

Doo Wop, Tin Pan Alley, Aldon Music and Phil Spector

Doo-Wop

Doo-wop is an unaccompanied style of close-harmony singing by groups of usually four or five members that developed in the late 1940s and thrived in the early 1950s. If instrumental accompaniment was added, it was very much in the background so as not to detract from the voices. The term “doo-wop” itself derives from the ad-lib syllables used while singing the harmony parts. The origins of doo-wop are traceable to nineteenth-century barbershop singing and to the music of such flagship groups as the Ink Spots in the 1930s and the Orioles in the late 1940s. The Orioles were one of the first prominent doo-wop groups, demonstrating their sound in 1948 with the #1 hit “It’s Too Soon to Know.” From 1948 to 1954, they recorded over 120 sides, hitting the charts with memorable songs such as “Crying in the Chapel” (1953).

In the mid-1950s The Castelles and The Penguins innovated new doo-wop styles, most famously up-tempo doo-wop. The Penguins’ “Earth Angel” (recorded in 1954) is an excellent example of the matured popular doo-wop sound. The song “Get a Job” by The Silhouettes (that hit #1 in 1958) is arguably the most successful doo-wop song of all time. This song inspired the early Motown release of The Miracles’ “Got a Job” in the same year. Other significant doo-wop groups include The Spaniels, The Moonglows, The 5 Royales, The Turbans, The El Dorados, The Five Satins, The Cadillacs and The Flamingos. In the

late 1950s, Italian doo-wop groups, whose sound and themes were closer to the Tin Pan Alley style, began to have a strong presence on the charts. These groups included Dion and the Belmonts, The Capris, Danny and the Juniors, The Mystics, The Impalas, The Tokens and The Duprees.



Recommended Listening

- Java Jive, the Inkspots, 1940
- It's Too Soon to Know, The Orioles, 1948
- Crying in the Chapel, The Orioles, 1953
- Earth Angel, The Penguins, 1954
- When You Dance, The Turbans, 1955
- In the Still of the Night, The Five Satins, 1956
- Get a Job, The Silhouettes, 1958

Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller

Jerry Leiber, April 25, 1933–August 22, 2011 (lyricist), and Mike Stoller, born March 13, 1933 (composer), were both born in New York in 1933, but they first met and began working together in Los Angeles in 1950. Together, they have written some of the most significant songs in rock history. In 1951, The Robins (who later became The Coasters) recorded Leiber and Stoller's song "That's What the Good Book Says" for Lester Sill's Modern Records. And by 1953, they had formed their own label, Spark Records. They penned almost every major hit for The Coasters, more than twenty songs for Elvis Presley and girl-group classics such as the Shangri-La's "Leader of the Pack."

When Big Mama Thornton recorded their song "Hound Dog" in 1953, Leiber and Stoller attended the sessions to ensure the quality of the production. They effectively became the producers of their own records. They continued to work directly with their artists, and in doing so pioneered a variety of revolutionary studio techniques. These included altering the speed of a performance after recording it and also splicing together various takes. Future industry giant Phil Spector learned many of his production techniques that would later evolve into the "wall of sound" by watching Leiber and Stoller produce The Drifters. Jerry Leiber once described his own writing style as "playlets," where every member of the group sang the role of an actual character. The duo's compositions were tailor-made for the specific abilities of their artists (a technique mastered by jazz composer Duke Ellington in the 1940s). Leiber and Stoller also state that they wrote records, not songs. More than anyone else, they pioneered the modern concept of the producer of a recorded performance.

Leiber and Stoller wrote a Broadway musical called *Smokey Joe's Café* featuring thirty-nine of their songs. The show debuted in 1994 in Los Angeles and then on Broadway on March 2, 1995, at the Virginia Theatre. It received seven nominations for Tony Awards, and the original Broadway cast soundtrack, *Smokey Joe's Café*, won a Grammy Award in 1995. The Broadway production closed on January 16, 2000, after 2,036 performances, but touring companies still produce the show.

Leiber and Stoller's awards include induction into the Songwriters' Hall of Fame in 1985, the Record Producers' Hall of Fame in 1986, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1987, an ASCAP Founders' Award in 1991, the Ivor Novella Award from the British Academy of Songwriters in 2000 and the prestigious Johnny Mercer Award, also in 2000.

