



CARL PERKINS

Born April 9th, 1932
Lake City, Tennessee



LITTLE WILLIE JOHN

KING CURTIS



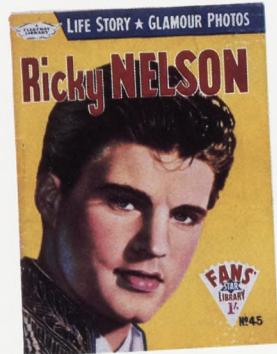
In 1954, Carl Perkins, a country and western singer by trade, was gigging around and doing a local radio show in Jackson, Tennessee, when he heard Elvis Presley's version of Arthur Crudup's "That's All Right." Here, for the first time, the major strains in Southern music – hillbilly boogie, country and western, rhythm and blues – came together. Perkins had been moving in that direction himself, so he headed straight to where Presley was working, Sun Records, in Memphis, and offered his services to owner-producer Sam Phillips.

On December 19th, 1955, in Sun's studios, Perkins, backed by his brothers Jay and Clayton, fashioned what came to be the signature song for the rockabilly genre, "Blue Suede Shoes." The arrangement was spare and sinewy; the vocal was stuttering and swagging; the beat was propulsive but also swinging. Best of all was the attitude: defiant, sexually challenging, even a little amused, a chip on the shoulder and a twinkle in the eye. "Blue Suede Shoes" was the first across-the-board chart hit, simultaneously reaching, in March 1956, the Top Five on the C&W, R&B and pop charts. The song was both rockabilly's prototype and its anthem. Even Elvis Presley had to record his own version.

Unfortunately, Perkins was sidelined just as his single began to break all the rules. At the end of March, en route to New York City to make a television appearance, he was involved in a car accident that claimed the lives of his brother Jay and his manager. After he recovered, Perkins resumed recording for Sun ("Boppin' the Blues," "Your True Love") and touring with label mates Jerry Lee Lewis and Johnny Cash. He performed in a movie musical, Jamboree, which also featured Lewis, Fats Domino, Joe Williams, Count Basie and even Slim Whitman. On December 4th, 1956, Perkins, Presley, Lewis and Cash held an impromptu session at Sun under the name the Million Dollar Quartet, the results of which, due to legal entanglements, were not heard for twenty-five years. (That same day, Lewis accompanied Perkins on "Your True Love" and "Matchbox," an adaptation of Blind Lemon Jefferson's "Matchbox Blues.")

In 1958, Perkins left Sun for Columbia Records, where he attempted to duplicate the success of "Blue Suede Shoes" with "Pink Pedal Pushers" and "Pointed Toe Shoes." He fared better with his more country-oriented material, though, and he worked extensively with his old buddy Cash, gaining extended national exposure as a regular on Cash's television variety show in the early Seventies.

Perkins's songs have consistently been in demand as covers, especially among the groups of the British Invasion. The Beatles recorded more tunes by Perkins than by any other outside composer, covering "Honey Don't," "Everybody's Trying to Be My Baby" and "Matchbox," which the group recorded while Perkins was in the studio with them. He found renewed favor among the cognoscenti of the rockabilly revival that followed the New Wave explosion of the late Seventies. In 1985, coming full circle, Perkins joined fellow Sun alumni Lewis, Cash and Roy Orbison for an LP called Class of '55.



