

1953



TIME
LIFE



At one minute past midnight on April 10, 1953, 24-year-old Eddie Fisher was discharged from the army. After being named *Billboard's* Most Promising Male Vocalist for 1950, he had been drafted with as much publicity and media attention as Elvis Presley would attract later that decade. Pfc Fisher spent most of his service time entertaining troops around the world. But with truce talks under way in Korea, this boy wonder of pop music, who had grown up in the slums of Philadelphia singing in alleys to help his father sell vegetables, and who had become the biggest teenage idol of his time, was ready to reclaim his throne.

Fisher's manager had booked him to appear at New York's Paramount Theater at 11 a.m. on April 10th. He caught the midnight train at Washington, arrived in New York at 6 a.m., changed into civilian clothes and got to the Paramount for a three-hour rehearsal. It was pouring rain, and Fisher was astounded to see hordes of bobboxers standing in line outside. As the show began, he started singing his first song, *Thinking of You*, offstage, and bedlam broke loose. "I sang for about thirty minutes, and nobody heard a note," Fisher recalled.

The pattern was repeated in each of five shows a day for the next three weeks. One of the new songs he introduced was **I'm Walking behind You**, a lustrous ballad by veteran British tunesmith Billy Reid. Delivered in the classic crooner style of a young Frank Sinatra, with a soprano singing a faint harmony in the background, the song was quintessential Fisher, and to no one's surprise, it became his fifth million-seller.

During the next few months, Eddie Fisher seemed to have a hand in almost everything memorable about 1953. He traveled to London shortly before the coronation of Queen Elizabeth to give a command performance before the royal family. He took on the new medium of television, premiering a 15-minute, twice-a-week show called *Coke Time*. Carried on an incredible 702 TV and radio stations, it won for Eddie the sobriquet "the Coca-Cola Kid" and had teenagers across the land going to their soda fountains asking for an "Eddie Fisher." By November his **Many Times** was riding the charts. Originally a Belgian song, it had been recorded first as an instrumental by Percy Faith, one of the leading arrangers of the day; fitted with new English words by Jessie Barnes, *Many Times* was a perfect vehicle for Fisher.

In December, the music trade magazine *Cash Box* announced that Eddie Fisher and Perry Como would share the title of Top Male Vocalist of 1953. The two also shared the same publicity agent at NBC, and throughout the year a public friendship had been cooked up between them, with photos of the two gracing fan magazines. In reality, they were rivals, and each knew it. Como was the veteran, pushing 41 in 1953, the seventh son of Italian immigrants who apprenticed him to a barber before his musical talent surfaced. Signed with RCA Victor since 1943, he had been scoring hits for eight years. In 1953 he managed to place an incredible six songs in the top 10. The two biggest were **No Other Love** and **Don't Let the Stars Get in Your Eyes**.

The former is classic Como bel canto; its tune was

derived from the score of the television documentary *Victory at Sea*, by renowned songwriter and composer Richard Rodgers. "The motif attracted a considerable amount of interest as soon as it was heard," Rodgers said. "I felt sure that I could find a place for it in a Broadway score." The play turned out to be *Me and Juliet*, from which Como took it. *Don't Let the Stars Get in Your Eyes*, a lilting, infectious country hit for Slim Willet in 1952, was more of a departure for Como, though it would be closely linked to his career.

The two most talked-about female vocalists of the year were Patti Page and Teresa Brewer. They were a study in contrast, Page being gentle, mellow and sentimental, and Brewer voluble, brassy and vivacious. Starting off as a country singer, Page met and married Jack Rael, who steered her in the direction of pop music. She was the first successful pop singer to harmonize with herself via tape overdubbing in 1949, a technique she also used in her smash hit of 1953, **The Doggie in the Window**. "Bob Merrill played the song for us right after he wrote it," Rael said. "It was slanted more to kids then, and I helped him rewrite it so it would have a more general appeal. But everybody was skeptical. Nobody else thought it would be anything but me."

At the recording session in New York, Rael created the choicest piece of trivia of 1953: the doggie barks. The distinguished violinist Max Ceppas handled the friendly yips, while well-known arranger Joe Reisman did the growls. The record eventually sold three million copies. Page's follow-up, **Changing Partners**, came from the pens of veteran songwriters Larry Coleman and Joe Darion, the latter of whom won fame on Broadway as the lyricist for *Man of La Mancha* and *Never on Sunday*.

