



The 1950s were an exciting time for music in America. The economic problems of the 30s and the war of the 40s were over. America was rich again. A new group of people became important—American teenagers. For the first time in history young people had money to spend. They had a new way of dressing, new hair styles and new dances.

In the early 50s slow romantic songs were still popular. But teenagers wanted dance music with a

good beat, and so they began to listen to R & B (rhythm and blues) on the black radio stations. A white disc jockey, Alan Freed, began to play R & B on the radio for white teenagers. He was the first person to call this new music rock and roll. The first white group to make a rock and roll hit record was Bill Haley and the Comets, with “Rock Around the Clock.” Rock and roll music had a strong dance beat. The musicians played electric guitars

and the music was loud and fast. American teenagers loved it.

About the same time, the owner of Sun Record Company, Sam Phillips said “If I could find a white man who had the Negro [black] sound and the Negro feel, I could make a billion dollars.” He found his wish in Elvis Presley, the king of rock and roll. Elvis became a new American hero and young people copied his hair style, his dress, and his music.

On February 3, 1959 three famous rock and roll stars, Buddy Holly, The Big Bopper, and Richie



Valens, died in a plane crash. As a result many people thought that rock and roll music had died too. But the music of the late 50s lived on. Rock and pop from the 60s to the 90s grew out of this old rock and roll. As the song says “Rock and roll is here to stay.”

Top left: Bill Haley and the Comets, 1957.

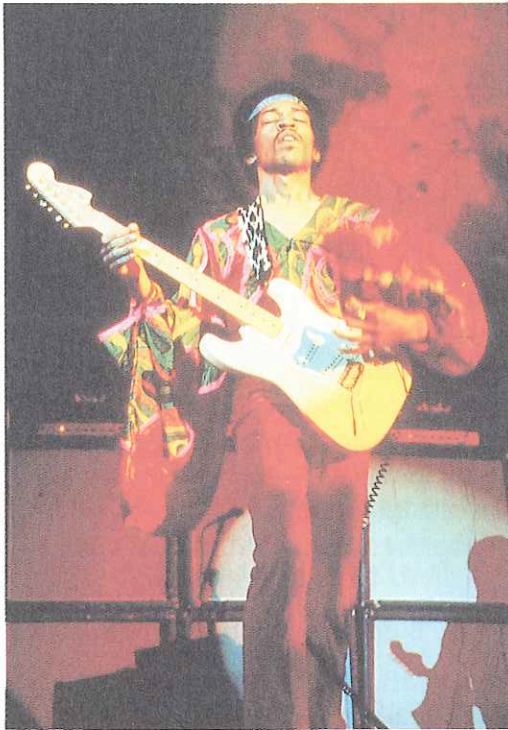
Left: Elvis Presley – the King of Rock and Roll.

Above: Buddy Holly fans dancing by a statue of Buddy Holly.

SIXTIES ROCK

In the 1960s the West Coast became an important center for rock music. Los Angeles and Southern California are famous for sunshine and surfing. There, a quieter kind of rock called surf rock became popular. The Beach Boys sang songs like "Surfin' U.S.A.," "California Girls" and "Fun, Fun, Fun." These songs made people dream about the good life in California.

San Francisco was a center for young people and rock music in the late 1960s. This was the time of



the Vietnam War, student protest, hippies, and drugs. Hippies talked about love and peace. They wore brightly colored clothes and had long hair. They listened to rock and folk-rock music.

Drugs were a serious problem during this period. The deaths of three young rock stars, Janis Joplin, Jim Morrison and the great guitar player Jimi Hendrix were all related to drugs.

Not all of the rock musicians came from California or the U.S.A. That was the time of the great Brit-



ish rock groups like the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. British rock musicians had a very important place in the rock music of the 60s in America.

Another kind of softer rock music was created by the singer-song writers about this time. Singers like Joni Mitchell and James Taylor wrote their own words and their own music. Their songs were about love and friendship, good and bad times.

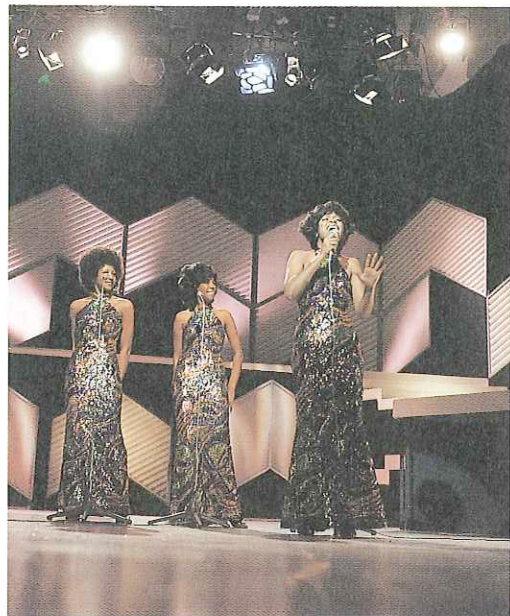
In the 1960s big rock concerts were very popular. The most famous concert was Woodstock. In 1969 in New York State, a million young people came together to hear

the rock stars. This peaceful Woodstock concert was the most important musical event of the 60s.