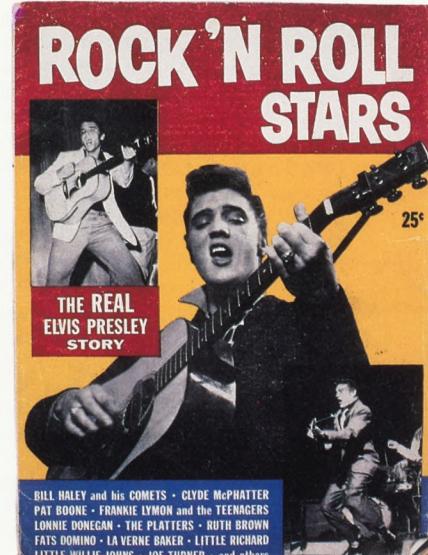
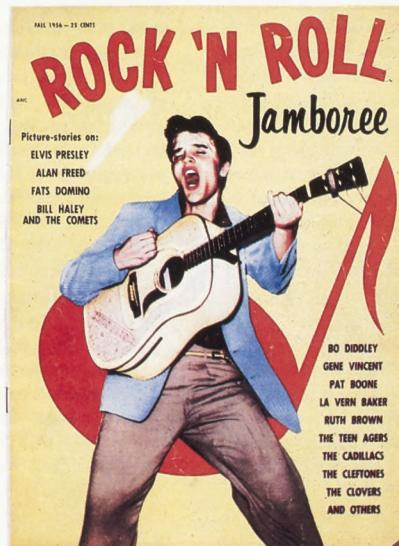
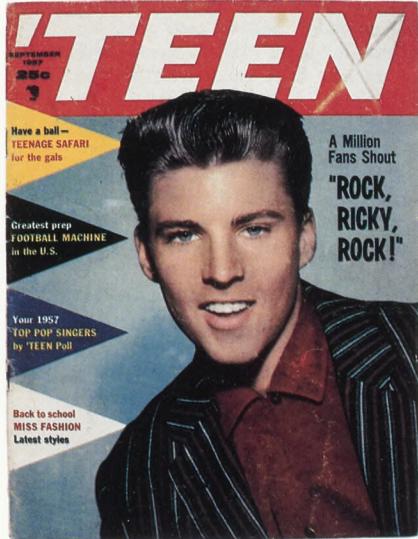
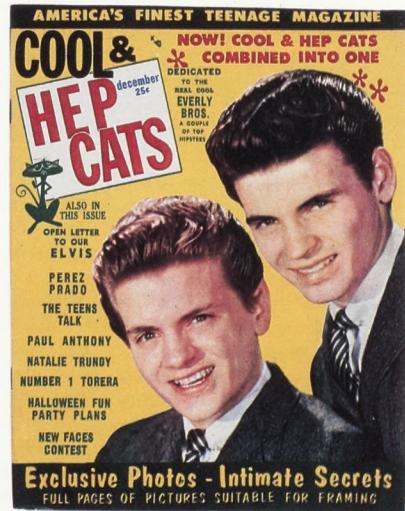
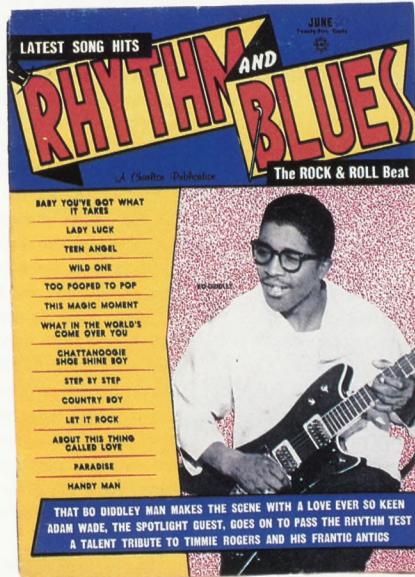
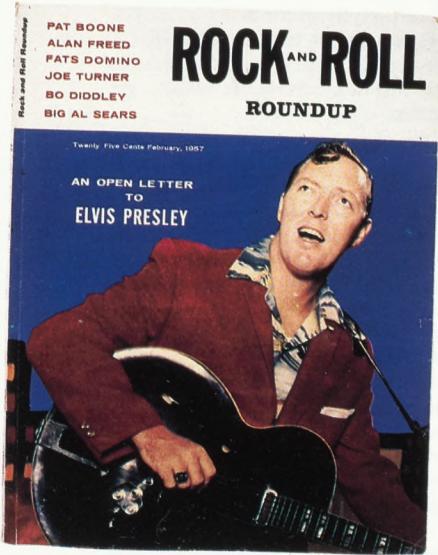
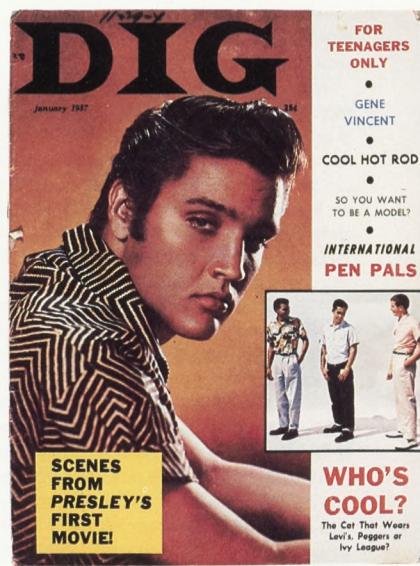
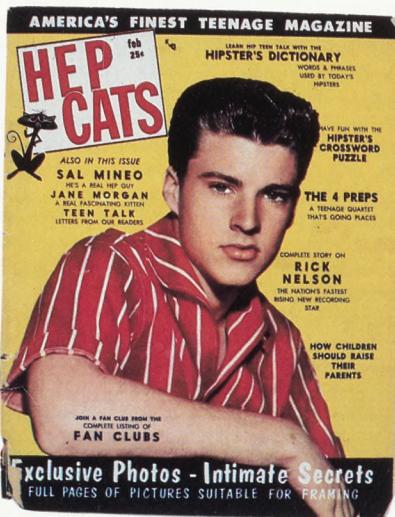
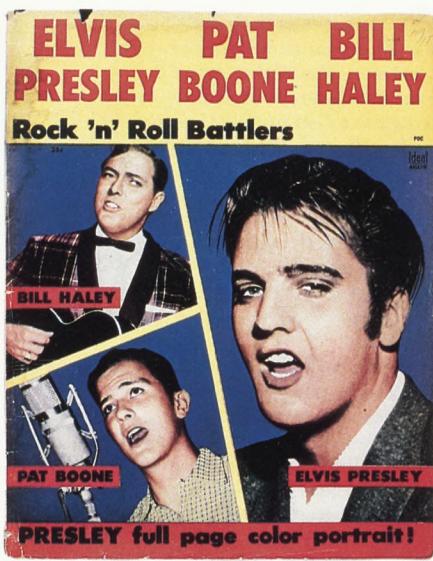
ROCK AND ROLL MAGAZINES

