Carl Perkins

By Stephanie Kocer, Christian Lindman and Moriah Wald
Why is Carl Perkins Important?

• He became a very influential figure for future pop stars.
• Perkins was a pioneer in the rockabilly musical style. He focused on country with a rock and roll feel which created a completely different sound.
The Life of Carl Perkins

- He was born in Tiptonville, Tennessee in 1932. His family was very poor and he was raised on a cotton farm.

- He was inspired by C&W, gospel, and blues and learned to play the guitar. He was writing and performing his own compositions by age 13 and soon after formed a band with his two brothers.
In 1950, the family moved to Jackson, Tennessee and met a man who joined the band as a drummer and they began appearing on local radio stations.

In 1955 the band signed a contract with Flip records and soon after released their first hit ‘Movie Magg.’ Carl wrote this song when he was only 14, and the song was not immediately adopted by the public, instead it sold slowly.
Carl Perkins Journey to Fame

- His first hit ‘Movie Magg’ was popular enough to land him an opening gig for Elvis Presley and Johnny Cash, and soon the band was touring with the two stars.

- While on tour in Arkansas, Carl gained his inspiration for the band’s only top 40 hit ‘Blue Suede Shoes.’ He overheard a couple in the crowd, and one was telling his date to not step on his blue suede shoes, and Carl found this statement entrancing.
• In 1955 the band recorded the record featuring the song ‘Blue Suede Shoes’ and released it in 1956. Again, it was sold slowly and the public was slow to adopt it. Carl wanted the hit and therefore became a frequent guest on the local ‘Big D Jamboree’ radio show in Dallas where they played his song every Saturday night.

• The song began to stick with country fans, then teenagers, and then rhythm and blues fans. He was considered a marvel, only 23 years-old and already in the spotlight.
In 1956, tragedy struck. The band got into a horrible car accident. The driver fell asleep at the wheel, killing himself and seriously injuring everyone else.

After the accident, Elvis covered the song ‘Blue Suede Shoes’ and it became his 3rd top 40 hit.
Tragedy and Fame

• The band never fully regained the minor amount of fame they earned but instead recorded a few minor hits that were more country-oriented. However, many of this songs became influences to major pop artists like Bob Dylan, Eric Clapton, and Paul McCartney.
In 1958 he signed a 5 year contract with a low 6% gain with Columbia records and recorded a few minor pop hits but his true draw was to country.

1963 he signed with Dollie label to produce country songs. Just two years later Carl joined Johnny Cash’s roadshow to replace Cash’s recently deceased guitarist.
Back in the Spotlight

• Carl was huge for Johnny Cash and wrote compositions like ‘Daddy Sang Bass.’ He stayed with Cash for 10 years.

• In the mid 70’s he finally released a new album and began recording songs for various labels in addition to establishing his own called ‘Suede’ after his one big hit. His newer band consisted of his two sons.
The Legend of Carl Perkins

• He appeared in the film ‘Into the Night’ and won the Grammy Hall of Fame Award in 1986 for Blue Suede Shoes.
• He was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1987.
• In 1991 he was diagnosed with throat cancer and was fortunately cured through radiation therapy to grant him seven more years, finally passing in 1998.
Carl Perkins’ quote “hopped-up version of the blues” to define rockabilly. Influenced primarily by his poor upbringings, his interest in country and his brother Jay’s interest in pop. Carl was the writer and composer of the band, but his brother’s had say as well. The overall sound they produced was new and unexpected. It was not accepted rapidly, and the group had many minor hits but is only really known for “Blue Suede Shoes.”
The unique fusion of country and blues was never really heard or combined before. The main hit was influenced while Carl was on tour with Johnny Cash and Elvis Presley, and he took influences from both styles of artists and created his own feel. Rockabilly is a fusion of country and rock and roll. The term literally comes from the combination of the words ‘rock and roll’ and ‘hillbilly.’ Uses a double versus a single bass guitar. The double bass is played in the style of ‘slapping.’ Vocals are dramatics and highly expressive, and the singers add individualities such as catch phrases and howls. Guitar solos are either chaotic, or subdued.
Carl Perkins Role in the Evolution of Rock Music

- It is a fusion of country and rock which moved the genres forward. It also fits in with unifying the segregated music theme of primarily black vocalists performing the blues and white vocalists performing pop and country western hits. This style allows the deeper and heartfelt blues to be placed along the lighter styles of pop and C&W. It is a great transitional style that was popular to almost every audience.
Musical Influences

• Carl Perkins was heavily influenced by Bluegrass legend and "father of Bluegrass music" Bill Monroe. Perkins claimed that the first words Elvis Presley spoke to him were "Do you like Bill Monroe?"
Some of the bands and musicians that were influenced by Carl Perkins:

- Rick Nelson
- John Fogerty
- Bob Dylan
- Eric Clapton
- and Paul McCartney, who said "If there were no Carl Perkins, there would be no Beatles."
**Other Popular Artists During This Time Period**

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<td>• Bill Haley</td>
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<td>• Buddy Holly</td>
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<td>• Jerry Lee Lewis</td>
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<td>• Ray Charles</td>
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The 1950’s was a time of change. There was an emergence of a new market and culture; the youth.

Money was spread into the hands of younger adults, giving them a reason to develop a new style of music targeted towards young people.

Big Band music slowly fell from the music industry because it was too difficult to produce a song with that many instruments.

Music slowly began to incorporate new styles including R&B and Country western, which lead to the development of Rock ‘n’ Roll.
References


