

# The History of Rock Music: 1955-1966

Genres and musicians of the beginnings

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## Paradise Reborn 1963-1965

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**(These are excerpts from my book ["A History of Rock and Dance Music"](#))**

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Across the ocean, the alternative to the British bands, that rediscovered and reshaped rhythm'n'blues, was the successor to rhythm'n'blues: soul music. The relationship between soul music and the British rebels was explicit: a soul record, Marvin Gaye's *Can I Get A Witness* (1963), became the anthem of the "mods". Wilson Pickett created an evil, ferocious kind of soul music with *In The Midnight Hour* (1964). Otis Redding's *I've Been Lovin' You Too Long* (1965) was soul music in which the instrumental backing had de facto replaced the gospel choir, and his *Respect* (1965) was a nod to the civil-rights movement.

The "Memphis sound" was very much the invention of instrumental bands that went almost unnoticed despite the fact that they provided the "music" for those stars. Outstanding among them were the [MG's](#), comprising keyboardist Booker T Jones, drummer Al Jackson and legendary guitarist Steve Cropper (who had been in the MG's predecessors, the Mar-Keys, and would co-write Wilson Pickett's *In The Midnight Hour*, Sam & Dave's *Soul Man*, Eddie Floyd's *Knock On Wood*, Otis Redding's *The Dock of the Bay*).

New Orleans had its own unique sound, which was best represented by pianist [Allen Toussaint](#)'s light touch, but also encompassed [Jimmy Reed](#)'s uplifting boogie.

Just like the trivial pop of the Beatles sold a lot more records than the bold rock'n'roll of the Who or the Rolling Stones, the kind of soul music that revolutionized the charts in the early 1960s was the catchy, mellow one. An enfant prodige, Stevie Wonder, ruled the scene throughout the 1960s, although his hits, from *Contract Of Love* (1962) to *Uptight* (1966), from *A Place In The Sun* (1966) to *Yester-me Yester-day* (1969), were old-fashioned pop ballads written by professional songwriters such as Ron Miller and Bryan Wells. His literate alter-ego was [Smokey Robinson](#), a consummate poet and arranger, who wrote *My Girl* (1965) and *Since I've Lost My Baby* (1965) for the Temptations

and *Track Of My Tears* (1965) for the Miracles. However, the audience perceived soul music as party music, as epitomized by the ultimate party song of the era, *Dancing In The Street* (1964), written by Marvin Gaye for the Vandellas.

[Brian Holland, Lamond Dozier and Eddie Holland](#) were the greatest tunesmiths of the era. In a few years, they produced an impressive number of melodic masterpieces: *Can I Get A Witness* (1963) for Marvin Gaye, *Where Did Our Love Go* (1964), *Stop In The Name Of Love* (1965), *I Hear A Symphony* (1965), *My World Is Empty Without You* (1965) and *You Can't Hurry Love* (1965) for the Supremes, *Baby I Need Your Loving* (1964), *I Can't Help Myself* (1965), *Same Old Song* (1965), *Reach Out I'll Be There* (1966) for the Four Tops. The H-D-H trio probably remains the greatest pop phenomenon of all times. These songs were a simplified form of soul music, but these were the kind of black music that white radio stations had no problem broadcasting. They were meant to dance at private parties, they complied with the conventions of the romantic ballad, they were sung by polite young people, and they implied no more than the usual stories of falling in love and heartbreak. There were none of the controversial elements of the Afro-American culture that had alarmed white parents when their children were listening to rhythm'n'blues.

Another Phil Spector production, the Righteous Brothers' *You've Lost That Loving Feeling* (1965), launched "blue-eyed soul", the version of soul music for white singers.

[James Brown](#) had clarified the relation between sexual lust and religious fervor with *Please Please Please* (1956). It took several years for the rest of soul music to catch up with his intuition, but eventually his monotonous and anti-virtuoso style created a new kind of music. With *Papa's Got A Brand New Bag* (1965) and *Cold Sweat* (1967) Brown coined a percussive style of soul, the predecessor of "funk". The deadly combination of psychotic falsetto, metallic guitar strumming, fractured bass lines, noisy horn section and pulsing polyrhythm was dance-music to the square. His visceral shrieks amid guttural lascivious wails (and lyrics full of sexual innuendos) invented a new vocal form. *Sex Machine* (1970), with Bootsy Collins on bass, was one of the songs that invented funk-music (and its piano figure virtually invented house-music).

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