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# Crossover: Sam Katzman's *Switchblade Calypso Bop Reefer Madness Swamp Girl* or 'Bad Jazz,' calypso, beatniks and rock 'n' roll in 1950s teenpix

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## Abstract

*This essay challenges the received wisdom that teenpix of the 1950s were dominated by a soundtrack of rock 'n' roll. I argue that this cycle of film production was marked by a diversity of musical genres, styles and types. Not only rock 'n' roll, but rhythm 'n' blues, folk, rockabilly, swing, West Coast jazz, bebop, Latin music such as the mambo, the rumba, the cha cha chá, and Caribbean calypsos were all heavily featured in these films. This study is carried out through a focus on the temporal arrangements – fads, cycles, trends – that govern serial production and consumption of movies and popular music. Following Philip Ennis' thesis that rock 'n' roll is best defined by its ability to 'crossover' musical boundaries – to move, for example, across the pop, country, and rhythm 'n' blues charts – I argue that the film industry chose not to overly limit the music it had on offer and instead provided a varied package, some of which, it expected, would crossover and appeal to diverse and capricious teenage tastes.*

## Introduction

'I'd say it was a 'mixed-up' rhythm: blues, an' Latin-American, an' some hillbilly, a little spiritual, a little African, an' a little West Indian calypso ... an' if I wanna start yodelin' in the middle of it, I can do that too'.

Bo Diddley on Bo Diddley

In an aside to his discussion of *Hot Rod Girl* (1956), teenpic historian Thomas Doherty noted that the jukebox in the teenagers' hangout is playing 'bad jazz' when, he suggests, their preferred choice of music should be rock 'n' roll (Doherty 1988, p. 111). With the benefit of hindsight we know that the hip juvenile delinquent listened to rock 'n' roll, and we also know that the key authenticating performances for post-1960s music critics are Jerry Lee Lewis's pyrotechnics at the start of *High School Confidential* (1958) or Gene Vincent's street punk snarl in *Hot Rod Gang* (1958) or *The Girl Can't Help It* (1956; see Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> But this restricted view ignores



Figure 1. Gene Vincent and His Blue Caps in *The Girl Can't Help It*. (All images are from the author's collection.)

the rich diversity of musical styles and genres that were on display in 1950s teenpix, not the least of which might have been 'bad jazz'.

The cut of a suit, the style of a hat, kitchen utensils, car models, all the material objects that are littered throughout a movie register its temporality, as does the popular music played both diegetically and on the music track. Used over the opening sequence, Elvis Presley's 'Hound Dog', combined with images of a hot rod car careering along a desert road, is sufficiently representative of the 1950s to be able to locate, within a few years, the historical moment of *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (2008). Not just a temporal signifier, the soundtrack also enables the critical labelling of one film as authentic and another inauthentic. Looking back at the canonical 'rock 'n' roll' films of the 1950s, film critic Mark Kermode noted 'these films have gained a nostalgic appeal as a result of their seminal pop content – they got the music right, and that was enough' (Kermode 1995, p. 9). But despite this received wisdom, rock 'n' roll should not denote a more certain authenticity or a more appropriate signifier for mid to late 1950s youth culture than any number of other contemporary forms of music.

Noting the value or the appropriateness of one musical moment over another is not, however, the point of my contention that Doherty has misunderstood the musical cues in *Hot Rod Girl*, or that some films got the music 'right' while others just 'didn't get it'. Instead, I want to argue, it is the teenpix' incorporation of a diversity of musical genres, styles and types that makes it worthy of study. By looking across the trend in teenage-oriented movies, rather than at individual pictures or individual moments within a film, the sense of the fullness and variety of 1950s popular music culture becomes apparent. For example rhythm 'n' blues as represented by such distinct talents as The Platters, Chuck Berry, The Treniers, Julia Lee, Fats Domino, Little Richard, Moonglows, Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers, and across genres such as folk, rockabilly, swing, West Coast cool jazz, bebop, Latin music such as the mambo, the rhumba, the cha cha chá, and Caribbean calypsos. When faced with this startling array of talent and styles, the recognition of variety seriously

challenges the tendency toward a blinkered view of teenpix as being dominated by a soundtrack of rock 'n' roll.<sup>2</sup>

Jazz does not fit our contemporary image of teenpix defined in terms of an accelerating culture driven by hyper-change in fads and fashions. Viewed with hindsight, the big beat of rock 'n' roll better suits the temper of the times and makes a seemingly more appropriate accompaniment to teenage lifestyles as depicted in American films than a dissonant, or otherwise, jazz score. This scenario is underscored in countless '50s retro-movies from *American Graffiti* (1973), *American Hot Wax* (1978) via *Diner* (1982) to *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*. The two-minute-plus rush of rock 'n' roll – destination nowhere, with Chuck Berry's 'No Particular Place to Go' a highlight of the idiom – perfectly fits the received image of the '50s JD and the creed of live fast, die young, much better than jazz, whether it be bebop, cool, or cocktail lounge. With the advent of rock 'n' roll, jazz moved out of the lowbrow milieu of dance and sex music, out of the public spaces of the saloon and into the private space of the bachelor pad with high-end hi-fi as promoted in *Esquire* and *Playboy*.<sup>3</sup> Rock 'n' roll took on the mantle of 'noise' while jazz, at least in its more commercial forms, fitted into the background. Rock 'n' roll's 45 rpm headlong rush to completion – like a drag race – was opposed to jazz's 33 1/3 rpm circular routes inscribed on a *long*-playing phonograph record. Rock 'n' roll was hits – short, sharp jabs. Jazz was ideas in abstract motion and ill suited to accompany teenage rebellion.

But that is a retrospective gloss. The actuality of the teenpix soundtrack was that jazz continued to have a dominant role into the 1960s, at least non-diegetically. Inside the world of the story an assortment of musical styles were highlighted on jukeboxes and through personal appearances by singers and musicians. Furthermore, in the 1950s to designate a musical performance as 'rock 'n' roll' was less a definition of a particular type of music and more often the identification of the music's presumed audience – the teenager. In the 19 December 1956 edition of *Variety*, a full-page advertisement for a United Artists distributed double bill of *The Wild Party* and *Four Boys and a Gun* – a 'Sensational Package' – was sold as 'The Shock Stories Behind The Rock 'n' Roll Generation'. *The Wild Party* starred Anthony Quinn and promised to reveal 'The New Sin That Is Sweeping America!' A Louella Parsons quote tagged the film as being as 'modern as next month'. *Four Boys and a Gun*, with no featured starring roles, carried the tag line 'THESE KIDS ARE GOING STRAIGHT ... to the electric chair!' Neither film had anything to do with rock 'n' roll music.