A Vanishing Legacy

BY ALAN BETROCK

N THESE DAYS of concert films, rock videos, library archives, photographers' files and tape-recorded interviews, the recent history of rock and roll is well documented and well preserved. But in the early days of rock, before the music was thought to be of lasting value, and before media coverage and technological progress combined to satiate the needs of even the most die-hard rock fans, rock and roll magazines were one of the few places where we could read about the performers we all heard on the radio and on records. Even though many of these publications sold hundreds of thousands of copies, today most have been lost, destroyed or forgotten. Many copies were cut up, as teenagers pasted the photos of their favorite stars on their notebooks or bedroom walls or in their scrapbooks. Others were thrown out when trends or personalities changed or when teenagers "grew out" of their rock and roll phase. Most of the rest were used for scrap paper or simply discarded as the years went by. Libraries rarely, if ever, saved rock and roll magazines, and none of them were microfilmed. So today we find ourselves in the situation of trying to reconstruct the music's history by attempting to build collections of these lost treasures by any means possible.

To some this means combing flea markets and finding magazines one at a time, dogeared and faded, sometimes with pages cut out, covers detached or quirky comments scrawled over the stars' photos. Others scour secondhand bookstores or magazine stores hoping to find a pile in better shape, albeit at higher prices. Still more pore over mail-order lists or collector-oriented publications for the honor of bidding on magazines that recently have begun to change hands at twenty-five dollars, fifty dollars or even more per copy. And yes, some still dream of finding that elusive warehouse where the precious booty may have lain untouched for some thirty years now — that mint run of *Dig*, *Rock 'n Roll Stars* or *Rhythm and Blues* — all waiting for you at fifty cents per copy. But for most, this latter prospect remains just a dream — mercurial, evasive and heart-rending. Most storehouses are long gone, and those still remaining are more likely to have 40,000 copies of



National Geographic than anything else. Despite the odds, the search goes on.