Recommended Listening



- Hound Dog (Willie Mae “Big Mama” Thornton, Elvis Presley)
- Jailhouse Rock (Elvis Presley)
- Stand By Me (Ben E. King)
- Love Potion #9 (The Clovers)
- Kansas City (Wilbert Harrison)
- On Broadway (The Drifters)
- Spanish Harlem (Ben E. King)
- Searchin’ (The Coasters)

The Coasters

Members

- Carl Gardner (vocals; April 29, 1928–June 12, 2011)
- Cornell Gunter (vocals; November 14, 1938–February 27, 1990)
- Billy Guy (vocals; June 20, 1936–November 5, 2002)
- Will “Dub” Jones (vocals; May 14, 1928–January 16, 2000)

The Coasters date back to 1949 when Carl Gardner, Billy Guy, Bobby Nunn and Leon Hughes formed The Robins in Los Angeles. In 1951, they recorded Leiber and Stoller’s “That’s What the Good Book Says” and in 1954 signed to Leiber and Stoller’s label, Spark Records. In the mid-1950s, Nunn and Hughes left the group and were replaced by Cornell Gunter and Will “Dub” Jones. They changed their name to The Coasters and enjoyed a series of successful hits from 1956 to 1961. In 1957, “Searchin’” reached #1 on the R & B charts and #3 on the pop charts, while the flip side, “Young Blood,” also made the top ten on both charts. The Coasters were more “rock and roll” than other doo-wop groups, but have remained one of the most influential groups in the style. Leiber and Stoller wrote, produced and arranged most of their songs. Fourteen of the Coasters songs made the R&B charts, and eight also crossed over to the pop charts. The Coasters were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1987.

Recommended Listening



- Searchin’, 1957
- Young Blood, 1957
- Yakety Yak, 1958
- Charlie Brown, 1958
- Poison Ivy, 1959

The Platters

Members

- Tony Williams (April 15, 1928–August 14, 1992)
- David Lynch (July 3, 1929–January 3, 1981)
- Paul Robi (August 20, 1931–February 1, 1989)
- Herb Reed (August 7, 1931–June 4, 2012)
- Zola Taylor (March 17, 1938–April 30, 2007)

The Platters formed in Los Angeles in 1953 with Tony Williams as the lead singer. Under the direction of Buck Ram, they quickly became one of the most popular doo-wop groups in America. Buck Ram (born Samuel Ram on November 21, 1907, died January 1, 1991) had worked as an arranger for Mills Music, wrote songs, gave voice lessons and managed his own group, The Three Suns, before becoming the manager and producer of The Platters in 1954. He also worked as an arranger for swing band leaders including as Duke Ellington, Tommy Dorsey, Cab Calloway, Glenn Miller and Count Basie.

It was Buck's idea to include Zola Taylor, a woman, which was unusual in doo-wop at that time, but she proved a perfect addition to The Platters' slick sound. In October 1955, "Only You (And You Alone)," composed by Buck Ram, was released on the Mercury label. It soared to #1 on the R&B charts and #5 on the pop charts. The Platters followed up almost immediately with another song written by Buck, "The Great Pretender," in 1956, this time with even more success. "The Great Pretender" was the first #1 pop song for the Platters. In the same year, "My Prayer" became the group's second #1 charting pop song. The Platters then revived some songs from the 1930s and 1940s, including "If I Didn't Care," "I'll Never Smile Again" and "Red Sails In the Sunset," among other songs. These songs inspired the next #1 hit (in 1958), "Twilight Time," a song that Buck had written the lyrics for in 1938 with The Three Suns. Next came a jazz standard by Jerome Kern, "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes," which The Platters recorded in their signature doo-wop style. This also climbed to #1 in 1958.

After their initial success, the group went on to record thirty-three more pop hits on the Mercury label. In 1956, Alan Freed included The Platters performing "Only You" and "The Great Pretender" in his film *Rock Around The Clock*. The heyday for The Platters tapered off by 1962 after ten years of chart topping success. They were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1990, the Vocal Hall of Fame in 1998 and continued touring into the twenty-first century.



