**Origins of Rock and Roll**

**Rock-and-Roll** (rock’n’roll) first so used (1951) by Alan Freed, Cleveland disc jockey, taken from the song "My Baby Rocks Me with a Steady Roll". The use of rock, roll, rock and roll, etc., is traditional in blues, a form of popular music that evolved in the 1950’s from rhythm and blues, characterized by the use of electric guitars, a strong rhythm with an accent on the offbeat, and youth-oriented lyrics.

More precisely, in musical and social terms, rock and roll was born in the USA during the late 1940s and early 1950s. During that time, processes of active cross-fertilisation took place between country and western music (predominantly played and heard by white people), western swing, and rhythm and blues (R&B). These processes of exchange and mixing were fuelled by shared experiences in the Second World War, and by the spread of radio, and records. Several records of this period have been most frequently cited by different authorities as "the first rock’n’roll record". These include:

- "Rock The Joint" – either the original 1949 version by Jimmy Preston, or the 1952 version by Bill Haley
- Bill Haley’s "Rock Around The Clock" (1954)
- Elvis Presley’s "That’s All Right (Mama)" (1954)

However, there are many other candidates, and many of the threads which together made up rock and roll music can be traced back to much earlier precursor records.

**BILL HALEY**

**Bill Haley** William John Cliftop Haley Jr. was born in Highland Park, Michigan on July 6, 1925. His family was interested in country music and he learned to play guitar at an early age. When he was 15 he left home to tour with a country and western band and by 1951, when he signed a contract with Essex Records, he was leading a band of his own. The band was called The Saddlemen and their first record was a version of the rhythm and blues hit "Rocket 88" and prefigured Haley’s later style, an amagam of country, the blues and pop influences.

1952, Haley renamed his band in order to place his name outfront and came up with the clever name Bill Haley and The Comets. A year later the band recorded their first hit, "Crazy Man Crazy." In 1955, bandleader Bill Haley and His Comets recorded a landmark rock and roll song, "(We’re Gonna) Rock Around the Clock," which held down the number one spot for eight weeks and went on to sell 41 million copies worldwide. In Britain, "Rock Around the Clock" has re-entered the charts seven times, most recently in 1974. If only for the impact of "Rock Around the Clock," in which Haley adapted a black R&B song to a more streamlined rock and roll beat, Haley would deserve a place in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Yet his impact in the early days of rock and roll went well beyond that. Two years earlier he’d put out "Crazy, Man, Crazy," an original song that became the first rock and roll record to make Billboard’s pop chart. For most of the Fifties, Haley was a presence on the record charts with and in teen-oriented movies.
At their first session for Decca, they cut "Rock Around the Clock" (which had originally been recorded in 1952 by Sunny Dae. Little attention was paid to Haley’s version upon its initial release in the spring of 1954. The group followed it with their cover version of Big Joe Turner’s "Shake, Rattle and Roll," which cracked the Top Ten in July 1954 and sold a million copies. "Rock Around the Clock" got its second lease on life by being chosen for the soundtrack to The Blackboard Jungle, a 1955 movie about high-school delinquency that generated controversy in the press and pandemonium among the young. In effect, "Rock Around the Clock" became an anthem for rebellious Fifties youth. A 1956 movie named after the song, which featured nine lip-synched performances by Haley, made him a star here and abroad. His celebrity was particularly long-lived in Britain, where he continued to be treated as rock royalty into the Seventies.

ELVIS PRESLEY

Elvis Aaron Presley, in the humblest of circumstances, was born to Vernon and Gladys Presley in a two-room house in Tupelo, Mississippi on January 8, 1935. His twin brother, Jessie Garon, was stillborn, leaving Elvis to grow up as an only child. He and his parents moved to Memphis, Tennessee in 1948, and Elvis graduated from Humes High School there in 1953.

Elvis’ musical influences were the pop and country music of the time, the gospel music he heard in church and at the all-night gospel sings he frequently attended, and the black R&B he absorbed on historic Beale Street as a Memphis teenager. In 1954, he began his singing career with the legendary Sun Records label in Memphis. In late 1955, his recording contract was sold to RCA Victor. By 1956, he was an international sensation. With a sound and style that uniquely combined his diverse musical influences and blurred and challenged the social and racial barriers of the time, he ushered in a whole new era of American music and popular culture.

He starred in 33 successful films, made history with his television appearances and specials, and knew great acclaim through his many, often record-breaking, live concert performances on tour and in Las Vegas. Globally, he has sold over one billion records, more than any other artist. His American sales have earned him gold, platinum or multi-platinum awards for 150 different albums and singles, far more than any other artist. Among his many awards and accolades were 14 Grammy nominations (3 wins) from the National Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences, the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award, which he received at age 36, and his being named One of the Ten Outstanding Young Men of the Nation for 1970 by the United States Jaycees. Without any of the special privileges his celebrity status might have afforded him, he honorably served his country in the U.S. Army.

His talent, good looks, sensuality, charisma, and good humor endeared him to millions, as did the humility and human kindness he demonstrated throughout his life. Known the world over by his first name, he is regarded as one of the most important figures of twentieth century popular culture. Elvis died at his Memphis home, Graceland, on August 16, 1977.