

1 How did Rock and Roll Begin? Fact Sheet



Just imagine what life would be like without any Rock and Roll or Pop music. What would we play on our ipods, car radios and other devices, or watch on videos? What would we sing along with or dance to when we are hyped, excited or inspired? It's so hard to imagine life without Rock and Roll these days, because it's everywhere.

Did you know that Rock and Roll music didn't even exist until the 1950s? Much of the music that existed before that was **Classical, Folk, Jazz, Blues** or **Big Band** with singers like Frank Sinatra! People would do ball room or couples dancing, but they didn't sing or dance quite like we do now.

In 1954, a band called Billy Haley and the Comets launched a smash hit called *Rock Around The Clock*. This is often referred to as the beginning of Rock and Roll. Haley's song rose to number 1 in 1955 when it was included as a soundtrack of *Blackboard Jungle*, a movie about juvenile delinquents, with Bill Haley portraying a young rebel. The teenagers watching the movie couldn't help but get up in the aisles and dance as soon as they heard the music.

Rock Around The Clock was a new type of music which appealed especially to white American teenage kids who could dance, clap and sing along, while having fun watching the band perform crazy antics like performing acrobatics on the **saxophone** and riding the **double bass** as a pony.

By 1956, Bill Haley had become one of the most popular rock and roll performers in the world. Within two years he had 12 top 40 records which included songs such as *Shake Rattle and Roll*, *See You Later Alligator* and *Razzle Dazzle*. In 1956 he also starred in two of the earliest full length Rock and Roll movies called *Rock Around The Clock* and *Don't Knock the Rock*. By 1957, other crazier and wilder acts such as Elvis Presley and Little Richard (who sang *Tutti Frutti*) started to dominate the American scene, so Bill Haley's band looked for fame in other parts of the world, becoming the first Rock and Roll group to tour the world.

In America at this time, it was still uncommon for white families to even speak to their black neighbours. While Bill Haley was introducing the white American teenage population to this new Rock and Roll craze, artists such as Chuck Berry were introducing it to the black American population. This early style of Rock and Roll music is sometimes referred to as "**Rockabilly**" because these pioneers of rock combined **Blues** and **Country** music. Many of the themes and **lyrics** were about girls and cars.

Chuck Berry is best known for his witty lyrics, his trademark sound of the **double string guitar lick** and his unique "**Duck Walk**." His best known songs were written and recorded in the mid to late 50s, with his first number 1 smash hit, *Maybelline* in 1955. By 1958, Berry had a string of hits which included *Johnny B Goode* and *Rock and Roll Music*. He also appeared in feature films such as *Go Johnny Go*.

Today, Chuck Berry's music is still a source of inspiration for many rock bands worldwide and over the years, hundreds of films, artists and songwriters have used his songs and lyrics as inspiration for their own work.

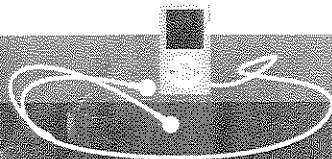
Fast facts

Time Span: 1950s

Influences: Blues, Country

Primary Instruments: Guitars, piano, drums, double bass, sometimes saxophone

Major Artists: Bill Haley, Chuck Berry



Fun Fact

Chuck Berry originally wanted to be a professional photographer. The main reason he started singing and playing in bands was to earn money to buy photographic equipment. He was also a janitor and a hairdresser at different times before becoming a professional musician.