Recommended Listening

- Only You (And You Alone), 1955
- The Great Pretender, 1956
- My Prayer, 1956
- Twilight Time, 1958
- Smoke Gets In Your Eyes, 1958

The Drifters

Members (as recognized by the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1988)

- Clyde McPhatter (November 15, 1932–June 13, 1972)
- Bill Pinkney (August 15, 1925–July 4, 2007)
- Rudy Lewis (August 23, 1936–May 20, 1967)
- Ben E. King (September 28, 1938–April 30, 2015)
- Charlie Thomas (born April 7, 1937)
- Johnny Moore (December 14, 1934–December 30, 1998)
- Gerhart Thrasher (December 3, 1928–November 1, 1977)

The Drifters have a confusing history in relation to the numerous performers who have passed through the group and all the variations that were operating at the same time, i.e.: The Drifters, Bill Pinkney's Original Drifters and The Second Drifters. They have had twelve different lead singers and two members named Charlie Thomas who were both from Virginia!

The group originated in 1953 with Clyde McPhatter when he left The Dominoes and was under the direction of producers Ahmet Ertegun and Jerry Wexler of Atlantic records. McPhatter formed The Drifters as a business venture with his manager George Treadwell. Each owned 50 percent and employed singers to fill out the ranks of the group as salaried employees. Clyde McPhatter and The Drifters with their doo-wop based sound hit the #1 spot on the R & B charts within months of forming with the song "Money Honey" and then again with "Honey Love." This success catapulted Clyde McPhatter's popularity, and after his departure from the group, they continued to issue albums containing the songs he recorded in the first two years. By late 1954, McPhatter left the group to pursue a solo career and sold his share of Drifters Incorporated to Treadwell. The Drifters had become quite prominent and continued with many hits on the R & B and pop charts throughout the 1950s and the early 1960s.

Just prior to performing at the Apollo theatre in 1958, the entire group quit, unhappy with the low pay and poor working conditions, and new Drifters were recruited. A Harlem group called the Crowns, including singers Ben E. King and Charlie Thomas, were part of this new lineup. It was around this time that Leiber and Stoller assumed control of producing the group. They brought The Drifters into what would become the "Brill Building sound" and pop ballads.

The Drifters are a key link between 1950s rhythm and blues and 1960s soul music. They were an inspiration to Berry Gordy, founder of the Motown label, and his artists. The Drifters epitomized the vocal group sound of the mid-1950s and led the way into the new "pop" sound in music. They acquired much of their material through such songwriters as Lieber and Stoller, Doc Pomus, Mort Shuman, Gerry Goffin and Carole King. Phil Spector, who was playing guitar on sessions for Atlantic in 1963, played guitar on the original recording of "On Broadway." The Drifters were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1988 and the Vocal Group Hall of Fame in 1998.

Recommended Listening



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| ■ Money, Honey, 1953 | ■ Some Kind of Wonderful, 1961 |
| ■ Honey Love, 1954 | ■ Up On the Roof, 1962 |
| ■ There Goes My Baby, 1959 | ■ On Broadway, 1963 |
| ■ This Magic Moment, 1960 | ■ Under the Boardwalk, 1964 |
| ■ Save the Last Dance for Me, 1960 | |

Tin Pan Alley

Tin Pan Alley was an area in Manhattan where many of the major music publishers were located from around 1885 to the end of the 1950s. The origin of the name “Tin Pan Alley” is not entirely clear, although a popular belief is that it describes the sound of many pianos playing at the same time, which passersby could hear at street level. Most popular songs were written, sold, and printed in this area, and many famous songwriters and composers got their start in Tin Pan Alley, including Irving Berlin, Jerome Kern, George and Ira Gershwin and Hoagy Carmichael. Aspiring songwriters would show up at one of the Tin Pan Alley publishing houses to play their new songs. If their song was picked up, they often agreed for the publisher not to list them as the composer in order to get cash in hand and their music published. Specific publishers would hire some of the better writers to write for them full time. From 1958 thru 1964, many of the “girl group” songs came from Tin Pan Alley through a new, young generation of writers. The Brill Building (located at 1619 Broadway) is the most famous office building associated with “Tin Pan Alley,” and the popular music sound that emerged during its heyday became known as the “Brill Building sound.”

