



Bill Haley and the Comets

GROUP #4

Background: The Beginning

- Bill Haley, the lead singer, was born as William John Clifton Haley, Jr. on July 6, 1925.
- He was born, blind in one eye, in Highland park, MI.
- Haley's love for country music was born in the mid '30s when he and his family moved to PA; he dropped out of school when he was 14 to pursue his passion in music.
- Haley played in several different bands to no avail.
- His first break was in 1944 when he joined the Downhomers. This was the first time he was able to record his voice on a record. He only stuck with this band until 1946, and ended up moving back to Pennsylvania.

Life back in PA

- Haley created a band called the Four Aces of Western Swing, which was signed with Cowboy Records. The band members included Johnny Grande as the keyboard man, Al Rex on bass guitar, and Billy Williamson on steel guitar.
- The first record came to fruition in 1948. After only a year, they had changed their name to The Saddlemen and hopped around from label to label.
- They ended up at Holiday Records in 1951 and had their first release there, "Rocket 88".
- This first release at Holiday Records was sexually charged and is a country cover of the original done by Jackie Brenston, now considered the first of rock and roll.

The Band Was Born

- "Rocket 88" didn't receive much commercial success. It *did* help the band realize that their audience was of the younger clientele.
- Their first major hit was 'Rock the Joint', which was big enough for the band to go on tour. The band began catering its music to what the crowd wanted.
- The Saddlemen played at many high school dances to appeal to their audience. In 1952, their name was changed to Bill Haley and His Comets. This was meant to be a take off of a combination of Bill Haley and Haley's Comet.
- Haley and his band paid close attention to what teenagers were doing and saying to add these elements to their music.

Success Strikes

- All of these efforts aimed at identifying with the audience paid off in 1953 when Haley and His Comets made the Top 20 on the pop charts with 'Crazy, Man, Crazy'.
- The year 1954 yielded two crucial songs in the band's career: "Rock Around the Clock" and "Shake, Rattle and Roll". The latter became popular immediately and sold over a million copies. "Rock Around the Clock" became a hit in 1955 when it was used for the credits of a popular film.
- "Rock Around the Clock" was re-released and spent a solid 8 weeks at the number 1 spot on the charts.
- Haley and His Comets were the only established white rock & roll band at this time.

Competition Hits

- Presley joined the music scene in 1956, and proved a much younger, 'sexier' idol for rock & roll.
- By 1959, Haley and his band were no longer making the top charts. Their mix of country, R&B, and honky tonk had its time in the limelight, and was no longer considered 'in'.
- However, in the late '60s there was a reignited flame of interest in the band, and Haley and his crew found a new demand for their music.
- As the '70s hit, the band members were clearly aging. The death of the saxman was the preliminary marker for the retirement of Haley in 1977. He then passed away in 1981.

Musical Style:

- Haley's music career was at the primetime of the musical integration in the 1950's.
- Sweeping across 3 music markets (Pop, C&W, R&B) the band appealed to a broad audience.
- Primary identification was with C&W but he also had a special liking for R&B.
- Haley and his band represented the "raucous" new style called rock and roll.



Evolution of Rock & Roll

- "Haley and his comets" seemed to represent the raucous
- Originated with the jazz and rhythm and blues movement
- Band originally called Saddlemen
 - Consisted C&W and R&B type instruments:
 - steel guitar, drum set, saxophone,

Influences

- Bill was first known as a Country & Western Musician
- While Bill was influenced by "race music", he was able to mix rhythm and blues together with Country music to create his own unique musical style
- The group was trying out all different Country and R&B songs where they were trying to find a hit. These songs and unsuccessful styles are what influenced them to find something that fit just right.
- In 1952, this new style was born as Bill and the rest of the Saddlemen turned in their cowboy hats and created rock and roll music without rock and roll existing, the mixture of country western and western swing combined with black rhythm and blues was then called the "cowboy jive" now we call it "rock and roll"

Influences :

- Bill Haley and the Comets noticed that before they started playing rock and roll, their listeners were usually younger and enjoyed the R&B style of music but weren't too fond with the Country style they incorporated.
- The Trieners were very successful in 1952 so Bill Haley and the Comets tried building their music off of what the Trieners were using for their success R&B style.
- The band was playing popular rock and roll music before it even had a name. They were the first group to play rock and roll which influenced others.

Who they influenced

- According to Haley's obituary written by Richard Palmer in the *New York Times*, he was "an important influence on the Beatles and other prominent rock performers during the 60's and 70's."
- Bill Haley and the Comets were the first group to create rock and roll music which spiraled into a very successful genre.
- Bill Haley has influenced and impacted music in such a unique and great way that his name will live on.

Who they influenced

- There are many artists today that still are inspired by Bill Haley and the Comets.
- Jerry Lee Lewis is one artist that was inspired by the group. He is an American rock and roll and country music songwriter.
- Chubby is another artist influenced by the band, he is an R&B singer
- Burgess Sonny is another artist influenced by the hard rocking of the group.
- Bill Haley and the Comets have influenced many different artists who now create many different types of music.

Examples of Music

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F5fsqYctXgM>

Rock Around the Clock

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d2UkFvKllLw>

Shake, Rattle, and Roll

Other Music of the Period

- In 1949, when the country western band, "The Saddlemen" changed their name to "The Comets", the rock music they produced became similar to many other artists in the next coming years.
- In 1953-1956 many other popular rock artists began producing music similar to the Comets including Elvis Presley, Carl Perkins, Bo Diddley, Chuck Berry, Gene Vincent, Little Richard, Eddie Cochran, Jerry Lee Lewis and Buddy Holly.
- There were two types of popular music that was being fused together during this time period and they were "black, urban music that included blues, gospel, jazz and ragtime. There was also the white, rural song-form with its roots in folk, bluegrass, hillbilly and southern traditions."
- Elvis Presley also started off with singing Country Western music and

Other Music of the Period

- Elvis Presley was called the "King of Rock" even though Bill Haley and the Comets started producing rock music before Elvis did. When Billy and the Comets starting producing their music there was no such thing as the name "rock" yet.
- Elvis was able to combine the two very popular styles of music, basically the black and white types of music where he gained many fans.
- Billy and the Comets also combined to styles of music to create one but they didn't attract both audiences as well as Elvis did.

Bringing people together

- Bill Haley and the comets knew that the people they needed to impress were teenagers as Bill Haley said they were the ones who would make their music "rock" popular.
- With having other competition in the first couple of years of producing rock music, Bill Haley and the Comets remained true to their fans by keeping their style consistent.
- During the time period of Bill Haley and the Comets, our country was still fighting for equal rights between black and white people. The rock music that was created by Bill Haley and the Comets helped bring the nation a little bit closer because both type of people (black and white) were fans of this music. It was no longer "black" music and "white" music. The genere rock fit both groups.



References

Bill Haley and the comets: 50 years rockin the world. *Bill Haley's Comets*. Retrieved from <http://billhaleyscometscentral.com/>

Eder, B. (n.d.). Bill Haley: Biography. Retrieved from <http://www.allmusic.com/artist/bill-haley-mn00000077870>

Gregoire, Denise. Rockabilly Hall of Fame. *Bill Haley and the Comets*. Retrieved from <http://www.rockabillyhall.com/BillHaley.html>

The Comets. *The First Band of Rock 'n' Roll* from <http://www.thecomets.com/history.html>