" LITTLE RICHARD

Date: 1955

Genre: Early Rock Music

Tempo: Fast and energetic

Form: Twelve-bar blues, nine choruses (A "chorus" is a full set of twelve bars of the blues form)

Instruments: Little Richard's voice and piano with string bass, tenor saxophone, and drums

Meter: Quadruple

Duration: 2:20

Context: The drums play strong accents on beats two and four of each bar (the "back beats"), adding to the energy of the recording. This kind of stress on the back beats is common in rock music of the fifties.

Timing

What to listen for

0:00	Little Richard's vocal introduction establishes the mood of the recording
0:02	First blues chorus, "Tutti Frutti . . ."
0:17	Second blues chorus, "Got a gal . . ."
0:33	Third blues chorus, "Tutti Frutti . . ."
0:48	Fourth blues chorus, "Got a gal . . ."
1:04	Fifth blues chorus, "Tutti Frutti . . ."
1:19	Sixth blues chorus, instrumental chorus featuring the tenor saxophone
1:34	Seventh blues chorus, "Tutti Frutti . . ."
1:49	Eighth blues chorus, "Got a gal . . ."
2:05	Ninth blues chorus, "Tutti Frutti . . ."

1960s Rock Music

There were a lot of things about 1950s rock music that people in the record industry did not like. For one thing, rock musicians tended to write their own songs, which cut the incomes for songwriters who traditionally wrote for pop singers. Rock music was also so clearly rooted in African American styles that some people, particularly in the South, did not want their young people to hear it. As Asa Carter of the North Alabama White Citizen's Council said in 1956, "Rock and roll is a means of pulling down the white man to the level of the Negro. It is part of a plot to undermine the morals of the youth of our nation." Other Americans disliked the sexiness of some rock singers and their songs and thought that the music would ruin young people's morals. The record industry eventually won out and was able to promote a very pop style of music that they tried to sell as rock. Pat Boone's "Tutti Frutti," for example, had none of the sexy energy that Little Richard's did. Part of the reason the record industry was able to win out was that many rock artists of the 1950s stopped performing at the end of that decade or the beginning of the next. Buddy Holly, the Big Bopper, and Ritchie Valens died in a plane crash; Elvis was drafted into the army; Jerry Lee Lewis's career was boycotted when his illegal marriage to his young cousin was reported; Eddie Cochran died in a car crash that also badly injured Gene Vincent; Little Richard quit singing rock and entered a Bible college; Carl Perkins was injured in a car crash; and Chuck Berry was imprisoned for two years for a violation of the Mann Act, which stated that it was illegal to take an under-age female across state lines for immoral purposes.

The day of Buddy Holly's plane crash is often called "the day the music died." The reason is not just the loss of Holly, Valens, and the Big Bopper; it is also that pop singers such as Frankie Avalon and Fabian took their places on the continuation of the tour, and the fans did not seem to notice the movement from more

aggressive and rhythmic 1950s rock to a smoother and more polite pop style. Pop styles were marketed so heavily that many "rock" recordings of the late 1950s and early 1960s had orchestral string sections and other instruments not associated with rock of the mid-1950s.

Many of the songs in this pop style, sometimes referred to as "teen idol" music, had lyrics such as "(Today I Met) The Boy I'm Gonna Marry" that were meant to appeal to very young teens. College-age teens wanted more to think about when they listened to music and many became fans of folk music. The civil rights movement began during the 1950s and continued on through the 1960s. The primary goals of the movement were to achieve greater equality for non-white Americans, particularly African Americans, who were not yet allowed to vote freely in parts of the South. The Vietnam War began and escalated during the 1960s, and so many young American men were drafted and died as a result that it was of great concern to young people. Folk music has traditionally taken a stand against war and against racism. Folk singer Bob Dylan became the spokesperson for the middle 1960s generation. Dylan put out his first album in 1962, but it was too folk-styled to become a hit

Elvis Presley
© Bettmann/Corbis



on the pop charts. His popularity as a rock musician started in 1965, when he began to record with amplified rock instruments and drums, something pure folk musicians avoided. Dylan sang songs against war and was supportive of the civil rights movement. Other **folk-rock** groups such as the Byrds, the Mamas and the Papas, and Simon and Garfunkel followed.

The **British Invasion** of 1964 also provided an alternative to teen-idol pop music in that the British bands had based their styles on American 1950s rock. The British bands' popularity, in effect, brought that more aggressive and less pop-oriented sound back to American audiences. The first two bands to “invade and conquer” the U.S. pop charts were the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. Members of both bands later became highly original writers in their own right, but they started their careers by copying the recordings and styles of Buddy Holly, in the case of the Beatles, and American blues and rhythm-and-blues musicians, in the case of the Stones. The Beatles named themselves after Holly's group, which was called the Crickets. “Rolling stone” was a slang term for a “man on the move, ready to satisfy every woman he meets” often used in songs by blues man Muddy Waters. At the time, this term evoked the image the Rolling Stones wanted. In general, British bands were so popular in America that American bands tried to pretend they were British. The Sir Douglas Quintet chose their name to attract fans of the British bands, but when they were interviewed by the press, the fact that they were from Texas became pretty obvious.