Aldon Music Publishing

Aldon Music, formed by Don Kirshner and Al Nevins in 1958, was one of the most successful music publishing companies dominating the teenage pop music scene in the early 1960s. Aldon is famous for its writing partnerships and contribution to the development of the “Brill Building sound.”

Kirshner and Nevins set up shop in New York at 1650 Broadway, just down the street from the famous Brill Building. They were largely responsible for what became known as the “Brill Building sound” in the early 1960s, even though their housing was outside of the famous establishment. At this time, the music producers took the reins of the rock and pop music business due to the loss of many rock and roll “heroes” in the late 1950s and an increasing demand for music for America’s teenagers.

Connie Francis sung Aldon’s first big hit, “Stupid Cupid” (written by Neil Sedaka and Howie Greenfield), which reached #14 on the U.S. and #1 on the UK charts. By 1962 Aldon had a staff of songwriters that included Sedaka/Greenfield, King/Goffin and Mann/Weil, Neil Diamond, Jeff Barry, Ellie Greenwich, Tommy Boyce, Bobby Hart, Andy Kim, Ritchie Adams, Ron Dante, Gene Allan, Toni Wise and others. The writers worked in cubicles, each with an upright piano, on a salary of \$150 a week or less (royalties followed for hit songs). They would compose, write lyrics, cut demos and play them for each other at the end of the day, making comments, suggestions and criticisms as they went and ultimately developing that distinct Aldon style. Aldon marketed its catalog to artists, managers and networks to sustain the careers of their best artists. Some of the hits went to the Shirelles, Little Eva, the Drifters, the Ronettes, the Crystals, Tom Jones, Ben E King, the Supremes, Dusty Springfield and the Shangri-Las.

In 1964, Columbia Pictures bought Aldon Music for two million dollars, and Kirshner became president of Screen Gems, the prestigious song publishing wing of Columbia Pictures. Aldon Music placed over two hundred songs on the Top 40 charts during the years of 1958–1963.

Al Nevins

Al Nevins (born Albert Tepper, 1915, Washington, DC, and died January 25, 1965, New York City) was a successful composer, guitarist and recording artist. Nevins had many pre-rock era hits as a member of The Three Suns, a trio that had written and recorded the original version of “Twilight Time” (1944) and had a #1 hit with “Peg ‘O My Heart” in

1947. The Three Suns continued to record up to 1965. Don Kirshner approached Nevins and sold him on the idea that publishing new material for teenage record buyers could be an extremely profitable venture. Nevins had a gift for song writing and teaming composers up with the right lyricists. Unfortunately, he suffered a series of major heart attacks in the early 1960s, which ultimately led to his death in 1965.

Recommended Listening



■ Twilight Time

Don Kirshner

Don Kirshner (April 17, 1934–January 17, 2011) became known as “the man with the golden ear.” He was a friend of Bobby Darin, a then struggling singer-songwriter, and helped him write several songs. Before meeting Al Nevins, he also managed Connie Francis. At only twenty-four years of age, Kirshner conceived and realized the music publishing business Aldon Music. He later moved to Screen Gems Publishing and other television and movie publishing ventures. Kirshner was involved in the creation of the Monkees (1966) and the Archies (1969), and he brought in many of his Aldon songwriters to produce the hit songs for those bands. He formed Don Kirshner Productions in 1972 to produce “Don Kirshner’s Rock Concert,” a very successful TV show generally considered the predecessor to MTV. At the end of the 1970s, Kirshner began selling off the licensing end of his publishing catalog and retired. In 2007, he was inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame with a “Lifetime Achievement Award.”

