

The History of Rock Music: 1955-1966

Genres and musicians of the beginnings

[History of Rock Music](#) | [1955-66](#) | [1967-69](#) | [1970-75](#) | [1976-89](#) | [The early 1990s](#) | [The late 1990s](#) | [The 2000s](#) | [Alpha index](#)

Musicians of [1955-66](#) | [1967-69](#) | [1970-76](#) | [1977-89](#) | [1990s in the US](#) | [1990s outside the US](#) | [2000s](#)

[Back to the main Music page](#)

[Inquire about purchasing the book](#)

(Copyright © 2009 Piero Scaruffi)

Trouble in Paradise 1961-1964

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

The Folk Revival

TM, ®, Copyright © 2003 [Piero Scaruffi](#) All rights reserved.

The most significant event of the USA music scene at the turn of the decade was the folk revival. Launched in 1958 by the Kingstone Trio's *Tom Dooley*, and celebrated in 1959 at the first Newport Folk Festival, the folk revival introduced a sense that music was meant to be more than mere entertainment. Within a few years, its boundaries had expanded dramatically. [Joan Baez](#) turned folk music into an austere form on **Joan Baez 2** (? 1961 - oct 1961). [Bob Gibson](#) was one of the very early folk-singers who set to renovate the art of folk music. His best album, **At The Gate Of Horn** (apr 1961 - ? 1961), a live performance with Bob Camp, predates the intimate style of folk-rock by a few years. Ian (Tyson) and Sylvia (Fricker) were perhaps the most soulful, predating folk-rock with Ian's *Four Strong Winds* (1963) and Sylvia's *You Were On My Mind* (1964, the We Five's hit). Folk music evolved rapidly into something more profound and more complex, as proven by [Lee Hazlewood](#)'s concept albums, **Trouble Is A Lonesome Town** (? 1963 - nov 1963) and **The N.S.V.I.P.'s** (? 1964 - ? 1964), that consist of bleak stories about misfits and losers.

Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger had invented the symbiosis between folk-singers and the Left. Between april 1962 (when Bob Dylan's *Blowing In The Wind* was released) and 1965 (when almost everybody was singing protest songs) that invention became the ruling paradigm for folk-singers around the country. Folk-singers became the voice of both the civil-rights movement and the peace movement. A song was expected to be a miniature political rally, its title a political slogan, its lyrics a political speech. The epicenter of this phenomenon was the Greenwich Village in New York. The so called "Greenwich movement" helped the folk-singer mutate into the singer-songwriter: politically-aware folk-singers were writing their own lyrics and music, and were placing the emphasis on the story, not on the melody. Bob

Dylan, Joan Baez, [Phil Ochs](#), the agit-prop bard of *Ain't Marching Anymore* (1965) and *The Ringing For Revolution* (1966), Tom Paxton, whose first official album **Ramblin' Boy** (? 1964 - ? 1964) harked back to Woody Guthrie's style, and Buffy Saint-Marie, with the pacifist anthem *Universal Soldier* (1964), "marched" and "sat in" along with thousands of students. True to their non-violent ideals, they did not advocate violent resistance. Their songs were rebellious in a melancholy and desolate way. The Greenwich Movement was also important because it gave young people a "voice", and that voice was a musical one. Music became the vehicle for young people to vent their (political) frustration. It was a different kind of music, and a different kind of frustration, but the similarity with rock'n'roll was obvious. It was just a matter of time before the personal (rock'n'roll) and the public (protest song) would find a common ground.

Progressive folk

TM, ®, Copyright © 2003 [Piero Scaruffi](#) All rights reserved.

While the music of protest singers was not expected to be innovative, other folk musicians focused just on that: innovation. Davy Graham in Britain, John Fahey on the West Coast, and Sandy Bull on the East Coast played and composed pieces that fused folk, blues, jazz and Indian raga, while [Joseph Spence](#) in the Bahamas invented an intricate, polyphonic and polyrhythmic guitar style.

[Davy Graham](#) played the folk ballad *She Moves Through the Fair* (1962) as a raga and then toyed with jazz and middle-eastern music on **Guitar Player** (? 1963 - ? 1963) and **Folk Blues and Beyond** (? 1964 - ? 1964).

[Sandy Bull](#) (12) was light-years ahead of his time with the lengthy *Blend*, on his masterpiece **Fantasias For Guitar & Banjo** (? 1962 - may 1963), as were the **Inventions For Guitar And Banjo** (? 1964 - ? 1965). Later works such as *Electric Blend*, on **E Pluribus Unum** (? 1968 - ? 1968), would confirm his status as one of the overlooked geniuses of the era.

His friend [Djalma "Bola Sete" DeAndrade](#) (3), a black Brazilian guitarist who had relocated to San Francisco in 1959, blended samba, jazz, USA folk music and European classical music in the effortless improvisations of **The Solo Guitar** (? 1965 - ? 1965), **Ocean** (mar 1972 - ? 1972), **Shambhala Moon** (jul 1982 - ? 1985).

It was around this time that John Fahey, following the intuition of Pete Seeger's **Goofing Off Suite** (? 1954 - ? 1955), invented "American primitivism", a new way of exploiting the folk and country tradition.