Soul music was another alternative for people who had no interest in early 1960s pop. Soul music developed out of black gospel music, and it shared many musical characteristics with gospel, such as the use of a solo singer backed by a group of two to four singers. Both gospel and soul solo singers tend to add what are called *melismas* (several notes sung to a single syllable of text) to decorate their vocal style. The primary difference between gospel and soul is that gospel music is religious while soul is secular. In fact, many of the most popular soul singers, such as Sam Cooke, James Brown, and Aretha Franklin, were all professional gospel singers before recording soul. Soul styles developed all over the United States, with major styles centered in Chicago, Memphis, Philadelphia, and Detroit, home of the Motown style. The singer, songwriter, and dynamic performer who came to be called the “Godfather of Soul” was James Brown. Brown was not only a great soul singer, but he also single-handedly invented **funk**, a style derived from the polyrhythms of African music, with his recording of “Out of Sight” in 1964. Brown also did much to cool tensions within the civil rights movement after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King with his recording and performances of “Say It Loud—I'm Black and I'm Proud” (1968). His message, not unlike that of Dr. King himself, was one of pride for African Americans and a peaceful movement toward equal rights and opportunities.

One of the most influential guitarists in rock history, Jimi Hendrix, enjoyed a short career between 1966 and 1970. Hendrix was playing in an American blues



Folk singer Bob Dylan
© Thierry Orban/Corbis Sygma

Guitarist Jimi Hendrix
© Douglas Kent Hall/ZUMA/
Corbis



band when Chas Chandler of the British group the Animals heard him. Chandler invited him to come to England, where blues-based rock music had a bigger following than it did in the United States. Hendrix accepted the invitation and subsequently formed the Jimi Hendrix Experience with English musicians Noel Redding and Mitch Mitchell. He was a big success in England before he was introduced to American audiences at the Monterey Pop Festival in 1967. He is famous for having “sacrificed” his guitar in flames in that show, but that was not the standard for Hendrix. He generally showed great respect for his instrument. From Monterey until his death in 1970 he worked with a variety of groups in the United States and the United Kingdom. He is best remembered for the highly controlled sound effects he could get out of the guitar and for his electrifying stage presence. One of his most famous performances was the “Star Spangled Banner” at the Woodstock Festival in 1969. He turned the U.S. national anthem into an aural antiwar statement by using some of the sound effects he was famous for to make his guitar sound as if bombs were dropping between parts of the melody.

The Diversity of Rock of the 1970s

From its beginnings rock music has existed in a variety of styles, but during the 1970s it spread out even further when rock bands added characteristics of other kinds of music to their sound. The Byrds and the Eagles added the sounds of the banjo and the mandolin to create a style called **country rock**. In the South, **Southern rock** was created by the Allman Brothers Band and others who played an aggressive form of the blues along with country influences. Jazz horn sections were added to rock bands such as Blood, Sweat and Tears to create the style **jazz rock**. Amplified rock instruments were added to jazz by Miles Davis to develop the jazz style called fusion. Moody Blues and other bands added whole orchestras or sections of instruments from orchestras to create the style **art rock**. Blues revival bands developed more powerful styles of **hard rock** and **heavy metal**, and elaborate stage theatrics became central to **glitter rock**. All of these diverse styles began in the late 1960s and grew to huge proportions during the 1970s.

Punk rock began during the middle 1960s in Detroit and New York, but it pretty much stayed in the northeastern United States until bands such as the New York Dolls and the Ramones went to England and sparked the punk movement there. Aggressive and angry punk bands stayed small and reached a whole audience of young people who did not care at all for grand arena performances by art, glitter, or heavy metal bands. Punk moved to the American west coast when the British band the Sex Pistols toured there in 1978. Punk had a big following throughout the 1970s, and post-punk styles continued to develop throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

The 1980s and Beyond

The hip-hop culture developed when Jamaican reggae disc jockeys such as DJ Kool Herc began playing music to encourage break dancing on street corners in New York's South Bronx. Others imitated his patter talk over the music. The style that resulted was **rap**. Much rap was and is very positive. Early rapper Afrika Bambaataa formed what he called the Zulu Nation and encouraged people of all races to join. Members participated in neighborhood cleanup projects, food drives, mentor programs, and talent shows. It was not until rap was taken up by street gangs in Los Angeles that the very angry and aggressive style called **gangsta rap** gave the patter-spoken vocals a negative reputation.