The Quinn vehicle was a kidnap drama. Film and jazz historian David Meeker described it as a 'Cheap melodrama set partly in a jazz club where the characters are all lost, derelict or unreal and where action is lurid and largely incomprehensible. Features almost continuous jazz on the soundtrack' (Meeker 1977). *Four Boys and a Gun* is based on a pulp novel first published in 1944 and centres around which of the four young hoodlums will take responsibility for a murder committed during the robbery of a boxing arena. It featured jazz arrangements by Shorty Rogers, who had previously produced the jukebox jazz heard in *The Wild One* (1953). Similarly, and despite its title, *Rock All Night* (1957) hardly featured any rock 'n' roll on its soundtrack. In its 25 April 1957 review of the film, *The Hollywood Reporter* (p. 3) claimed the fad for rock 'n' roll had 'run its course' but that this would not affect its success because the 'title is somewhat misleading ... not much time is wasted on music and what there is contains as much straight jazz and ballad

singing as rock 'n' roll'. To not feature the music it was ostensibly exploiting in its marketing was a common story for many of the films from this period that were promoted via rock 'n' roll.

The exploitation of 'rock 'n' roll' in this manner was not just carried out on the part of film marketing offices, but was also found in the promotion of nightclubs. Soul music historian Robert Pruter writes:

In 1956 Chicago's black nightclubs reacted to the emergence of rock 'n' roll with alacrity, but also with utter misunderstanding of what was going on. Just as Kaye Starr exploited the trend with a puerile and inane pop tune, 'Rock and Roll Waltz', the nighteries responded in a similarly ridiculous fashion. In May the Grand Terrace presented a 'Rock & Roll Revue' and in September the Roberts Show Club mounted a 'Rock & Roll and Mambo Revue', while the Club Delisa offered 'Rock & Roll Capers'. (Pruter 1996, p. 218)

None of these shows had anything to do with rock 'n' roll music or with any vocal groups or other rock 'n' roll acts: 'Rock 'n' roll was just a phrase attached to the shows in order to appear trendy' (Pruter 1996, p. 218).

Although *Wild Party* and *Four Boys* use rock 'n' roll as no more than a sensational and highly topical tag upon which to build an advertising campaign for what are essentially crime and social problem pictures, it is reasonable to expect that a movie advertised as featuring 'The Wonderful Story of Today's Rock 'n' Roll Generation' would include rock 'n' roll music, as was the case with *Rock, Pretty Baby*, starring Sal Mineo and John Saxon. The film held out the promise that you could 'Rock to 12 Wonderful Tunes'. However, the tunes are either, like the title track, substandard Bill Haley impersonations, or dreamy romantic show tunes. The latter are sung in the diner and at the beach by future bestselling poet Rod McKuen. Henry Mancini scored the film and composed the original tunes, but he had no feel or understanding of rhythm 'n' blues, the root music of rock 'n' roll, and so his contribution amounted to little more than anodyne pop tunes. As one encyclopaedia entry on the film notes: 'During the 1950s, there were two sorts of teenage movies: the lousy and the extremely lousy. *Rock, Pretty Baby* is among the latter because we're concerned with music, and the music stinks' (Crenshaw 1994, p. 118).

*Rock, Pretty Baby*, however, was not designed to catch the ear of rock 'n' roll connoisseurs 20, 30, 40 or 50 years after its initial release, but was produced to momentarily hold a teenager's interest, and then to disappear. Discussing the critical dismissal of the films that formed the short cycle of twist movies, John Mundy writes: 'Such criticism, then as now, misses the point. Films such as these, operating at the margins of the Hollywood canon, lived with and acknowledged their ephemerality. In a sense, that very ephemerality was the justification for their existence' (Mundy 2006, p. 55). *Rock, Pretty Baby* might gain a second life as a re-run but, more likely, after its first-go-around on the theatre and drive-in circuit, it would be sold on to television as part of a package. As such, the film and the music were inevitably conceived as disposable products with built-in obsolescence, evanescent attractions within a passing fad aimed at that most capricious of consumers – the teenager.

The presumption that underlines my chronicle of music in the teenpix is that the film and music industries operated with little artistic regard for the individual film or platter, and less still for how posterity might view their productions. Indeed, it is arguable that they had no conception of interest in a movie or disc extending much beyond its initial release and economic exploitation.<sup>4</sup> The teenpic or 45 rpm disc was conceived as just another item in an assembly-line production

of a repeatable experience. A consumer's relationship to a particular film or disc was considered to be transient, a passing distraction; it was not expected to last. When the products of the entertainment industries are viewed as essentially ephemeral, received film or music history is altered, the focus shifts away from recording a chain of extraordinary artistic interventions into the flow of commerce (Elvis at Sun, Beatlemania, Bob Dylan going electric – unique moments which uniquely make demands on our attention) and instead moves the interest onto how production was predicated on short-lived cycles tied to broader trends. The process of repetition marked by incremental innovation or readjustment, rather than distinction, becomes the subject of critical enquiry.

The entertainment industries fed upon fads that were understood to be expressions of consumer desire which, having been identified, were then developed and exploited. The extraordinary turnover of records – approximately 100 45 rpm singles were released weekly in the late 1950s – suggested how difficult it was for producers to second-guess fads. Rather than hope they would hit pay dirt by backing a specific craze and then hazard a commercial flop at the box office, the norm was to spread the risk (Sanjek and Sanjek 1991, p. 137). Rock 'n' roll's broad and uncertain musical characteristics (what do the Moonglows and Link Wray have in common?) compared to, say, the mambo or calypso was therefore a boon to producers in marketing their teen-oriented product. As with jazz, a music always amenable to change and development, the protean nature of rock 'n' roll accounted for its relatively long-lived existence as a key factor in producers' attempts to appeal to teenage consumers – it could suggest, I argue, a youthful attraction without overly determining what was on offer.

### Fads, cycles and trends

Like seasonal fashion changes, film and music cycles contain within themselves the promise of their own demise – *Live Fast, Die Young* is the apt title of a Universal Pictures distributed movie from 1958. In a 1957 scholarly article on the 'natural history of fads' the authors announced that there was an identifiable pattern to a fad's life cycle: 'discovery of the potential fad, promotion by the discoverers and/or original consumers, labelling, dissemination, eventual loss of exclusiveness and uniqueness, and death by displacement' (Meyersohn and Katz 1957, pp. 594–601). Sociologists Rolf Meyersohn and Elihu Katz were discussing, among other things, the contemporary fad for rhythm 'n' blues among teenagers and the feedback from mediators such as disc jockeys that could lead to success *and* failure in the marketplace:

the skewed feedback of the music industry is responsible in part for the volatility of its fads; exaggerating as it does the tastes of an already erratic group considered as its primary audience, its fads fluctuate beyond all expectation. ... Hence, while the feedback from consumer to producer makes, at first, for a frenzied increase in a fashionable product, it may also make for a more rapid saturation than is warranted or, if the gauge is placed somewhere else in society, for an oversupply. (Meyersohn and Katz 1957, p. 601)

The terms 'fads', 'cycles' and 'trends' as expressed in trade journals tend to be used interchangeably, suggestive of the temporary state of audience interests and the entertainment industry's attempts to prophesise and influence shifts in consumption

habits and taste, but it makes sense for the scholar to consider these three terms as each defining a distinct time-frame. Literary theorist Franco Moretti (2005, pp. 13–14) has discussed the ‘temporary structures’ that constitute the particular temporal arrangements that govern serial production and consumption of literature. Drawing upon the work of historian Fernand Braudel, Moretti explores three time-frames: event, cycle, and *longue durée*. He draws the conclusion that ‘the short span [event] is all flow and no structure, the *longue durée* all structure and no flow, and cycles are the – unstable – border country between them’ (Moretti 2005). In this context temporal structures become visible to the literary historian because repetition is introduced into the equation, hence he or she is able to ‘map’ regularity, order and pattern. In his refiguration of Braudel’s tripartition of temporal structures, Moretti renames *longue durée* as ‘genre’, that is ‘morphological arrangements that last in time’ (Moretti 2005).