The Aldon Stable of Writers

Howard “Howie” Greenfield

Howie Greenfield (March 15, 1936–March 4, 1986) worked primarily as a songwriting partner with Neil Sedaka, but he also collaborated with Carole King, Helen Miller and Jack Keller. Greenfield and Keller wrote songs used for the TV show *Bewitched*. The songs that Greenfield and Sedaka had hits together with include “Oh! Carol,” “Stairway to Heaven” (not the Led Zeppelin song!), “Calendar Girl,” “Little Devil,” “Happy Birthday Sweet Sixteen,” “Next Door to an Angel” and “Breaking Up Is Hard to Do” (that sold over twenty-five million copies). In 1991, Howard Greenfield was inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame.

Neil Sedaka

Neil Sedaka (born March 13, 1939) studied classical piano and spent time studying at the Julliard School of Music. During high school, he dated songwriter Carole King (then Carole Klein), the subject of his 1959 song “Oh! Carol,” and became friends with Howie Greenfield, Sedaka’s lyricist for many years. In 1958, Sedaka joined Al Nevins and Don Kirshner’s Aldon music group of songwriters. The next year he signed with RCA as a recording artist and released a number of successful songs. Sedaka’s song “Calendar Girl” was released as one of the first Scopitone (early music video) hits with scenes filmed in Italy of pin-up girls. Scopitone was a big deal in Europe in the early 1960s, but it failed commercially in the USA. Like many of today’s MTV music videos, there are two themes to Scopitones: They illustrate

the story of the song, and they make it sexy! Since the death of Greenfield in 1986, Sedaka has continued to write hit songs, tour and record on a regular basis. Neil Sedaka was inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1983; he has received multiple Grammy Awards with the songs he composed for other artists, six BMI Awards and 52 Gold and Platinum records; and he earned a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 1978.



Recommended Listening

- Oh! Carol
- Calendar Girl
- Happy Birthday Sweet Sixteen
- Breaking Up is Hard to Do

Gerry Goffin and Carole King

The husband and wife songwriting team of Gerry Goffin (February 11, 1939–June 19, 2014) and Carole King (born February 9, 1942) composed for many artists through Aldon Music during the 1960s. Some of their hits included “Up on the Roof” (the Drifters), “One Fine Day” (the Chiffons), “I’m Into Something Good” (Herman’s Hermits), “Will You Love Me Tomorrow” (the Shirelles), “Take Good Care of My Baby” (Bobby Vee), “Chains” (the Cookies, and later, the Beatles), “Don’t Bring Me Down” (the Animals), “Take a Giant Step” (the Monkees) and “Goin’ Back” (the Byrds). Goffin (a lyricist) and King (a pianist) met at Queens College in 1958 and Don Kirshner hired them in 1960. Due to their success, Kirshner formed Dimension Records in 1962 specifically to focus on their songs. In 1968, Goffin and King divorced, but they continued their success individually. King released an album titled *Tapestry*, which stayed at #1 on the charts for fifteen weeks, earning her a Grammy for Album of the Year in 1971. She followed with several other high-charting albums in the 1970s. Gerry Goffin and Carole King were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1990.



Recommended Listening

- Up on the Roof (the Drifters)
- I’m Into Something Good (Herman’s Hermits)
- Will You Love Me Tomorrow (the Shirelles)
- Chains (the Cookies, or, the Beatles)

Doc Pomus and Mort Shuman

Doc Pomus (born Jerome Solon Felder on June 27, 1925, died March 14, 1991) and Mort Shuman (November 12, 1936–January 2, 1991) are the composers of some of the greatest songs in rock and roll history. These include “This Magic Moment” (the Drifters), “Young Blood” (the Coasters), “Lonely Avenue” (Ray Charles), “There Must Be a Better World Somewhere” (B. B. King), “Turn Me Loose” (Fabian), “Can’t Get Used to Losing You”