Toledo, Ohio, native Teresa Brewer had emerged from a background as a child radio star to pop-music stardom in 1950 with *Music, Music, Music. Till I Waltz Again with You*, a country-flavored piece by Sidney Prosen, took off in early 1953. Joe Darion

showed a song he had co-written named *Vaya Con Dios* (*May God Be with You*) to Carl Hoff, O'Day's manager and husband. O'Day cut it for the independent Clef label. She was supposed to plug the song on the TV show *Juke Box Jury* in early 1953, but the night before her scheduled appearance, she was arrested on a heroin charge in Long Beach, California. By the time she resolved this issue, the record's chances had peaked. Meanwhile Les Paul and Mary Ford heard O'Day's recording on the radio, loved it and immediately set about getting rights. Their own ver-



Teresa Brewer

then provided her with the delightfully alliterative **Ricochet**, a strident, self-assertive song tailor-made for the Brewer style. It rode the charts for 19 weeks, and was Teresa's third million-seller.

Billboard's 1953 top-tune-of-the-year honors belonged to Les Paul and Mary Ford for **Vaya con Dios**, which probably also had the oddest history. In December 1952, jazz singer Anita O'Day was recording in Chicago when her orchestra leader Larry Russell



Eddie Fisher



sion of the song entered the charts in July, and became the biggest hit of their career.

Another song that succeeded despite itself was Nat King Cole's **Pretend**. "I practically had to pull a gun on everyone to get this song," Cole explained. "I was working at a theater in Chicago and I heard Ralph Marterie's band on the car radio playing this melody. I looked all over, and when I tracked down the publisher he said I couldn't use it; it was exclusive to Marterie. He even threatened to sue me if I recorded it. Finally he relented." Marterie had the big-band hit with the song in 1952, and Nat the vocal in 1953.

"This year's top disks also point up the strong revival of interest in instrumentals," noted *Billboard* in 1953. "The lush sound of violins came into real vogue." A case in point is Les Baxter's **April in Portugal**, which originated in 1947 as a Portuguese song by Raul Ferrao called *C Coimbra*; it was brought to America, retitled *Whispering Serenade*, given lyrics and renamed *April in Portugal*. Baxter, the leading studio arranger for Capitol Records, chose not to use the words, but fashioned a fine blend of strings and Spanish guitars. More moody and pensive is Baxter's second hit of the year, **I Love Paris**, a Cole Porter tune from the 1953 Broadway show *Can-Can*.

The Song from Moulin Rouge was not exactly an instrumental (it features a vocal chorus by Felicia Sanders) but it certainly spotlighted Percy Faith's arranging talents. Like many pop melodies from the 1950s, this one was taken from a classical source, namely French composer Georges Auric. It was designed for John Huston's 1952 film *Moulin Rouge*, a biography of artist Toulouse-Lautrec starring Jose Ferrer. **Ruby**, with its bewitching harmonica solo, also had a movie connection, the 1952 Charlton Heston-Jennifer Jones soap opera *Ruby Gentry*.

Dragnet, surely one of the best-known theme songs in modern times, was written by Hollywood film composer Walter Schumann for Jack Webb's popular network crime drama. The show debuted on television on January 3, 1952, and this recording by Ray Anthony made the charts in August 1953. Trumpet player Anthony, a former sideman with Glenn Miller, had one of the top successful

DISCOGRAPHY

*Indicates highest Billboard chart position

- 1. Don't Let the Stars Get in Your Eyes** Perry Como • Music and lyrics by Slim Willet, Cactus Pryor and Barbara Trammel. RCA Victor 5064. No. 1*
- 2. Side by Side** Kay Starr • Music and lyrics by Harry Woods. Capitol 2334. Courtesy of Capitol Records, Inc. No. 3*
- 3. You You You** The Ames Brothers • Music by Lotar Olias, English lyrics by Robert Mellin. RCA Victor 5325. No. 1*
- 4. April in Portugal** Les Baxter and His Orchestra • Music by Raul Ferrao. Capitol 2374. Courtesy of Capitol Records, Inc. No. 2*
- 5. Vaya con Dios** Les Paul and Mary Ford • Music and lyrics by Larry Russell, Inez James and Buddy Pepper. Capitol 2486. Courtesy of Capitol Records, Inc. No. 1*
- 6. I'm Walking behind You** Eddie Fisher • Music and lyrics by Billy Reid. RCA Victor 5293. No. 1*
- 7. Ricochet** Teresa Brewer • Music and lyrics by Larry Coleman, Joe Darrin and Norman Gimbel. Coral 61043. Courtesy of MCA Records, Inc. No. 2*
- 8. No Other Love** Perry Como • Music by Richard Rodgers, lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II. RCA Victor 5317. No. 1*
- 9. Oh! Pee Wee** Hunt and His Orchestra • Music by Byron Gay and Arnold Johnson. Capitol 2442. Courtesy of Capitol Records, Inc. No. 3*
- 10. Hi-Lili, Hi-Lo** Leslie Caron and Mel Ferrer • Music by Bronislau Kaper, lyrics by Helen Deutsch. MGM 30759. Under license from PolyGram Special Projects, a Division of PolyGram Records, Inc. No. 30*
- 11. Rags to Riches** Tony Bennett • Music and lyrics by Richard Adler and Jerry Ross. Columbia 40048. Courtesy of CBS Special Products. No. 1*
- 12. The Doggie in the Window** Patti Page • Music and lyrics by Bob Merrill. Mercury 70070. Under license from PolyGram Special Projects, a Division of PolyGram Records, Inc. No. 1*
- 13. Dragnet** Ray Anthony and His Orchestra • Music by Walter Schumann. Capitol 2562. Courtesy of Capitol Records, Inc. No. 2*
- 14. Many Times** Eddie Fisher • Music by Felix Stahl, English lyrics by Jessie Barnes. RCA Victor 5453. No. 4*
- 15. Till I Waltz Again with You** Teresa Brewer • Music and lyrics by Sidney Prosen. Coral 60873. Courtesy of MCA Records, Inc. No. 1*