Bottom left: Jimi Hendrix.

Top left: Janis Joplin.

Above: Woodstock, 1969.



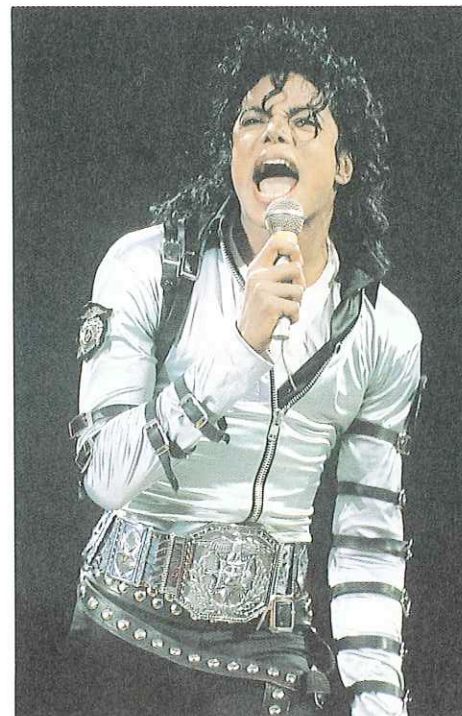
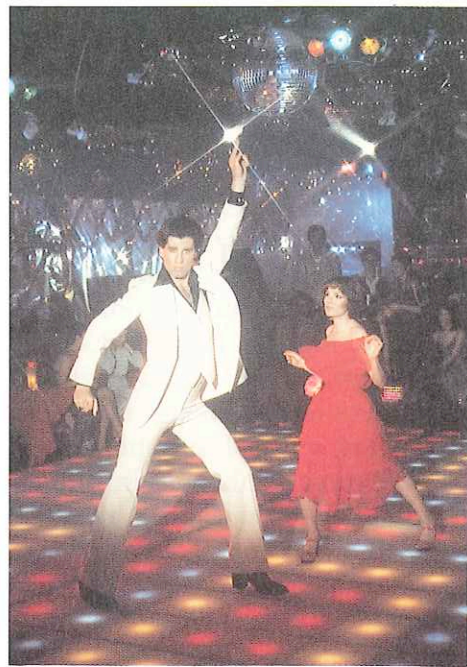
After World War Two a large number of black people moved from the South to the big industrial cities like New York, Detroit, and Philadelphia. Many black people lived in poor parts of the city such as Harlem in New York. Musicians wrote and sang about life in the big cities. Life was hard but music and dancing made it a little easier.

Popular black music had a strong beat for dancing. At first this music was called rhythm and blues. By the 1960s it was called soul.

In Detroit, a black musician named Berry Gordy started an all black record company. It was called

Motown. Motown or motor town is another name for Detroit, where cars are made. Most of the famous soul musicians like The Supremes, The Temptations, and The Jackson Five recorded with Motown.

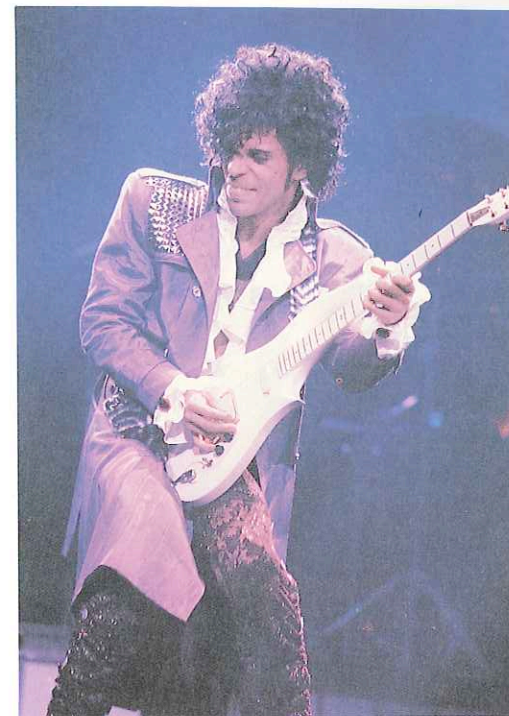
Soul music was always dance music but in the 1970s a new dance music became popular—disco. Disco is a kind of soul music, often with Latin or salsa rhythms. Discos opened up all over America. At discos, the music was on records (discs), not live. Many of the disco musicians were black, like Donna Summer, but disco dancing was



popular with most Americans.

In the 1980s a number of black musicians became superstars, for example, Prince, Michael Jackson, and Whitney Houston. Some old stars like Tina Turner and Aretha Franklin made new hit records.

Rap is a very skillful kind of fast street talk, with a strong rhythm. It began with young black people in the big cities. When rap talking is combined with music it is called rap music. Rap music became very popular in the 1980s.



Top left: The Supremes.

Bottom left: Disco dancing in the movie *Saturday Night Fever*.

Above left: Michael Jackson.

Above right: Prince.