(Andy Williams) and “Save the Last Dance for Me” (Ben E. King). They also wrote more than twenty songs for Elvis Presley, including “Little Sister,” “Surrender” and “Viva Las Vegas.” In 1958, Don Kirshner and Al Nevins hired Pomus and Shuman as one of their first and strongest writing teams. Doc Pomus generally wrote the lyrics, and Mort Shuman wrote the music to their songs. In 1964, after the sale of Aldon Music, the writing duo moved to England where they began to spread their working relationships to other writers. In 1965, a bad fall injured Doc Pomus and confined him to a wheelchair for the rest of his life. He retired from composing for ten years but returned to music in the late 1970s to work with Dr. John and B. B. King. In 1992, following his death from lung cancer in 1991, Doc Pomus was inducted posthumously into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, adding to his existing inductions into the Songwriters Hall of Fame, the Blues Foundation Hall of Fame and the New York Music Hall of Fame. He was also a founding member of the Rhythm and Blues Foundation. Mort Shuman’s later career included writing for the Hollies, Andy Williams and Cilla Black, translating popular French songs and writing for London musicals. He was inducted posthumously into the Songwriters Hall of Fame. Together, Doc Pomus and Mort Shuman’s songs have appeared on more than thirty million records.

Recommended Listening



- This Magic Moment (the Drifters)
- Lonely Avenue (Ray Charles)
- Turn Me Loose (Fabian)
- Can’t Get Used to Losing You (Andy Williams)
- Little Sister (Elvis)
- Surrender (Elvis)

The Shirelles

Members

- Beverly Lee (born August 3, 1941)
- Shirley Alston Reeves (born June 10, 1941)
- Addie “Micki” Harris (June 10, 1940–June 10, 1982)
- Doris Kenner-Jackson (August 2, 1941–February 4, 2000)

Before becoming a famous vocal pop group, the Shirelles were high school friends who enjoyed singing as a pastime. They got their break when a friend’s mother, Florence Greenberg, released their version of “I Met Him on a Sunday,” and it became a minor hit. Originally called the Pequellos, they soon changed their name to the more recognizable and stylistically current Shirelles. The girls signed with Decca records briefly in 1958 but switched to Scepter Records in 1959. There, they recorded many hits, beginning with the #1 charting “Will You Love Me Tomorrow” (released in 1960). Florence Greenberg founded and ran Scepter Records to focus on the Shirelles’ music. Funds from the original hit “I Met Him On a Sunday” and the sale of her Tiara label enabled the beginning of Scepter records. The Shirelles were the first African American “girl group” with a #1 charting single, and their consistent hits up until 1964 ultimately opened the door for many other girl groups to become successful. They were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1996 and are still performing today under the leadership of original member Beverly Lee.



Recommended Listening

- I Met Him On a Sunday, 1958
- Will You Love Me Tomorrow, 1960
- Mama Said, 1961
- Soldier Boy, 1962
- Baby It's You, 1962

The Crystals

Members

- Barbara Alston (left the group in late 1964)
- Mary Thomas (left the group in late 1963)
- Dolores “Dee Dee” Kenniebrew
- Myrna Girard (left the group in late 1963)
- Patricia Wright (left the group in late 1964, and Frances Collins replaced her)
- Dolores “La La” Brooks (joined in late 1963)
- Darlene Love and the Blossoms (recorded by Spector sporadically as the Crystals)

The Crystals formed in 1960 in Brooklyn and were the first group signed by producer Phil Spector to his Philles label (in 1961). Although the girls were only fifteen at the time, they provided Spector with some of his first charting hits as a producer. These included “There’s No Other (Like My Baby)” in January 1962, “Uptown” (1962), “Da Doo Ron Ron” (1963) and “Then He Kissed Me” (1963), and their one #1 hit, “He’s a Rebel” (1963). Many think Darlene Love and the Blossoms (in L.A.) recorded this song, released by Spector under the Crystals’ name.* After great success and five top ten hits in the early sixties, Spector lost interest in the group, and their popularity waned. The Crystals continued as a quartet and then as a trio until 1967 when the group finally broke up. If the British invasion hadn’t dominated the music industry so much in the mid-1960s, the Crystals and many of the early 1960s girl groups may have continued their careers more substantially. Since reviving the group in 1971, “Dee Dee” Kenniebrew has led several lineups of the Crystals for over thirty-five years, and they still perform today.



Recommended Listening

- There’s No Other (Like My Baby), 1962
- Uptown, 1962
- He’s a Rebel, 1963
- Da Do Ron Ron, 1963
- Then He Kissed Me, 1963

* Some girl groups used a variety of singers in the studio in the early 1960s in addition to the publicized or touring lineup. The record companies owned the rights to the names of these groups and chose to record the best voices for lead and backing as necessary on a particular song. This was all part of the experimentation with sound, studio techniques and producing a saleable “product.” In most of these cases, the girls’ pictures did not appear on the album covers, and the company paid them as “studio musicians.”