1952, and this recording by Ray Anthony made the charts in August 1953. Trumpet player Anthony, a former sideman with Glenn Miller, had one of the few successful big bands still functioning in 1953.

—Charles K. Wolfe



The Ames Brothers

- 15. Till I Waltz Again with You** Teresa Brewer • Music and lyrics by Sidney Prosen. *Coral 60873. Courtesy of MCA Records, Inc. No. 1**
- 16. The Song from Moulin Rouge** Percy Faith and His Orchestra • Music by Georges Auric, English lyrics by William Engvick. Vocal by Felicia Sanders. *Columbia 39944. Courtesy of CBS Special Products. No. 1**
- 17. Keep It a Secret** Jo Stafford • Music and lyrics by Jessie Mae Robinson. *Columbia 39891. Courtesy of Corinthian Records. No. 4**
- 18. Ruby** Richard Hayman and His Orchestra • Music by Heinz Roemheld. *Mercury 70115. Under license from PolyGram Special Projects, a Division of PolyGram Records, Inc. No. 3**
- 19. Eh, Cumpari** Julius La Rosa • Music and English lyrics by Julius La Rosa and Archie Bleyer. *Cadence 1232. Courtesy of Barnaby Records. No. 2**
- 20. I Love Paris** Les Baxter with His Chorus and Orchestra • Music and lyrics by Cole Porter. *Capitol 2479. Courtesy of Capitol Records, Inc. No. 13**
- 21. Changing Partners** Patti Page • Music by Larry Coleman, lyrics by Joe Darion. *Mercury 70260. Under license from PolyGram Special Projects, a Division of PolyGram Records, Inc. No. 3**
- 22. Pretend** Nat King Cole • Music and lyrics by Lew Douglas, Cliff Parman, Frank LaVere and Dan Belloc. *Capitol 2346. Courtesy of Capitol Records, Inc. No. 2**
- 23. Baubles, Bangles and Beads** Peggy Lee • Music and lyrics by Robert Wright and George Forrest. *Decca 28890. Courtesy of MCA Records, Inc. No. 30**
- 24. P.S. I Love You** The Hilltoppers • Music by Gordon Jenkins, lyrics by Johnny Mercer. *Dot 15085. Courtesy of Capitol Records, Inc. No. 4**

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Perry Como
- 2 **Side by Side** Kay Starr
- 3 **You You You** The Ames Brothers
- 4 **April in Portugal**
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- 5 **Vaya con Dios** Les Paul and Mary Ford
- 6 **I'm Walking behind You** Eddie Fisher
- 7 **Ricochet** Teresa Brewer
- 8 **No Other Love** Perry Como
- 9 **Oh! Pee Wee Hunt** and His Orchestra
- 10 **Hi-Lili, Hi-Lo** Leslie Caron and Mel Ferrer
- 11 **Rags to Riches** Tony Bennett
- 12 **The Doggie in the Window** Patti Page
- 13 **Dragnet** Ray Anthony and His Orchestra
- 14 **Many Times** Eddie Fisher
- 15 **Till I Waltz Again with You** Teresa Brewer
- 16 **The Song from Moulin Rouge**
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- 22 **Pretend** Nat King Cole
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- 24 **P.S. I Love You** The Hilltoppers



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