In film studies a theory of cycles and trends remains notably underdeveloped, but what work there is has deployed a similar set of temporal identities to those defined by Moretti. In his study of film genres, Rick Altman notes that by ‘assaying and imitating the money-making qualities of their most lucrative films, studios seek to initiate film cycles that will provide successful, easily exploitable models’ (Altman 1999, p. 60). Each film in the cycle contributes to the marketing of the others; however, overreliance on the repeatable experience will eventually lead to the market reaching saturation point. Through the various viewing positions – production, marketing and consumption – that can be assumed in relation to the body of films that form a cycle, Altman argues, a consensus emerges over its identification as a genre, or at least as a potential generic type. This is, he suggests, ‘a never-ceasing process, closely tied to the capitalist need for product differentiation’ (Altman 1999, p. 64). The commercial success, then, of an individual event, for example film or song, encourages repetition of key elements. The shared characteristics utilised across a number of films or songs form a cycle, which at the point when the repeated elements are sufficiently stabilised will enable the cycle’s transformation into, and its eventual identification as, a genre.

Film historian Tino Balio, however, argues that the development of a cycle leads not to the formation of a genre but to what the industry recognised as a trend, an overarching production category, which is constituted by film cycles. In his study of the studio system in the 1930s, Balio lists eight production trends: prestige pictures, musicals, the woman’s film, comedy, social problem films and horror films (Balio 1993, pp. 179–313). The trends are not possessive of the cycles from which they are formed so that the possibility of a group of films over-spilling the mould and mutating across trends is a common occurrence and in the process a trend dissipates and is eventually replaced by a new trend or trends. Because of the industry-led need to remake and remodel, cycles tend to be rapidly exhausted, perhaps even within a single production season, while trends might last for several years.

The films which form part of the juvenile delinquency cycle in the 1950s participated in the trend for social problem pictures – drug addiction among teenagers, for example – as well as within Westerns, musicals, comedies, horror, and so forth. The sheer prevalence of cycles of films about and aimed at teenagers was significant in production, marketing and consumption terms, and sufficiently long lasting, to in turn become marked enough to be recognised as a trend. The shifting parameters of cycles and trends, then, are suggestive of the process of continual remaking, or

refashioning, of existing forms. Change occurs incrementally and is therefore open to identification by both contemporary commentators and film historians.

One aspect dramatised in the cycle of films within the trend in teenpix was a concern with the speed of reinvention and a movie's ability to appear to be of the moment, to draw from the topical issues of the day, particularly the fads and fashions of teenage culture, not the least of which were the myriad musical styles and forms on offer, and to represent them in heightened dramatic form. While the turnaround of musical fads was fearsome, movie fads were also fleeting and could leave even the most watchful of film industry commentators at a loss in their monitoring of the latest cycles.

## Calypso and Latin rhythms

They 'calypso' – They 'rock' – on the prison farm that makes them wilder!

Poster tag line for *Untamed Youth* (1957; Figure 2)

One such fad was for calypso, in vogue from 1955 to 1958 and briefly exploited by low-budget independent filmmakers. Part of *Variety's* remit was to spot such fads and to predict whether it would last long enough to form a cycle. Its front page headline report on 26 December 1956 was on the 'Hot Trend: Trinidad Tunes – Calypso-Caribe Takeover Kick'. Herm Schoenfeld reported that: 'The calypso beat, which has been picking up momentum in the past few months, is now getting a national showcasing in niteries, concert auditoriums, college balls and on disks'. The motor behind this interest in the Jamaican beat was the growing profile of Harry Belafonte, but *Variety* also put it down to increased US tourism to the Caribbean where, 'Yanks have become hep to that territory's native music'. Central to *Variety's* report was the question of whether calypso would 'overtake rock 'n' roll in the pop music market?' In the trade press there was something of a consensus over rock 'n' roll's demise. *The Hollywood Reporter's* April 1957 (p. 3) review of *Dragstrip Girl* (which was double-billed with *Rock All Night*) noted that



Figure 2. Newspaper advert for *Untamed Youth*: 'They Calypso – they Rock'.



the film 'seems to cover the two major interests of the younger set, hot rods and hot music, although the rock 'n' roll phase apparently is somewhat in eclipse to calypso at the moment'.

The basic premise of calypso surpassing rock 'n' roll in popularity was followed through in three independent movies that were produced during March and April 1957. Bel-Air Productions' *Boop Girl Goes Calypso* was released in July; a month earlier Clover Productions exhibited *Calypso Heat Wave*, while William F. Broidy Productions pipped both by releasing *Calypso Joe* in May. Though Harry Belafonte, who had starred in *Carmen Jones* (1955), maintained an extraordinary popularity, and calypso performers had appeared in American films at least as early as 1943 when Sir Lancelot had singing roles in the Val Lewton thrillers *I Walked with a Zombie* and *Ghost Ship*, Hollywood's interest in calypso lasted only as long as it took for the three films to be conceived and released.

The fad for calypso was loosely tied in with the folk revival, in part through the unlikely link of The Kingston Trio's 1958 hit single 'Tom Dooley'. The band's name was chosen to suggest a Jamaican connection, and their version of the murder ballad was based on a 1951 syncopated arrangement recorded by the Folksay Trio.<sup>5</sup> Folksay's guitar and banjo player Erik Darling was also responsible for the 'Banana Boat Song' which he performed as part of the Tarriers in *Calypso Heat Wave* and which Belafonte turned into an international hit. These suggestive interchanges reveal the extraordinary commingling of popular musical styles during the 1950s. The calypso fad followed hard on the Cuban heels of the post-war vogue for Latin dance music that had its origins in Havana: the mambo, the cha-cha-chá and the rhumba, driven by the percussion instruments the maracas, conga, bongó and campana. Against the grain of received wisdom on the antecedents of rock 'n' roll as being an unholy alliance of jazz, blues and country music, Cuban music historian Ned Sublette argues that rock 'n' roll owes much more than is commonly acknowledged to contemporary Latin music. Rock 'n' roll was, he stresses, 'a negotiation between the ... enormous popularity of Latin music at the time, and the degree to which African American music was swinging' (Sublette 2007, pp. 69–94). A description that adds depth to *Variety's* 25 December 1956 (p. 1) claim that calypso is but a 'swinging improvisation on Afro-Cuban and jazz themes'. Sublette writes:

When 'Rock Around the Clock' hit Number One in July 9, 1955, *Billboard*, the record it displaced had held the spot for nine weeks: 'Cerezo Rosa', or, in English, 'Cherry Pink and Apple Blossom White', a slowed-down cha-cha-chá by Pérez Prado. In 'Rock Around the Clock' the debt to Latin music is apparent despite the swing-boogie rhythm – listen to the strong clave feel of the lead vocal. Bill Haley's less successful follow-up was 'Mambo Rock', which, though it wasn't anything close to a mambo quoted 'The Peanut Vendor' in three different spots. The quickie movie called *Rock Around the Clock* featured, besides Haley, a Latin band doing four numbers. (Sublette 2007, pp. 69–94)

Sublette's thesis is that, following the US embargo on trade with Cuba, the rich interaction between the island and the mainland has been forgotten, if not actively obliterated. A reading that supports his argument is that the most iconic of rock 'n' roll songs, 'Louie Louie', is based upon the cha-cha-chá. But Richard Berry's song was also sung, in cod calypso dialect, as a lament by a Jamaican sailor dreaming of the girl he left behind. He wrote the song in 1956, Sublette notes, at the height of the cha-cha-chá boom. It was also at the height of the calypso craze.<sup>6</sup> Chuck Berry,

whose understanding of the popular music market between 1955 and 1960 was second to none, used elements of Latin music in any number of his early hits – it's a major structuring element in his top ten smash from 1957, 'Rock and Roll Music' – and with 'Havana Moon', released in November 1956, Chuck plundered the same musical trove as Richard Berry – a cha-cha-chá rhythm with a rock 'n' roll accent, and told the similar story of a Caribbean man sitting on the docks sucking on a bottle of rum thinking about an American girl who has left her mark on him – 'the boat she sail, me love is gone'.

## Rock 'n' roll

Unlike calypso or the rhumba, rock 'n' roll is not an easily definable musical style; it is far too inconsistent and promiscuous. It is best thought of as an umbrella term for a mess of musical forms that were choked together by disc jockeys such as Alan Freed, Dewey Phillips or Wolfman Jack. Chuck Berry's music, like Bo Diddley's, puts a stress on its polyglot being. In his seminal history of 'rocknroll' [sic], Philip H. Ennis considers the genre to be a seventh stream of popular music that drew deeply from the other six streams: pop, black pop, country pop, jazz, folk and gospel. He makes a convincing argument for rock 'n' roll as music defined by its 'crossover' potential, for example, Chuck Berry's 'Maybelline'. Released in July 1955, the disc eventually hit #1 on the R&B charts and then crossed over to the pop charts and hit #5. A cover version by Marty Robbins took the song to #9 on the country charts (Ennis 1992, p. 227). Nevertheless, at any given moment a particular style or figure might dominate the mix and in 1955 into 1956 that style was best personified by Bill Haley and 'Rock Around the Clock' (Elvis does not hit nationally until the Spring of 1956).

In the Sam Katzman-produced film that took Haley's song as its title, rock 'n' roll is conceived as a found object and a vernacular music created by amateur musicians, but also as a music of mixed parentage. Moonlighting farmers Bill Haley and His Comets are discovered by out-of-work big band musicians, who by chance encounter the next big thing in Strawberry Springs – pop. 1472: 'It isn't boogie, it isn't jive and it isn't swing – it's kind of all of them'. 'The sound of slaughtered cows', quips one metropolitan sophisticate. 'All you do is play the music upside down', explains Haley. To balance the rock 'n' roll provided by Haley, musical diversion also comes in the form of 'top novelty outfit' Tony Martinez and his Band, who do the cha cha chá and a rhumba with vibes. Freddie Bell and His Bellboys also have a featured spot with the lively 'Giddy Up a Ding-Dong'. The Platters, introduced by disc jockey Alan Freed, perform 'The Great Pretender' and 'Only You' with stately solemnity. But this was Haley's vehicle with nine of his songs featured, including 'Mambo Rock'.<sup>7</sup>

Haley, Bell, Martinez, and The Platters offered a rounded – Latin, rock 'n' roll, novelty, and vocal harmony – bill of musical fare. Follow-up films in the cycle, which gave more space to musical performances, increased the breadth of musical styles on offer. After the runaway box office success of *Rock Around the Clock*, which had a release date of April 1956, the small New York-based independent Vanguard went into production in August on their own rock 'n' roll film. Like *Rock Around the Clock*, *Rock Rock Rock* featured disc jockey Alan Freed, but here his act as master of ceremonies was given more screen time and he had more say over the acts that

appeared. Via the mediating television set, Freed is given the role of interlocutor between the musicians, his core audience of teenagers, and their parents. Freed fronts his own Rock 'n' Roll Band, featuring Big Al Sears on sax for two numbers. The vocal group sound is presented by three acts: Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers, The Flamingos, and The Moonglows. White vocal group harmony is provided by Cirino and the Bowties, who also back up the film's rock 'n' roll Shirley Temple – Ivy Schulman. Chuck Berry cuts things up with his third release on Chess Records 'You Can't Catch Me' – the top side of the 'Havana Moon' 45. A Latin performer is not included in the line-up, but Atlantic recording star LaVern Baker sings the calypso-tinged 'Tra-La-La'. The title song is performed by Jimmy Cavallo & His House Rockers and it is done in the style of Bill Haley (though to be fair to Cavallo he was recording rhythm 'n' blues numbers in a similar mould to Haley as early as July 1951, when he cut a version of Jimmy Preston's 1949 floor-pounder 'Rock the Joint' a good ten months before Haley attempted the tune). Connie Francis provides the vocals on the two orchestral pop ballads mimed by Tuesday Weld.

*Rock Rock Rock* gave increased space to distinctive styles of black music – big band rhythm 'n' blues, Berry's rock 'n' roll, three highly individual vocal groups, and Baker's calypso. The music delivered by the white performers moves from the Haley impersonation, through orchestral pop ballads, and hits a moment of rare frisson with the Johnny Burnette Trio's rendition of 'Lonesome Train'. The band are introduced by Freed, who gives a short lesson in musicology that Philip Ennis would surely find convincing: 'Rock 'n' roll is a river of music; it is the flow of many streams: rhythm 'n' blues, jazz, ragtime, cowboy songs, country, boogie songs, folk songs. All have contributed greatly to The Big Beat ...'. But despite the diversity on offer, the film, at least in its advertising, conflated all the musical styles under the banner heading of '21 – New Rock 'n' Roll Hits'.