The Ronettes

Members

- Veronica “Ronnie” Bennett (born August 10, 1943)
- Estelle Bennett (July 22, 1941–February 11, 2009)
- Nedra Talley (born January 27, 1945)

The Ronettes (originally called the Darling Sisters), dubbed the first “bad girls” of rock, are one of the most enduring groups of the girl group category. In 1959, Veronica “Ronnie” Bennett (who would marry Phil Spector in 1968 and divorce him in 1974), her sister Estelle Bennett, and their cousin Nedra Talley formed the Ronettes to perform as singers and dancers at the Peppermint Lounge. Legendary disc jockey “Murray the K” (Murray Kaufman) discovered them and gave their career a kick start through his Brooklyn Fox Theater rock and roll revues. The Ronettes released their first single, “You Bet I Would,” in 1961 on the Colpix label, co-written by Carole King. After nurturing by Phil Spector, the hits began to roll out with “Do I Love You,” “Baby I Love You,” “The Best Part of Breaking Up,” “I Can Hear Music,” the Grammy Award-winning “Walking in the Rain” and their biggest hit, “Be My Baby.”

When performing in the UK, the Ronettes were the headliners to the Rolling Stones and the Yardbirds supporting acts. In August 1966, the Beatles personally requested that the Ronettes join their final U.S. tour. Unfortunately, by the end of 1966, they had disbanded. Ronnie Spector made a relatively successful attempt at a solo career beginning in the 1970s when she released her 1974 solo single, “Try Some, Buy Some,” written and produced by George Harrison (with Harrison, John Lennon, and Ringo Starr in the backing band). She then went on to sing with Alice Cooper and also on Jimi Hendrix’s final recording session in August 1970. In 1976, Billy Joel wrote “Say Goodbye to Hollywood” in tribute to her. In 1998, Ronnie Spector and the other Ronettes sued Phil Spector for allegedly cheating them of royalties in the early 1960s, and they won a three million dollar judgment; however, an appeals court later reversed the decision. In 2004, the Ronettes were inducted into the Vocal Group Hall of Fame and then into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame on March 12, 2007.

Ronnie Spector’s latest recording project, *Last of the Rock Stars*, features Dennis Diken (the Smithereens), Nick Zinner (Yeah Yeah Yeahs), Patti Smith, and Keith Richards of the Rolling Stones.

The Ronettes

The first “bad girls” of rock, The Ronettes

Recommended Listening

- Be My Baby, 1963
- Baby I Love You, 1964
- (The Best Part of) Breaking Up, 1964
- Walking in the Rain, 1964
- Do I Love You, 1964
- Try Some, Buy Some, 1971



Phil Spector

Phil Spector
launched his
'wall of sound'
concept at only
21 years of age

Phil Spector

Harvey Philip (Phil) Spector was born December 26, 1939 in the Bronx, New York, and many refer to him as the greatest producer of rock and roll. While attending Fairfax High School in Los Angeles, Spector learned to play the guitar, piano, drums, bass and French horn. He felt drawn to the local rhythm and blues scene in Los Angeles and studied guitar with Barney Kessel, who encouraged him to get into music production. At age seventeen, Spector joined The Teddy Bears and

recorded "To Know Him Is to Love Him." He wrote, arranged and produced the song, which reached #1 on the charts after airing on Dick Clark's *American Bandstand* in 1958. He left The Teddy Bears less than a year later to focus on writing and producing music. In 1960 Spector moved to New York and became an apprentice to Leiber and Stoller, with whom he co-wrote the hit "Spanish Harlem." In 1961 Spector and Lester Sill (January 18, 1918–October 31, 1994) formed Philles (Phil-Les!) Records to capitalize on the Brill Building sound and the Aldon songwriters. In 1962 Spector bought out his partner and became the sole owner. Spector also signed The Crystals and tested his formula for produced, charting acts while working as an independent producer for Atlantic Records and Don Kirshner.