What keeps fans searching, and why do collectors subject themselves to endless travels that usually lead to a dead end? Well, in the pages of early rock and roll magazines lies the history of the music as it happened. We can see who got coverage and why. We can gaze at early photographs printed nowhere else. We can read the first interviews and profiles of the performers, learn about their early years, hear anecdotes about their recording sessions and so much more. What did they wear, how did they get their first hits, where did they play, what were their influences, and how did they see themselves as this new music swirled and raged around them? These magazines take you back in time, and with the benefit of hindsight, you can try to separate fact from legend and attempt to construct an accurate picture of how things happened and why the performers were important. True, we have the records, but these publications give us so much more. They help place the music in a historical context that makes it that much more enjoyable.

As there were literally dozens of titles published between 1955 and 1960, what follows is a brief overview of the twenty or so that I feel are the most important today. This is based on their historical value, their content, their collectibility today and their impact at the time.

The field is basically divided into two distinct categories. First we have the one-shots, magazines that were published only once, on a particular performer or theme. One-shots have been around for a long time, and publishers rush them out to capitalize on a performer or subject that reaches massive popularity but may not be around in six months. If it happens that the subject is still popular in six months, nothing is lost, because you can always put out a somewhat-updated second one-shot. In the field of pop there were one-shots on Tommy Sands, Ricky Nelson, Fabian and Frankie Avalon, Edd "Kookie" Byrnes, Dick Clark, *American Bandstand* and the twist. There were three one-shots on Pat Boone, four on James Dean and several on Harry Belafonte and the calypso boom.

But the clear-cut champion of the one-shot was Elvis Presley, who had thirteen different magazines devoted exclusively to him, most of which sold between 500,000 and 1 million copies each – quite amazing sales when you think of all the other books, magazines and merchandise related to the Elvis phenomenon. The one-shots had such titles as *Elvis Answers Back*, *The Amazing Elvis Presley*, *Elvis Presley Speaks*, *Elvis Presley in Hollywood*, *Elvis in the Army*, *Elvis: His Loves and Marriage* and *Elvis Presley: Hero or Heel?* They are filled with little-known facts about Elvis, photos of Elvis in concert and on television, candid shots and articles that often have an interesting editorial slant. Other notable one-shots include *Rock 'n' Roll Battlers* (1956), mainly devoted to Elvis, Bill Haley and Pat Boone, and *Rock 'n' Roll Rivals* (1957), featuring the weird mix of Elvis, Tab Hunter, Pat Boone and Tommy Sands. In the fall of 1956 came *Rock 'n' Roll Jamboree*, one of the first integrated rock publications. A great magazine, it featured profiles of Alan Freed, LaVern Baker, Clyde McPhatter, Carl Perkins, Bo Diddley and many others. *Rock 'n' Roll Stars* began as a one-shot but was so successful that it ultimately had three issues, roughly one each in 1956, 1957 and 1958. Like *Rock 'n' Roll Jamboree*, it was integrated; along with the usual array of big names, it had features on some often-overlooked performers, like Frankie Lymon, Ruth Brown, Screamin' Jay Hawkins, the Cadillacs, Andre Williams and Ivory Joe Hunter. In 1957 came *Rock 'n' Roll Yearbook*, which is notable for its coverage of regional stars and lesser-known performers. Also in 1957 came a square-bound soft-cover mass-market book-magazine called *Who's Who in Rock 'n' Roll*, which is the most complete publication devoted to early rock. There are pictures and bios of more than 200 performers, including the stars, the one-hit wonders and the also-rans. It's a veritable encyclopedia of its era and is a must for fans and collectors.