In *Rock Around the Clock* rock 'n' roll is represented as a found object, with the story focusing on how best to exploit this untapped cultural resource. By the time *Rock Rock Rock* was released the story is no longer about the discovery of the music but rather the actual fact of its exploitation – as it was in the major studio, big budget, production of Frank Tashlin's *The Girl Can't Help It* and the Presley vehicle *Jailhouse Rock*. A third stage, rock 'n' roll's decline, is covered in *Bop Girl Goes Calypso* wherein rock 'n' roll is presented as the craze of the moment, but one that has 'peaked' – and is now 'on the skids'. A fad's 'lifecycle' as identified by sociologists Meyersohn and Katz, moving from discovery, to promotion, dissemination and exploitation, before eventual loss of exclusivity and death by displacement, is all played out within and across the scenarios of these films (Meyersohn and Katz 1957, pp. 594–601). The events dramatised in *Bop Girl Goes Calypso* suggest that the ebb and flow of musical fads could be finely calibrated, allowing for scientific predictions of a style's rise and fall in popularity (Figure 3). Working on a thesis called 'Mass Hysteria and the Popular Singer', an applied psychology student, Bob Hilton, played by Bobby Troup (the composer of 'Route 66', the deathless tribute to America's highway), has already predicted the rise of rock 'n' roll and now predicts its eclipse by calypso; evidence for which is gathered by his reading of a decibel counter that records the level of public response (applause) to musical performances.

Moving from nightclub to nightclub, Bob collects evidence for his thesis. The film opens with yet another imitation of the Haley sound: a honking sax-led number

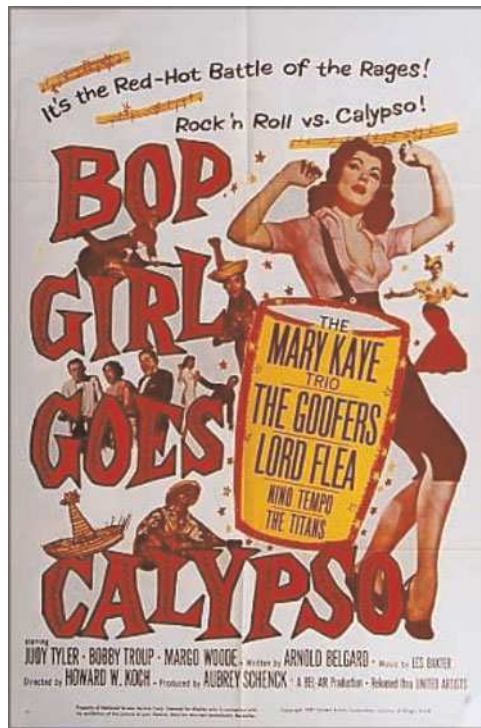


Figure 3. Poster for Bop Girl Goes Calypso.

provided by Nino Tempo and his all white combo sweating it out in the Club Downbeat. Tempo is followed by the black vocal group The Titans singing 'Rhythm & Blues' and 'So Hard to Laugh, So Easy to Cry'. Interrupted by a drunk who demands a calypso, the house band at the Crescendo Club, the Mary Kaye Trio (two guys in bowties play sidekicks to guitarist Kaye), keep him happy by playing 'Calypso Rock' which alternates between the title's two musical styles – Bob Hilton's applause-o-meter hits 10! At the Seville Club Lord Flea performs a more authentic calypso, but his audience is meagre. What is needed to really test Bob's prediction, and his ambition to record the first mass hysteria induced by calypso, is a white singer who can bring together the big beat of rock 'n' roll with the Caribbean rhythms of calypso. This scenario has clear parallels with Sun records owner Sam Phillips' stated desire to find a white man who can sing the blues, and thereby make him a millionaire – enter Elvis, stage left. Both scenarios, though, are expressions of Ennis' conception of the 'crossover' as the defining aspect of the period's popular music. As Bob explains to nightclub rock 'n' roll singer Jo Thomas: 'we're in a very restless world, always looking for something new'. As is usually the case, however, and is certainly so in this instance, the 'new' is in fact little more than a reconfiguration – a crossover – of the already existing.

Thomas accepts Bob's challenge and at an afternoon rehearsal at the YMCA plays 'Calypso Boogie' to a highly appreciative audience of young teenagers. Club Downbeat is given a revamp and becomes Club Trinidad, and Jo wows an adult public with 'Bop Calypso' which makes it the third time – 'Rock' 'Boogie' 'Bop' – that the film has crossed rock 'n' roll with calypso. Most of the film's original numbers were

composed by Les Baxter who, along with Martin Denny and Arthur Lyman, was responsible for exotica – a crass vulgarisation of world music housed in album jackets that appealed to a suburban fantasy world of desert islands populated with dusky skinned primitive maidens.<sup>8</sup> Suggestive of the crossover audience the film's producers hoped to attract, the music presented in *Bop Girl Goes Calypso* is shown to appeal to both YMCA club teenagers and to adult nightclub patrons. Nevertheless, the film flopped at the box office and was quickly re-promoted under the truncated title *Bop Girl* with the tag-line changed from 'It's the Red-Hot Battle of the Rages! Rock 'n Roll vs. Calypso!' to 'It's a Rock 'n Roll Riot'.

As the historian of popular music and film John Mundy has noted, for all the noise and bluster musical teenpix create in announcing the novelty of their particular musical attractions they were based on long-standing formulas, either as the musical with its 'integrated narrative number structure' or as a return to the revue film which 'characterised the very earliest musicals' (Mundy 1999, p. 110). Either way, both forms worked to contain the potential excesses of contemporary music, particularly in relation to racial concerns. Michael Eldridge has argued that the containment of rock 'n' roll's troubling racial caste was precisely why calypso was offered as an alternative. Unlike rock 'n' roll, calypso evoked 'a happy-faced, tropical version of plantation-apartheid in which dark-skinned people still exist primarily to serve and entertain white people' (Eldridge 2005). Calypso, then, could be held at one remove from the American suburban home that rock 'n' roll appeared to penetrate so effortlessly through discs, radio and television; representing a faraway and unthreatening black Caribbean culture.<sup>9</sup>

*Bop Girl* is cynical in its suggestion that musical taste is predictable and easily exploitable, presenting rock 'n' roll unambiguously as a novelty act. At the film's centre are two performances by The Goofers; their second number 'Rock 'n' Roll Till I Die' has the band made up to look like ghouls and they perform the song lying in coffins. Their first number began with some athletic dancing – Cossack kicks, somersaults, splits, and so on, progressing to the point where, in turn, each member of the band swings head-down feet-up on a trapeze while playing their instrument; even the double bass ... which actualises Bill Haley's description of rock 'n' roll as music played upside down, but was intended, I think, to contain the music within a comic scenario.

