

1956 STILL ROCKIN'



TIME
LIFE
MUSIC

The
ROCK'N'ROLL
ERA

Digital Remaster

1956 STILL ROCKIN'

- 1 **Please, Please, Please** James Brown
with the Famous Flames
- 2 **When You Dance** The Turbans
- 3 **(You've Got) The Magic Touch**
The Platters
- 4 **My Blue Heaven** Fats Domino
- 5 **Church Bells May Ring** The Willows
- 6 **My Special Angel** Bobby Helms
- 7 **Slippin' and Slidin'** Little Richard
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The Heartbeats
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and the Teenagers
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Roy Orbison and the Teen Kings
- 14 **Ivory Tower** Otis Williams and His Charms
- 15 **Corrine Corrina** Joe Turner
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Johnny Cash and the Tennessee Two
- 21 **Devil or Angel** The Clovers
- 22 **Goodnight My Love** Jesse Belvin

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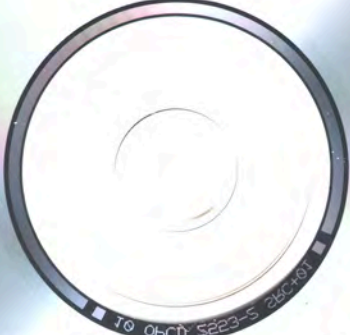
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TO OBCD S223-S 28C-191

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The Turbans



1956: STILL ROCKIN'

A number of black rock 'n' roll artists—most notably Fats Domino and Little Richard—emerged as national stars by the end of 1956, consistently producing hits purchased by black and white teenagers alike. Though Domino and Richard both recorded in New Orleans and shared many of the same studio musicians, their records seemed to be from two different worlds. The warm, cherubic Domino created a relaxed, infectious sound, even gently rocking up melodic standards such as **My Blue Heaven** and *Blueberry Hill*.

While Domino's smiling face and lazy Creole drawl had a reassuring impact on concerned parents, the sight and sound of Little Richard were evidence for many that this new music was, as some critics suggested, a disease. Dressed in a baggy suit with elephant trousers, his hair swept up into a monstrous plume, Richard banged on his piano with mamacal glee, delivering near-tuneless ditties such as **Slippin' and Slidin'** and **Ready Teddy** in a voice that ecstatically soared into freakish squeals, rasps and whoops.

His touring band, a New Orleans sextet known as the Upsetters, was perhaps the finest live rock 'n' roll group of the mid-'50s. According to drummer Charles Connor, "The Upsetters wasn't just a name—when we'd go into a place, we'd upset it! We were the first band to wear pancake makeup and eye shadow, have an earring, and have our hair curled in a process. It was real gay looking. Richard was the only guy in the band that was like that, but he wanted us to be different and exciting."

Throughout 1956, Richard's live performances with the Upsetters caused pandemonium. Their show at the Royal Theater in Baltimore had to be stopped twice so the police could remove hysterical girls. Some were climbing onstage, while others were removing their

panties and throwing them at the band. As Connor recalled, "We didn't know what was happening. We cracked up and stopped playing. I picked up a pair on my stick and waved them in the air."

A number of the biggest R & B hits in 1956 did not achieve much popularity with the white audience. Of these, none was more significant than James Brown's debut, **Please, Please, Please**. An important steppingstone to his career occurred when he was serving time in reform school for auto theft. While pitching on the school's baseball team, he met Bobby Byrd, whose family later sponsored Brown for parole. He took over Byrd's group, the Gospel Starlighters, who then switched to R & B, changing their name to the Famous Flames.

Brown and the Famous Flames were working out of Macon, Georgia, in 1955 when they recorded a demo of *Please, Please, Please*, which attracted the interest of Leonard Chess of Chess Records. A snowstorm prevented Chess from getting to Macon before Ralph Bass, A & R (artists and repertoire) man for King/Federal Records, could sign the group. *Please, Please, Please* was little more than a repetitive plea, but as Bass noted about Brown, "He wasn't singing or playing music. He was transmitting feeling, pure feeling." The song, the first of an incredible 62 R & B hits for James Brown during the next 15 years, was a milestone in the evolution of the gospel-based soul style.

Although the raw, religious fervor (i.e., the "blackness") of *Please, Please, Please* made it an unlikely pop hit candidate, the failure of other R & B songs to cross over is less understandable. With Clyde McPhatter now a solo act, the Drifters enlisted Johnny Moore as their new lead singer and made the charts with Leiber and Stoller's **Ruby Baby**. Dion scored a

major hit with it in 1963, the same year that Moore rejoined the Drifters (he sang lead on *Under the Boardwalk* in 1964). Atlantic's other groundbreaking vocal group, the Clovers, sweetened their style on **Devil or Angel**, but this song would also have to wait until the '60s to achieve mass popularity, this time in the hands of Bobby Vee.