[John Fahey](#) (114) is the man who introduced the stream of consciousness into folk music, and turned folk music into classical music, and then made it cross the boundaries of western and eastern music. The spiritual father of the "american primitive guitar", Fahey turned the guitar solo into a metaphysical exercise. **The Great San Bernardino Birthday Party** (? 1966 - ? 1966) and **Requia** (? 1967 - ? 1967) introduced his surreal world of tragic and solemn visions; images penned by the guitar, rather than by the voice. His "western raga", as defined by his three instrumental masterpieces, *A Raga Called Pat Part 3 & 4*, on **Voice Of The Turtle** (? 1968 - ? 1968), *The Voice Of The Turtle*, on **America** (jan 1971 - ? 1971, but first full release oct 1998), and the title-track

from **Fare Forward Voyagers** (? 1973 - ? 1973) weave a slow, hypnotic flow of tinkling sounds, a majestic tide of free-form melodic fragments. These lengthy meditations work at two levels: first they evoke wide landscapes and imposing nature, and then they resurrect the ghosts of all the people who roamed them. The dreams of the explorers, the anxiety of the adventurers, the hopes of the pioneers are joined together, but Fahey shuns the epic mode and prefers a form of domestic impressionism, which is tender and warm. His art is about the collective myths of mankind. His musical pilgrimage represents the odyssey of all the "Ulysseses" who traveled (walked, rode, sailed) towards the unknown.

The mysterious Daniel Robinson, better known as [Robbie Basho](#) (23), took up John Fahey's solo-guitar music, wed it to eastern mysticism (way before new-age music was invented), mixed in elements of middle-eastern, Indian, Latin and Japanese music (way before world-music was invented), and added experimentation derived from jazz improvisation (way before fusion was invented). **Seal Of The Blue Lotus** (? 1963/1965 - ?1965), **The Grail And the Lotus** (? 1966 - ?1966) and **Falconer's Arm** (? 1967 - ? 1967) are simply unique. **Venus In Cancer** (? 1969 - ? 1969) and **Song Of The Stallion** (? 1971 - ? 1971) are more than unique.

The first crossover of rock, Middle-Eastern and jazz music was attempted by [John Berberian](#), a New York-born oud virtuoso of Armenian descent, on **Expressions East** (? 1964 - ?1964), that featured an arsenal of Turkish, Armenian and Arabic instruments.

Egyptian-Nubian oud and tar virtuoso [Hamza El Din](#) (2) concocted a mesmerizing sound on **Al Oud** (? 1965 - ? 1965) and **Escalay** (? 1971 - ? 1971), that displays the haunting interplay of the oud's gentle strings, the extended percussive range and overtones of the tar and his subdued vocals.

Ska

TM, ®, Copyright © 2003 [Piero Scaruffi](#) All rights reserved.

Theophilus Beckford cut the first "ska" record, *Easy Snapping*, in 1959, but Prince Buster (Cecil Campbell), owner of the sound system "Voice of the People", was the one who, around 1961, defined ska's somatic traits once and forever (he and his guitarist Jah Jerry).

The Wailers, featuring the young Bob Marley, Peter Tosh and Bunny Livingston, slowed down the beat in *Simmer Down* (1963). Millie Small's *My Boy Lollipop* (1964) was the first worldwide ska hit. The charismatic leaders of the ska movement were the Skatalites, a group of veteran ex-jazzmen, led by saxophonist Tommy McCook and featuring virtuoso trombonist Don Drummond and tenor saxophonist Rolando Alphonso, that formally existed only between 1964 and 1965 (*Ball O' Fire*, 1965; *Phoenix City*, 1966; the instrumental *Guns Of Navarone*, 1967), but ska's star was Desmond Dekker (Dacres), whose *007 Shanty Town* (1967), *Rudie Got Soul* (1968) and *Rude Boy Train* (1968) fueled the mythology of the "rude boy", and whose *Israelites* (1968) launched the even faster "poppa-top". Ska music was relatively serene and optimistic, a natural soundtrack to that age of peace and wealth, somewhat akin to the music of the "swinging London".

Jamaica had become an independent country in 1962, but social problems had

multiplied. During the mid Sixties, ska music evolved into "rock steady", a languid style, named after Alton Ellis' hit *Rock Steady* (1966), that emphasized sociopolitical themes, adopted electric instruments, replaced the horns with the guitars, and promoted the bass to lead instrument (virtually obliterating the drums). In other words, ska mutated under the influence of soul music. Rock steady was identified with the crowd of young delinquents (the "rude boys") who mimicked the British "mods" and the USA "punks". Its generational anthems were *Judge Dread* (1967) by Prince Buster, John Holt's *The Tide Is High* (1966) by the Paragons, *Rivers Of Babylon* (1969) by the Melodians. The music took the back seat to the vocal harmonies. This helped bring about the supremacy of vocal groups: Wailers, Paragons, Maytals, Pioneers, Melodians, Heptones, etc.

[Next...](#) | [Back...](#) | [Index](#)

[Short version](#) | [Long version](#) | [Home](#)

(Copyright © 2009 Piero Scaruffi)