Like with The Goofers, rock 'n' roll performances tend to be neutered affairs in teenpix; watching Haley in *Rock Around the Clock* it is hard to imagine he once had a cataclysmic effect on his audience. In June 1956, *Look* magazine reported on one of his shows:

A tenor saxophone tilts backwards and throws insistent, brutal notes into the air. The melody is simple and repetitious. More important is the beat: it is so firm and strong you can practically walk on it. Bill Haley and his Comets are playing 'Rock Around the Clock' at the Sports Arena in Hershey, Pa, to an audience that wails, screeches and sometimes dances in the aisle.<sup>10</sup>

The photographs that accompany the article give mute testament to the veracity of that description. If wild untamed rock 'n' roll performances are all but absent in teenpix, they have, nevertheless, come to dominate historical recall of the era. Reflecting on the pleasures offered in *The Girl Can't Help It*, the *Village Voice's* film critic Jim Hoberman wrote: 'the coolest presence ever recorded by a Hollywood camera may be the entranced Little Richard contemplating his piano as if wondering whether

to pulverise or incinerate it' (Garcia 1994, p. 168). But the fact is Little Richard does not destroy the piano; instead, he gave what must be his most restrained performance ever before film or television cameras.

### Jazz, beatniks, and the teenpic

If the lack of interest by film historians in calypso and the movies can be explained by the box office failure of the three calypso-themed films and the subsequent lack of industry interest in producing sufficient films to create an identifiable cycle, which in turn might produce scholarly activity in order to explain the phenomenon, the general academic disinterest over the major role that jazz played on the soundtracks of teenpix is less easy to explain, even though jazz was a music wholly in keeping with the ur-text for the teenpic, *The Wild One*.<sup>11</sup> Although rock critic Greil Marcus has called *The Wild One* and *Rebel Without A Cause* the 'first rock and roll movies', he noted, somewhat paradoxically, that they had 'nothing to do with rock and roll music'. As music, he argued, rock 'n' roll would have taken shape without these films; but 'as culture, it very well may not have' (Marcus 1976, p. 350). Given the innumerable overt references to these two films in rock music culture through the mid-1960s and beyond, this is fair comment, but it is also an act of cultural erasure: Brando's character does not need rock 'n' roll to complete his rebel pose. In 1954, jazz carried hipster credibility and it would continue to do so until well into the 1960s when bands such as the Rolling Stones with their wholesale appropriation of Chuck Berry licks, Muddy Waters tunes and James Brown dance moves helped rewrite a history of cool.

The year *Hot Rod Girl* with its bad jukebox jazz was released, 1956, was also the year that Ginsberg's *Howl* was first published, which was followed a year later by Kerouac's *On the Road*. If you take these two events as seminal in any history of post-war youth culture then jazz, not rock 'n' roll, was the delinquent's preferred soundtrack. Granted Ginsberg and Kerouac define a rather high-end sophisticated version of 1950s youth culture, but at the other end of the youth culture hierarchy a similar musical alliance is played out. The car customizer and pin stripper Von Dutch who, through his appearances in magazines, came to represent, as much as any one man might, hot rod culture of the mid-1950s, made jazz his music of choice. In the March 1956 issue of *DIG: America's Coolest Teenage Magazine*, Von Dutch is shown barefoot, cross-legged, wearing a beret and playing the flute.<sup>12</sup> By this measure, jazz in *Hot Rod Girl*, regardless of whether it is 'good' or 'bad', is not the mistaken choice of some hapless and terminally unhip film executive, but a valid musical referent.

Released on 19 March 1955, *Blackboard Jungle* featured Billy Haley's 'Rock Around the Clock' over the opening and closing credits which helped to promote the disc into the *Billboard* charts in May where it stayed for 24 weeks, hitting #1 in July and holding on to the top spot for eight weeks.<sup>13</sup> Aided by the March 1956 release of Sam Katzman's exploitation of Haley and the song's popularity with the movie *Rock Around the Clock*, *Blackboard Jungle*, juvenile delinquency and rock 'n' roll became inextricably linked – 'Suddenly, the festering connections between rock and roll, teenage rebellion, juvenile delinquency, and other assorted horrors were made explicit' wrote Marcus (1976, p. 350).<sup>14</sup> However, both the film and its source novel (1953) focus on jazz as the music of the day. The long laudatory review

of the film published by *Variety* on 2 February 1955 finished with some notes on the technical side of things and on the music used:

Used to pinpoint drama are three recordings, with 'Rock Around the Clock', played by Bill Haley [sic] and His Comets, theming the jazz beat that expresses the film's mood. Others heard are 'Invention for Guitar and Trumpet', played by Stan Kenton and his Orchestra, and 'The Jazz Me Blues', played by Bix Beiderbecke and His Gang.

For this contemporary reviewer, jazz 'expresses the film's mood', and Haley's 'Rock Around the Clock' has the requisite 'jazz beat'. With the benefit of hindsight this appears as a highly perverse definition given the iconic status of the song in rock history, but it also shows how fluid and open descriptive terms given to musical styles and forms were at this point in time.

Furthermore, as suggested in both book and film, jazz is the music that matters inasmuch as it defines its more ardent listeners as being outside a bland consumerism – separating the hip from the square. Josh Edwards (Richard Kiley) is a vocational school teacher and lover of swing; after classes he discusses the intricacies of his favourite musical performances with his colleague Richard Dadier (Glenn Ford) in a bar. They talk about Sarah Vaughan, Harry James, the Duke, Charlie Barnet, Jimmy Dorsey, Glenn Miller, and the like, while Josh lays plans for taking his record collection into class. He is intent on drawing his students into a world of art and culture accessed through the arcane knowledge he holds on his beloved music. Edwards' plans, however, come to nothing when his collection of treasured discs is smashed. Discussing this scene, jazz and film scholar Krin Gabbard wrote that Edwards 'seemed out of touch, stuffy, and elitist. A defiant youth culture built around the rockabilly sounds of Bill Haley was much more attractive for a significant proportion of the audience' (Gabbard 1996, p. 9). I do not doubt the appeal of Haley for a contemporary youth audience, but the trashing of the discs in both film and novel is not used to dramatise generational conflict through shifts in musical tastes: swing music being usurped by the rhythm 'n' blues say of Johnny Ace, Chuck Willis, Chuck Higgins, or even Haley's version. The students stomp on the records not because they represent the music of their parent's generation, or because Edwards appears elitist, but because it is an action that underscores their ignorance and recourse to wanton acts of disobedience, vandalism, and violence when faced by figures of authority.