Much about the marketing of rock music and its many related styles changed dramatically when cable television became available nationwide and **MTV** was broadcast coast to coast. Suddenly a performer's ability to dance was as important as singing or playing musical instruments. People in the entertainment industry came to realize that images sold music much more easily than radio. Racism still being a factor in the entertainment industry, early MTV did not show many African American performers, but once Michael Jackson started making videos, his career was unstoppable. He was just too good to be ignored, and he eventually came to be called the King of Pop. Prince and Madonna were other dancer/singers whose careers were greatly aided by their videos on MTV. Of course, eventually other cable/satellite stations were added to show rock videos, and MTV itself added game shows and other types of entertainment to their programming, but the importance of MTV in the 1980s is without a doubt revolutionary to rock music of the era.

Also during the 1980s, music that was on the pop charts in England became popular in the United States as **alternative rock**, so named because it offered an alternative to the dance-oriented pop rock that MTV played most often. Bands such as the Smiths and the Cure gained alternative reputations in the United States. Other alternatives to pop rock were post-punk styles that developed in many parts of the United States. Some of those post-punk styles were aggressively antidrug, including Ian MacKaye's band Minor Threat. In the 1990s MacKaye formed the popular band Fugazi, who led the movement to reduce CD and concert ticket prices. The Seattle band Pearl Jam was also part of that movement. It sued Ticketmaster because of the prices it charged for tickets. The suit was unsuccessful, but the effort was lauded by fans. Other bands from the Seattle area became known as **grunge rock** bands, including Soundgarden and Nirvana.

Another angry post-punk style was called **industrial rock**. Most industrial rock music used sound effects created by machines of all kinds, in addition to more traditional instruments, such as amplified guitars using feedback and fuzz-tone. Some bands played guitars with buzz saws or other nonmusical devices. Industrial vocals are often distorted to sound nonhuman. Trent Reznor's Nine Inch Nails added a bit of melody to what was otherwise a mostly tortured and

Singer Madonna
Frank Micelotta/
ImageDirect/Getty Images



alienated sound. Depressing lyrics, but with less aggressive instrumentation, continued to be popular among young people during the 1990s with the music of the British band Radiohead.

Electronic dance music called **techno** featured hypnotic repetitions of synthesized music, along with an intense, throbbing beat. The music became associated with the rave culture that added the drug Ecstasy to their dance parties. Because the drug was illegal, rave dances tended to be held on private properties that were fairly well hidden from the general public.

As much as rock music has changed over the years since its inception in the early 1950s, most rock styles of the past have continued on through the changes. There are few young people today who have not heard of Elvis Presley, the Beatles, or any number of other performers who have not performed their original styles in decades. Rock music is not all that old. Some of its originators, such as Chuck Berry and Little Richard, are still around and performing in the 2000s. Paul McCartney, Mick Jagger, and Elton John have all been knighted by the Queen of England and have the official titles “Sir” before their names. All continue to perform the music that made them famous.

Summary

Rock music developed during the late 1940s and early 1950s as a combination of blues, rhythm and blues, gospel, and country music. Rockabilly combined “rock” and “hillbilly” country music with the blues to create an energetic and popular 1950s style. A more pop-oriented style was widely marketed as rock music during the early 1960s, but the British Invasion bands knocked it off the American charts and brought back music that was closer to 1950s rock styles. Soul music remained popular throughout the 1960s, both before and after the British Invasion. By the 1970s, rock diversified into a great variety of styles that combined rock music with instruments or other influences of such styles of music as jazz, art (or classical), and country music.

Punk was an angry and aggressive style that remained largely in the northeastern cities of

Detroit and New York until it hit Britain. British bands popularized punk all over the United States. A variety of post-punk styles have continued to pop up in many U.S. cities, along with other depressed or angry music such as industrial rock. MTV popularized music and dance videos that, at first, countered more angry music. Rap grew in popularity through the 1980s and 1990s, going from simple patter talk to accompany break dancing to an entire new vocal style that is at times quite positive and at other times angry and negative.

Rock music continues to be played by some of its earliest stars, as well as by new musicians creating their own sounds every day. The music has changed from one performer or time period to another, but it still remains a viable and popular kind of music that exists in many varied styles.

New People and Concepts

alternative rock, 7

art rock, 6

British Invasion, 5

country rock, 6

cover recording, 1

folk rock, 5

funk, 5

gangsta rap, 7

glitter rock, 6

grunge rock, 7

hard rock, 6

heavy metal, 6

industrial rock, 7

jazz rock, 6

MTV, 7

punk rock, 7

rap, 7

rhythm and blues, 1

rockabilly, 2

soul music, 5

Southern rock, 6

techno, 8



Finale

Little Richard's "Tutti Frutti" on iTunes

Listen again to Little Richard's recording of "Tutti Frutti" and compare your impressions now with your notes from your first listening. Do you hear more now than you did before? You should now be able to answer the following questions:

- What is the tempo?
- What is the meter?
- What is the song about?
- What instruments are accompanying the singing?
- Where do melodies or lyrics repeat?