At the age of twenty-one, Spector singlehandedly changed the direction of recording and producing within the music industry when he created his "wall of sound" phenomenon. Spector attributes this discovery to his interest in Richard Wagner's symphonies. The wall of sound concept essentially applies two or more of each instrument to each voice, producing a big and present sound before multi-track recording was available. He often used twenty-four to twenty-five musicians on these tracks, who he referred to as "The Wrecking Crew." He specifically designed the wall of sound to boost the sound quality of his records on jukeboxes and mono record players, and for radio play (mostly AM stations at that time). Spector's other ingenious idea was to put an instrumental on the B-side of his singles to prevent disk jockeys from flipping the record and taking attention away from his "push" side.

Spector is mostly known for his association with the girl group era of the early sixties and as the producer for The Crystals, Darlene Love, Bob B. Soxx and the Blue Jeans and The Ronettes. Between 1960 and 1965, his formula sent twenty-five songs into the top 40. In 1963, Spector co-wrote songs with the Rolling Stones and in 1965, he produced The Righteous Brothers' "You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'," which immediately went to #1. In 1966, he produced Ike and Tina Turner's "River Deep, Mountain High." Spector considered this his best work, but it failed to chart in the U.S., although it did reach #3 in the UK. A dejected Spector went into retirement until the end of the 1960s. In 1969 Spector began working with the Beatles on post-production for the *Let It Be* album as well as on solo albums for John Lennon and George Harrison. Spector had become quite reclusive and only occasionally took work. His later projects included Cher, Duran Duran, Leonard Cohen, The Ramones' *End Of The Century* (1980), Yoko Ono's *Season of Glass* (1981) and Starsailor's *Silence Is Easy*. He had also been scheduled to work on The Vines' latest album (2003) before his arrest.

Over the years, Spector has had the reputation of having a bad temper, at times even brandishing guns when he didn't get his way (especially with women). On February 3, 2003, police arrested him on suspicion of murder after they found actress Lana Clarkson shot to death in his mansion. On September 26, 2007, a jury stated that it could not reach a verdict. The judge declared a mistrial, and the murder case against Phil Spector began again in fall 2008. In April 2009, Spector was convicted of murder and sentenced on May 24th to serve 15 years in prison.

Phil Spector has won several Grammy Awards, including Album of the Year for the *Concert for Bangla Desh*, co-produced with George Harrison in 1972. He was inducted into Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1989 and the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1997.

Recommended Listening



- To Know Him is to Love Him, The Teddy Bears
- He's a Rebel, The Crystals
- Da Doo Ron Ron, The Crystals
- Be My Baby, The Ronettes
- You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin', The Righteous Brothers
- The Long and Winding Road, The Beatles

Trivia

- The title for Spector's first #1 hit, "To Know Him is to Love Him," is the epitaph from his Father's gravestone.
- Someone once asked Spector whether he enjoyed the work of Andrew Lloyd Webber. "Why, yes," he replied. "In fact, I respect his work so much that one day I'd like to set it to music."
- Spector preferred the artistry of singles to albums, describing LPs as "two hits and ten pieces of junk."
- He had a cameo appearance as a drug dealer in the film *Easy Rider* in 1969.
- **Let's Dance the Screw:** In 1962, Lester Sill agreed to sell his share of the Philles label to Phil Spector for \$60,000, but Spector refused to pay, claiming that Sill owed him money from back royalties. Sill sued his former partner, demanding all royalties to the next Crystals record as compensation, with which the court agreed. In January 1963, Spector and the Crystals went into the studio to record a song of Spector's called "(Let's Dance) The Screw—Part 1." The chorus consisted of nothing but the word "dance" with Spector singing the line "dance the screw." The B-side, "(Let's Dance) The Screw—Part 2," featured a nearly identical rendition of the song. Lester Sill received a copy of "the next Crystals record" (stamped "D. J. COPY—NOT FOR SALE"). Sill later remarked, "That was Spector saying, 'F*** you, buddy.'"—from *anecdote.com*

Further Reading

- The Chantels
- The Angels
- The Chiffons
- The Cookies
- The Dixie Cups
- The Shangri-Las
- The Exciters

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