The second major category of early rock magazines is the continuing publications. Of these, the seminal magazine has to be *Rhythm and Blues*, a Charlton publication that first appeared in 1952. Predating the rock and roll explosion by several years, it was unmatched in tracing rock's R&B roots, with profiles, stories and

pictures of performers, mainly black, whose work was not widely covered in the mass media. The magazine covered jazz, blues, R&B, jump, vocal groups and more. The 1950s issues of *Rhythm and Blues* were erratically distributed and are very difficult to find today. In 1955, Charlton brought us a short-lived title, *Ebony Song Parade*, which dealt primarily with some of the more middle-of-the-road black performers of the era. Charlton also published *Hit Parader* and *Song Hits*, both already established magazines that covered whatever was popular at any given moment. In 1956 the company began to issue *Rock 'n' Roll Songs*, which focused mainly on performers that the publishers felt fit the rock and roll tag. Besides the usual profiles, stories and pictures, all Charlton titles featured song lyrics to popular (and some lesser-known) songs of the era.

Late in 1955 came *Dig*, the first publication that saw rock and roll as part of a new teenage culture. The magazine tried to be truly trend setting, covering clothes, hair styles, movies and music. *Dig* was lively and irreverent, and copies are essential to any study of teen culture and fads of the Fifties. In 1957, the publishers of *Dig*, which seems to have been tailored primarily for teen boys, began another magazine, *Modern Teen*, geared more toward girls. *Modern Teen* was less exciting than *Dig*, and as time went on it devoted more and more space to the teen idols. The only real competitors to *Dig* were *Hep Cats* and *Cool*, both started in 1957. They were issued somewhat erratically but were streetwise, hip and very informative. They certainly lived up to their titles, as they were indeed cool and for hep cats only. In 1958 the two merged as *Cool & Hep Cats*, which became, by the early Sixties, rather tame and run-of-the-mill. But the first two years, before and after the merger, are close to unbeatable.

Movie Teen Illustrated, one of the most valuable magazines of the era, also began publication in 1957. Its early issues concentrated mainly on James Dean and Elvis Presley. The magazine featured mostly one-of-a-kind photos, many of which were artful and poignant. The stories were a bit more serious and knowledgeable than most. *Rock and Roll Roundup* only published four issues (between January and July of 1957), but it offered in-depth stories and interviews, as well as interesting photos, often in color, a rarity for the early rock and roll magazines. It also had features on black artists, and its demise was a significant loss to the field. The same company gave us *Teenage Rock and Roll Review*, the first issue of which came out in October of 1956. This publication was pretty good, but as time went on the editors seemed to try to show how safe and clean-cut rock and roll was. The title was later changed to *Teenage Review* and finally just to *Teenage*, but by that time (late 1957), the magazine's squeaky-clean outlook made it pretty forgettable.

The other two magazines of the era worth mentioning are *'Teen* and *16*. *'Teen* began in 1957 as a pretty hip magazine, but it became filled with rather boring fiction and clean, fluffy features on such subjects as fashion and dating. Still, the early issues are worth tracking down. Debuting in May of 1957, *16* was the final significant publication of the era. Early issues were devoted heavily to James Dean and Elvis Presley. In the first two years, the magazine was published erratically and the editorial focus changed often. But in the late Fifties, the magazine latched onto the coming teen-idol boom and rode that wave to its crest, becoming one of the few publications that had the power to make (and sometimes break) stars. While most Fifties mags were gone by 1960, *16* was able to go with each changing trend, from early rock and roll to the British Invasion and beyond. Although over the years it became rather lightweight, being geared primarily to young girls, it was certainly important and trend setting, and its early issues are packed with good photos and information.

I've outlined only the most significant of the magazines that came and went in rock's early days. They are invaluable artifacts of Fifties music and culture. As we honor tonight's inductees, we shouldn't forget the importance of these publications. They too had to fight their way to the top, often in the face of heavy opposition, and many battled to preserve rock's energy and integrity and to spread the word about performers and their music. They deserve a mention in tonight's celebration of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.