

Music 262: Rock Music, History and Social Analysis, Instrumental Surf Rock/Garage Bands

[Music Playing on Piano]

[Brian Ward]: So one thing about rock n' roll is that we've always had these instrumental hits in rock n' roll and rhythm and blues songs that feature no vocals and have either a lead saxophone back in the early rhythm and blues period or later on, a lead guitar that really was the lead instrument in the band. There were even always some hit songs at every stage of rock n' roll from an instrumental band. These songs were usually built on a simple riff. In the 1960s these became important groups because they really kept rock n' roll alive during this dark period. They kept it in the form that Buddy Holly had left it with the mere fact that they used a two guitar, bass, drums lineup.

So in the 1950s some of these groups really set the trend for some of rock n' roll's first garage bands, is what we call them. Duane Eddy really was the most successful instrumental rocker in the late 50s. He developed this twangy guitar style. He formed a model for the surf bands that came on later. So let's talk about surf music. In 1960s, this instrumental music became known as surf music. What we have is primarily the guitar driven music. You have the classic rock n' roll lineup, two guitars, bass, and drums. This surf music was primarily an instrumental style and it accompanied dances and beach parties along the pacific coast. It was kind of a local phenomenon for a minute. The lack of vocals necessitated experimenting with different sounds on the guitar. So they started using different guitar effects, different guitar pedals to create these sounds, tremolo being one of them. Even though the guitar had disappeared in all of the teen idol music, these instrumental rock bands, these surf bands from the Pacific Coast really kept the guitar alive in rock n' roll music. It really reestablishes guitar as the central role in rock n' roll.

So let's talk about some of these bands. The Ventures is probably the most popular surf rock band, even though they really didn't start out that way. They were a Seattle based band. They really, like I said, solidified this two guitar, bass, drums lineup for rock n' roll. They used a heavy reverb, whammy bars, tremolo in their music. They created a lot of space rock songs, little kind of instrumental theme songs that they did. Their hits though, were surf songs and they became a favorite with the surf crowd.

Speaking of surf music, we have Dick Dale and the Deltones. Now Dick Dale is the king of surf guitar. He never really had a national hit but he influenced a lot of people that came after him. A big influence on people like Eddie Van Halen for example. He was actually a professional surfer so he lived this lifestyle. He had a band called The Deltones and they spawned a lot of garage bands in California that tried to imitate their sound and just try to have fun playing music in their own garage. He was also an interesting guy. He played the guitar left handed which was kind of a rare thing.

At the same time we also have what I mentioned, garage rock. Now garage rock is a simple raw form of rock n' roll. It's instrumental mostly, but there are vocals with it. This was created in the mid-60s with a number of American bands. Now, you are a young teenager in the 1960s and The Beatles come on the scene. You're inspired by this group and so what do you want to do? You get a guitar and some friends and a drum set. You go in your parent's garage and you jam. That's how these garage bands came along. They were really the first wave of do-it-yourself, indie, punk rockers, if you want to look at it that way. The most famous garage band song came from The Kingsmen, a song called Louie Louie. You've heard this song in many sports arenas I'm sure, but this was a big hit in the 1960s. The song has an interesting life to it and we're going to talk about it for just a second. Now Louie Louie was a song that was written by Richard Berry in 1956. Now Richard Berry was a reggae artist and recorded this song for his group called The Pharaohs. Now The Kingsmen were a Portland based garage band, Portland Oregon. So they went to Seattle and recorded this song as a demo for a cruise ship audition. Well they didn't learn the song from Richard Berry. They learned it from another group called The Wailers, who was a Seattle garage band who recorded this song before The Kingsmen. They missed out on the success of the song however, because The Kingsmen were the ones who were really able to make this a hit song. Also there's another band called Paul Revere and the Raiders who recorded this song as well. In fact they recorded it the day after The Kingsmen recorded it in their studio. So you have this kind of slurred singing style. It's not very serious at all. That's to mimic the Jamaican accent from the original version of the song. It became a national hit when a disc jockey in Boston played it and declared that it was the worst song he had ever heard. There was a ban on the recording because a lot of the parents thought it had dirty lyrics. There was probably a leak somewhere that the lyrics were obscene, so the FBI began to investigate this. The U.S. Congress had a full scale investigation to find out what the words to this song really were. They were looking for smut in the words, but the FBI investigated it and this was their official declaration; that the lyrics to this song, Louie Louie were incomprehensible at any speed. They slowed it down, they tried any way to figure out what the guy was saying and they couldn't even understand the words at all. So because of all this publicity, the song became a huge seller and still is a big hit today. So I'm going to ask the question that everybody asks and that's who is Louie? The song is being sung to this guy Louie and nobody knows who that is. Well when you investigate, the original artist who wrote the song, he wrote it to a bartender. So he's talking about his true love and how he feels about her and being away from her, and he's telling this to his bartender who you know is sort of the psychologist of the night life. So this is kind of the person that you can tell anything to and he will keep it a secret. That's who Louie was, he was a bartender.