The teenagers in *Blackboard Jungle* are not being defined by the film's producers as hip, this would take a nostalgic gloss applied years after the fact, but instead, and wholly in keeping with the film's contemporary generic identity as a social problem picture, they are being defined as delinquent troubled youth, growing up, for the most part, in an uncaring society. As such, the film works on the generic remit of showing a problem and then asking the audience what they might do to participate in its solution. But then rock 'n' roll as it appears in the films that followed the extraordinary box office success of *Rock Around the Clock* was not perceived by the producers as hip either; beyond its immediate appeal to teenagers, it was understood to be no more than just another musical fad. To be hip you have to practice a form of cultural discrimination – a discrimination that is generally seen as illegitimate, at odds with the mainstream and which, at least in its racial makeup, follows the lines laid out in Norman Mailer's 1957 essay 'The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster'.<sup>15</sup> In his essay Mailer made explicit the hipster's expropriation of blackness as a marker of non-conformist cool, best exemplified by the Beats' fulsome and

romantic view of the black jazzman as a cultural and social outlaw. The 'hip', if it existed anywhere in the perception of filmmakers and industry insiders operated in the realm of the Beats, not with the rock 'n' rollers. The racial complexion of hip partly explains why Hollywood more or less shunned stories that instil themselves in a culture of cool and instead represented Beatniks as alien and criminal, and its adherents as psychopaths.<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, the hip could be found near the heart of Hollywood, in Cosmo Alley to be precise, where a coffee house was kicking up enough of a stir that in October 1958 *Variety* ran a report on its activities and suggested that it might be a model for failing nightclubs to follow:

As the night clubs go out of business, the coffee houses are going into business. And much of the jump and excitement that has put this area's coffee house trend into night-time orbit is being given an extra shove by live entertainment. Just as the nitery shutterings detract from Los Angeles' talent showcase, so these little coffee houses are adding to it. (Silverman 1958, pp. 2, 26)

Discussing the coffee house located in, and called, Cosmo Alley, the reporter noted that as 'most coffee houses, this one was launched in trade by the Beat Generation, but publicity that brought in the "squares" has driven out most of the Beatniks. The crowd nonetheless, is a "hip" one and one that demands top off beat entertainment'. Currently holding forth is actor and folk singer Theodore Bikel who is joined by a 'Sahi-ish comic with routines' Lenny Bruce – 'His satire is biting, his material is good, and he's a solid scorer when he "makes the scene" at this bombed-out looking but atmospheric coffee house'. The article finishes with a survey of the area's other coffee houses and their respective attractions.

In a short article headlined 'Poetry With Jazz In Cafes Makes Bad Rhyme Out of Bohemians & Minimums', *Variety* covered the New York Beatnik scene five months earlier on 23 April when it reviewed San Francisco poet Kenneth Rexroth's readings at the Five Spot – a storefront dive on the Lower East Side that was 'inhabited by the bohemians, intelligentsia, artists, and a lot of characters in the genuine sense of the word'. The reporter thought that Rexroth lacked the 'romantic touch', but then 'scholars are rarely one to stop long enough to look at the boy-girl angles'. If poetry backed by jazz in niteries is to take off, he concluded, then some of the more 'gifted and more handsome of the penurious actors with a poet's feel, must come in to follow up. Then perhaps shall the minnesingers and the bards fill the air with their songs' (pp. 1, 6).

If the coffee house Beatnik scene was too limited in its appeal to become a significant cinematic attraction – not enough boy-girl romantic action – it still gave rise to a number of film scenarios, including: *The Rebel Set* (1959) – 'the screen's big jolt about the Beatniks – the drifters, the hipsters, and the hot sisters'; *The Beat Generation* (1959) – 'The Beatnik hang out was a front for violence and weirdness'; *The Bucket of Blood* (1959) – Roger Corman's comedy of Beatnik manners; *The Subterraneans* (1960) – 'Love among the new Bohemians'; and a film that had nothing to do with the Beats beyond its title, *The Beatniks*, but which had the best of the advertising tag lines: 'Their password was mutiny against society'. The significance of this brief cycle of Beatnik movies lay in their conflating subterranean Beat culture with criminal underworlds producing a highly sensationalist handling of the subculture. Often dismissed by scholars as false and ridiculous representations of the milieu, the films, however, never purported to be anything other than exploitative. In satiric



recognition of Hollywood's appropriation of whatever fad hit the headlines, Lenny Bruce was promoted via an advert placed in *The Hollywood Reporter* as 'Soon to be seen in Sam Katzman's *Switchblade Calypso Bop Reefer Madness Swamp Girl*' – a phantasmagorical fusion of the period's sensationalistic sub-cultural fads (29 March 1957, p. 4).

Coffee houses and subterranean Beatnik scenes appeared in a slew of films from the mid-1950s and into the 1960s, including *Dementia* (1955), *The Wild Party* (1956), *I Want To Live* (1958), *Hole in the Head*, (1959), *Bell, Book & Candle* (1958), *Blast of Silence* (1961), *Two for the Seesaw* (1962), *The Greenwich Village Story* (1963), and *Night Tide* (1963); all feature the requisite jazz soundtrack, and invariably have someone banging away on bongos or congas. *Blast of Silence* featured a particularly impressive performance on the congas by Dean Sheldon. Indeed, congas and bongos were at the height of their popularity and were a Latin import from Cuba, but one that was quickly domesticated, becoming synonymous with Beatniks and coffee houses. Jack Costanzo billed himself as Mr. Bongo, he had earlier played with Stan Kenton and Nat 'King' Cole, and is remembered today, if at all, as having jammed on the bongos with Marlon Brando on the Ed Morrow talk show. But it was Preston Epps who best understood the crossover potential for this humble but loud instrument, chalking up hit singles with 'Bongo Rock' – Top 20 in 1959 – 'Bongo Party', and 'Bongo Bongo Bongo'.<sup>17</sup>

Like Beat culture with its appropriation of Latin rhythm, or at least the promise of its rhythm, rock 'n' roll effortlessly absorbed hepcat jive. This was a form of second-hand, or borrowed, clothing that gave a performer a veneer of cool, for example Gene Vincent's 'Bop Street' (1956): 'Hey cat, where are ya goin' man?' 'Man, I'm going down to bop street'. 'Tell me cat, where's that di-rection?' 'Man, ain't you heard? They got one of 'em in every town'. 'Real cool.' Or Elvis Presley's 'Hold it fellers, that don't move me – let's get real, real gone' after the slow opening of his third Sun Records 45 'Milkcow Blues Boogie'. Teenpic and Beatnik movies just as readily crossed over, producing something akin to *Switchblade Calypso Bop Reefer Madness Swamp Girl*. *High School Confidential* (1958) is a particularly self-conscious example of this process of exchange. Opening and closing with Jerry Lee Lewis' title song (which is also reprised mid way through), the dialogue script reads as if it has been ripped wholesale from the pages of the 1953 slang dictionary *The Jives of Dr. Hepcat*. Beyond the hep talk between students, the only lesson they attend is given over to slang and the shifting meaning of 'square'. When the teacher leaves the classroom one of the students gives an impersonation of Harry 'the Hipster' Gibson or Lord Buckley – comedians of hip – as if one of these 'cats' had assumed the role of the teacher. After school, students meet at the club where a jazz band provides background punctuation for a Beatnik chick's poetry recital – 'life is dragsville, man.'