Most rock 'n' roll era vocal groups were barely a notch above amateur status, since they often moved quickly from street-corner rehearsals to recording deals with small inner-city labels specializing in doo-wop. Besides the Drifters and the Clovers, the most notable exception was the Platters, who benefited from the arranging and production skills of music-business veteran Buck Ram. He not only developed a sophisticated sound equally appealing to adults and teenagers, but also wrote hits for the group such as **(You've Got) The Magic Touch**. The Platters' polished pop style was emulated by the Five Keys in **Out of Sight, Out of Mind** and Otis Williams and His Charms in **Ivory Tower**. Williams, who had a history of covering hits by other acts (e.g., the Jewels' *Hearts of Stone* and the Five Keys' *Ling Ting Tong*), took *Ivory Tower* from pop singer Cathy Carr.

More characteristic of the doo-wop style were Frankie Lyman and the Teenagers, the young quintet whose first single was the smash *Why Do Fools Fall in Love*. Their next record, **I Want You to Be My Girl**, featured two Teenagers trademarks—an inventive bass introduction from Sherman Garnes and a squawking sax solo from Jimmy Wright. The group racked up two more hits in 1956, but by mid-1957 the original Teenagers were fractured, as Lyman was steered into an ill-fated solo career as a pop singer.

Along with the Teenagers, New York City produced a host of memorable vocal groups, including the Willows, the Harptones, the Cadillacs, the Heartbeats, the

Mr. Please, Please, Please, the hardest-working man in show business. James Brown



The Clovers



Slow-walking Sil Austin

Channels and the Charts. Few enjoyed any major pop success, although Harlem's Willows did reach the charts with **Church Bells May Ring**, originally released under the erroneous title *Church Bells Are Ringing*. Like a number of other doo-wop hits, the song (with a young Neil Sedaka on chimes) was covered by the Diamonds. The Heartbeats also scored a hit with **A Thousand Miles Away**, written by lead singer James "Shep" Sheppard after his girlfriend moved to Texas. As front man for Shep and the Limerites, Sheppard just missed topping the charts in 1961 with *Daddy's Home*, an obvious copy of *A Thousand Miles Away*.

The Dells, one of the longest-lived vocal groups ever, pulled a similar trick when they took a remake of their 1956 R & B hit, **Oh What a Nite**, to the top 10 in 1969. The title was inspired by a wild party the group enjoyed with some lady friends. Reminiscing the next day about the previous evening's bacchanalia, lead singer Marvin Junior sighed, "Oh what a night," and another Dell, Johnny Funches, answered, "to love you." Like *Oh What a Nite*, Jesse Belvin's **Goodnight My Love** wasn't a pop hit in 1956, but it did serve as DJ Alan Freed's sign-off song for years, and has long since become one of the most beloved oldies and last-dance records of the era.

The 45-year-old blues veteran Joe Turner found himself a rock 'n' roll star in 1956 with his version of **Corrine Corrina**, a well-known tune from the '20s that became his biggest pop hit ever. As the most notable blues shouter in the Kansas City jazz scene of the '30s and as a progenitor of the boogie-woogie and jump blues of the '40s, Big Joe Turner helped lay the foundation for rock 'n' roll. His labelmate Chuck Willis also gained widespread recognition with danceable updates of folk material (*C.C. Rider* and *Betty and Dupree*), but Willis' searing original, **It's Too Late**,



was just too bluesy for the pop market.

Many rockabilly performers likewise cut records too unvarnished for mainstream tastes, thus restricting their popularity to the Deep South. A case in point was Carl Perkins' follow-up to his monumental *Blue Suede Shoes*, **Boppin' the Blues**, which sold only modestly because it was a classic slice of pure rockabilly. Roy Orbison made his national debut on Sun Records out of Memphis with the rollicking **Ooby Dooby**. Although cast as a guitar-based rocker by producer Sam Phillips, Orbison felt uncomfortable with the role and left Sun in 1958, re-emerging in 1960 as one of the great balladeers.

Another Sun artist, Johnny Cash, gained large followings in both the country and rock 'n' roll markets by developing a distinctive, sparse style that eschewed traditional hillbilly instruments such as fiddle and steel guitar. Cash was working as a vacuum cleaner salesman in Memphis before he began recording with his group, the Tennessee Two. **I Walk the Line**, written by Cash as a pledge of devotion to his wife, became his signature song and opens with one of pop music's most unusual lines: "HMMMMMMMMM . . ."

