

## **Music 262: Rock Music, History and Social Analysis, Phil Spector**

*[Music Playing on Piano]*

[Brian Ward]: So Phil Spector of Spector Records is a person that we need to talk about because in the 1960s he became really the king of pop music. As a producer, he produced some of the greatest records of the time. He called these records little symphonies for kids because they were pop songs, but he would use a lot of different instruments. He would use harps, strings, extra brass instruments, woodwinds. He produced what they called a wall of sound and this became a real important development in production and in rock n' roll itself. Now Phil Spector kind of came from a humble beginning. He started out with his own group and had a mild success. Then he went to New York and he studied and apprenticed with Leiber and Stoller. In doing so, he learned a lot about songwriting, about producing, about how the business works. From there, he went on to become this tycoon. By the age of 21 he was a record industry tycoon.

He was really a self-conscious guy and what he would do was very deliberate. He was very exact about what he was trying to create musically and really pushed rock n' roll into the realm of art. In doing so, he really invented the role of the modern producer. We think about a producer today, someone who creates a track and gets it ready for production and distribution. This is the role that he invented for the producer. So he was involved with everything, the songwriting, from the engineering, the arrangements, the contractor, he was the artistic director. He was really the first producer to become a star in his own right. The groups and the singers were kind of secondary to Phil Spector at the time. He was a very eccentric guy, very iconoclastic. He had long hair. He dressed outrageously. He was a real tyrant in the studio. He pushed people around. He needed to do this. He needed to kick ass basically to get the music that he wanted to get and the music that he did produce was very successful to a wide audience.

So I mentioned this wall of sound concept. This wall of sound is the use of many instruments. You could use like six guitars in a session, three pianos, two basses, brass, full choirs, percussion instruments, tambourines, castanets, bells and marimbas. Like he said, it's little symphonies for kids. In fact anyone in the studio at the time of recording could end up on the track playing a wood block or something. He might see the janitor in the corner and say, "Hey come over here. You're gonna pay this part." That's how he got things done.

He did this in Los Angeles. Now this is the real first foyer probably of rock n' roll on the west coast with a lot of success. Barring people like Ricky Nelson of course. He used the Gold Star Studios in Hollywood. It's a big sound stage and it had a nice echo to it. He would record these large groups in this big echo chamber basically. So you have this nice reverb that comes in his recordings. To this day, that's a very popular device to use in producing. He had a large list of studio musicians who lived in Los Angeles, naturally. So he could utilize these people that usually play on movie soundtracks or what have you, symphonies, to come play on his recordings. So this large list of studio musicians became known as The Wrecking Crew because

every time they recorded a song, it became a hit. That's why they are known as the wrecking crew.

So a couple of the groups that really inspired Spector's best work... Well he had this girl group called The Ronettes. Now the Ronettes had this real bad girl image. They had these really tall beehive hair-dos. They wore these leather boots up to their knees with stiletto heels, leather miniskirts, this real bad girl image. They sang these great hit songs. They kind of had this "Go-Go" look about them. Ronnie and Estelle Bennett were sisters and their cousin Nedra Talley became The Ronettes. They became the bad girls of pop. Ronnie had a voice a lot like Frankie Lymon and Phil Spector used it to great effect. They had a lot of hits. In fact, Phil Spector married Ronnie and she became Ronnie Spector.

Spector's last great success was a group called The Righteous Brothers. The Righteous Brothers were a duo and he needed something to really offset when The Beatles arrived on the scene. He got this male duo that was different. What it consisted of was Bill Medley who sang real soulful, a Ray Charles style of voice, and then Bobby Hatfield who sang with a real wailing falsetto. They had a lot of great hits and just great pop songs. Phil Spector really used his wall of sound to great effect with this group. In fact there's a funny story. You've Lost That Loving Feeling was a big hit by them. It starts out slow when you listen to it, and then it builds all the way to the end like one of Phil Spector's masterpieces. It came out to be a little long, it was three minutes and fifty seconds which negated it from any radio play. Anything more than three minutes, maybe three minutes and ten seconds tops wouldn't be on the radio. Otherwise the DJ wouldn't play the song because it was just too long for the time. So what Phil Spector did was on the single, when he stamped the label on the single, he flipped the zero and the five around. It said three minutes and five seconds. So the DJs played it really not knowing that it was almost four minutes long. It was a good trick and a very successful one as well.