In AIP's *Hot Rod Gang* the crossover develops out of John Ashley's character's attempt to live a double life as hot-rodder, rock 'n' roller, and buttoned-down heir to a fortune. When Gene Vincent asks him to appear as a guest on his show, Ashley at first turns him down; he cannot afford to be recognised. However, the idea of Ashley wearing a disguise is suggested. Snapping his fingers, Gene says, 'I got a thought. Why not gimmick him up. You know, we got the shaggy mane, the shivery spine, and the rubbery legs, why not dress him up in a cool set of shrubbery and real classy threads. You know, like one of those Greenwich Village guys who are on cloud nine?' Ashley reappears as a 'bop cat' in beard and beret.

Less intentionally humorous crossovers can be seen in such movies as Imperial Productions' *The Cool & The Crazy* (William Whitney 1958), which featured psychotic reefer smoking JDs, and Robert Altman's debut *The Delinquents* (1957), which was described by *The Hollywood Reporter* as a 'sordid and depressing "study" of what is commonly called juvenile delinquency, although depravity would be a more accurate designation in this case' (19 February 1957, p. 3). There is not a rock 'n' roll tune to be heard in either film; instead the soundtracks are made up of various jazz styles. Rock 'n' roll's absence, though, should not close our ears to these soundtracks; they are as valid and potentially evocative of the era as anything by the established canon of rock 'n' roll performers. After all, where else but in *The Delinquents* can you see and hear a performance by Kansas City jazz legend Julia Lee? What really formed the soundtrack to the mid to late 1950s was a Babel of sounds and styles, a polyglot mix of black and white popular music enhanced by Latin music and rhythms – a series of crossovers.

## Conclusion

Discussing the plenitude of temporal markers for 1950s youth culture and the display of adolescent activities and pranks – cruising, drag racing, sock hops, 'mooning' – in *American Graffiti*, film and music scholar Jeff Smith notes that the structuring of the film's soundtrack as if it were a radio show DJed by Wolfman Jack enhanced the 'impression of the film's authenticity':

The radio not only serves as an overarching form of realistic motivation for the music, it also adds a certain connotative richness by marking the film's time and place as a distinctly teenage subculture, one with its own particular rituals, dialect, and consumption patterns. (Smith 1998, p. 177)

But as he comments in a footnote, the mix of 'golden oldies' or pop hits would not have been played by Wolfman Jack back in the day of his border radio broadcasts when he parlayed a much more heady mix of blues and hillbilly tunes.<sup>18</sup> This was also true of other influential disc jockeys such as Dewey Phillips, who on his *Red, Hot and Blue* show gave Elvis his first radio exposure. His biographer Louis Cantor describes a typically eclectic playlist:

On any given night listeners got what might be called a Dewey Phillips's amalgamated hodge-podge ... Dean Martin's 'That's Amore' followed by Big Mama Thornton's 'Hound Dog'; Patti Page followed by Howlin' Wolf; Mahalia Jackson's 'Move On Up A Little Higher' preceding Lloyd Price's 'Lawdy, Miss Clawdy'; and then Hank Williams and Rosetta Tharpe back to back ... And just about the time that you thought Dewey had slipped totally out of the mainstream he'd throw Frankie Laine's 'That's My Desire' on the turntable. (Cantor 2005, p. 140)<sup>19</sup>

The selection of distinct and varied musical styles to accompany moments of youthful activity and leisure in teenpix, some of which now strike us as inauthentic (bad jazz on the jukebox) or patently absurd (calypso eclipsing rock 'n' roll in popularity), the high impact rock 'n' roll had on the generation that came of age during the 1960s and their role in telling the history of popular music with its often exclusive view of its music of choice as the only music that matters – before Elvis there was nothing – occludes the fact that the music industry rode the wave of a phenomenal rise in sales of discs, particularly 45s. This rise in sales had them chasing fads, which

were often no more than phantoms – apparitions from the industry's collective psyche – in order to try and capitalise on the consumption frenzy. In the same manner, the film industry sought to regain a lost audience; it too chased fads and phantoms in its appeal to the core consumer of popular music – the teenager – that most fickle and untrustworthy patron of the arts but who just maybe liked 'bad jazz', romantic pop, calypso, or even Gene Vincent. Like Dewey Phillips, the film industry chose not to overly limit the music it had on offer and instead provided a varied package, some of which, it expected, would crossover and appeal to diverse and capricious teenage tastes.

## Acknowledgements

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## Endnotes

1. For example see Marcus (1976). In Crenshaw's *Hollywood Rock* the entry on *High School Caesar* (1960) echoes Doherty: 'Yes, the film is peppered with rock 'n' roll moments, but the squares who produced it still reverted to swing-type music for the dancin' and romancin'.'
2. For a useful, and entertaining, guide to the diversity of teenpix see Betrock (1986).
3. For a cultural history of hi-fi see Keightley (1996).
4. Evidence for this can be found in the almost complete lack of regard on the part of Roger Corman for copyrighting his 1950s productions, a miscalculation that cost him dearly when *Little Shop of Horrors* was turned into a musical (Gray 2000, pp. 62–7).
5. The folk revival and its links to calypso are touched upon in Cantwell's superb history of the former (Cantwell 1996, p. 6).
6. Sublette (2007, pp. 69–94).
7. In 1954 The Robins, later renamed The Coasters, also recorded an ersatz mambo – 'Loop de Loop Mambo', a wonderful confection composed by Jerry Lieber and Mike Stoller.
8. Baxter also provided most of the music for *Untamed Youth*, a May 1957 release by Warner Bros which featured a mix of rock 'n' roll and calypso.
9. The best account I know of rock 'n' roll's penetration of the suburbs is found in Lhamon (2002, pp. 67–97).
10. Reprinted in *Rock 'n' Roll 1939–59* (Fondation Cartier 2007), pp. 152–3.
11. See, for example, Gabbard (1996) and Stanfield (2006).
12. The magazine's cover and images from the photospread are reproduced in Kahan (2006, pp. 84–5).
13. See Dawson's (2006) excellent popular history of the song and the movie spin-offs.
14. Another *Rolling Stone* critic made pretty much the same observation in 1969 when he wrote: 'Juvenile delinquency and Rock 'n' Roll. The origin of either phenomenon may not be as important as the fact that they were supposedly engaged in unholy and incestuous collusion; rock 'n' roll caused juvenile delinquency and juvenile delinquency naturally caused rock 'n' roll' (Staehling 1975, pp. 220–51).
15. Essay collected in *Charters* 1993, pp. 582–605.
16. On an earlier attempt to represent the hip by Hollywood, see Stanfield (2006, pp. 142–51).
17. For more information on Beatniks and bongos, see McIntosh (2003) and on the instrument's Cuban roots see Sublette (2007).
18. *Ibid.*, 264, n50. Smith's source is Morthland (1976, p. 92).
19. For more on the role of the disc jockey in the promotion of rock 'n' roll, see Ennis (1992, pp. 131–60).

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