—Joe Sasy

Johnny Cash

DISCOGRAPHY

*Indicates highest Billboard chart position

1. Please, Please, Please (2:33) James Brown with the Famous Flames • *Music and lyrics by James Brown and Johnny Terry. Federal 12258. Produced under license from PolyGram Special Projects, a Division of PolyGram Records, Inc. No. 6 (R & B)**

2. When You Dance (2:45) The Turbans • *Music and lyrics by Andrew Jones. Herald 458. Courtesy of Arista Records, Inc. No. 33**

3. (You've Got) The Magic Touch (2:22) The Platters • *Music and lyrics by Buck Ram. Mercury 70819. Produced under license from PolyGram Special Projects, a Division of PolyGram Records, Inc. No. 4**

4. My Blue Heaven (2:10) Fats Domino • *Music by Walter Donaldson, lyrics by George Whiting. Imperial 5388. Courtesy of EMI-Manhattan Records, a Division of Capitol Records, Inc. No. 21**

5. Church Bells May Ring (2:25) The Willows • *Music and lyrics by Morty Craft, Anthony Middleton, Joe Martin, Ralph Martin and Richard Davis. Melba 102. Courtesy of SJ Records, Inc. (Savoy Jazz). No. 62**

6. My Special Angel (2:57) Bobby Helms • *Music and lyrics by Jimmy Duncan. Decca 30423. Courtesy of MCA Records, Inc. No. 7**

7. Slippin' and Slidin' (2:10) Little Richard • *Music and lyrics by Richard Penniman, Edwin Bocage, James Smith and Albert Collins. Specialty 572. Courtesy of Specialty Records, Inc. No. 33**

8. It's Too Late (2:37) Chuck Willis • *Music and lyrics by Chuck Willis. Atlantic 1088. Produced under license from Atlantic Recording Corp. No. 5 (R & B)**

9. Boppin' the Blues (2:47) Carl Perkins • *Music and lyrics by Howard Gruffin and Carl Perkins. Sun 243. Courtesy of Sun Entertainment Corp. No. 70**

10. Slow Walk (2:36) Sil Austin • *Music by Sil Austin, Irving Siders and Connie Moore. Mercury 70963. Produced under license from PolyGram Special Projects, a Division of PolyGram Records, Inc. No. 19**

11. A Thousand Miles Away (2:22) The Heartbeats • *Music*

*and lyrics by James Sheppard and William H. Miller. Rama 216. Courtesy of Roulette Records, a Division of ABZ Music Corp. No. 53**

12. I Want You to Be My Girl (2:50) Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers • *Music and lyrics by Richard Barrett and Morris Levy. Gee 1012. Courtesy of Roulette Records, a Division of ABZ Music Corp. No. 17**

13. Ooby Dooby (2:10) Roy Orbison and the Teen Kings • *Music and lyrics by Wade Moore and Dick Penner. Sun 242. Courtesy of Sun Entertainment Corp. No. 59**

14. Ivory Tower (2:11) Otis Williams and His Charms • *Music and lyrics by Jack Fulton and Lois Roberts. DeLuxe 6093. Courtesy of G.N.L., Inc. No. 12**

15. Corrine Corrina (2:52) Joe Turner • *Music and lyrics by J. Mayo Williams, Bo Chatman and Mitchell Parish. Atlantic 1088. Produced under license from Atlantic Recording Corp. No. 41**

16. Out of Sight, Out of Mind (2:15) The Five Keys • *Music and lyrics by Ivory Joe Hunter and Clyde Otis. Capital 3502. Courtesy of Capitol Records, Inc. No. 27**

17. Oh What a Nite (2:50) The Dells • *Music and lyrics by Marvin Junior and John Fanches. Vee-Jay 204. Courtesy of Vee-Jay Records, No. 4 (R & B)**

18. Ready Teddy (2:05) Little Richard • *Music and lyrics by John Marascalco and Robert Blackwell. Specialty 579. Courtesy of Specialty Records, Inc. No. 44**

19. Ruby Baby (2:21) The Drifters • *Music and lyrics by Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller. Atlantic 1089. Produced under license from Atlantic Recording Corp. No. 13 (R & B)**

20. I Walk the Line (2:43) Johnny Cash and the Tennessee Two • *Music and lyrics by Johnny Cash. Sun 241. Courtesy of Sun Entertainment Corp. No. 19**

21. Devil or Angel (2:24) The Clovers • *Music and lyrics by Blanche Carter. Atlantic 1083. Produced under license from Atlantic Recording Corp. No. 4 (R & B)**

22. Goodnight My Love (3:06) Jesse Belvin • *Music and lyrics by George Motola and John Marascalco. Modern 1005. Courtesy of Murray Spom. No. 10 (R & B)**

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1956: Still Rockin' was produced by Time-Life Music in cooperation with Warner Special Products. Digitally remastered at Hit and Run Studios, Rockville, Md.

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Time-Life Music wishes to thank William L. Schurk of the Music Library and Sound Recordings Archives, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio, for providing valuable reference material.

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