

1957



TIME
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MUSIC



*Harry Belafonte
in the recording studio*

1957

For many Americans, the best symbol of the pop music scene of 1957 came not from the Broadway stage or Tin Pan Alley but from the wide, new screens at their local movie theaters. It was the Cinerama image of the giant hot-air balloon that carried David Niven, Shirley MacLaine and Cantinflas across the Alps and through the desert in Mike Todd's epic travelogue *Around the World in 80 Days*.

As audiences thrilled to the exotic adventures, they also reveled in the musical score by veteran composer Victor Young, who had written arrangements for Bing Crosby and Judy Garland and film scores for *Shane* and *The Quiet Man*. Though Young died in November 1956, his recording of the theme from the Todd film, **Around the World**, became one of the year's favorite tunes.

In its lush, romantic, good-natured escapism, *Around the World* set the tone for much of 1957's music. People seemed to long for some version of "Shangri-la." Perhaps it would be "in the middle of an island" where sparkling waters would wash up on "white silver sands" or where beachcombers could write "love letters in the sand." Perhaps it would be the exotic calypso land of "Jamaica" or quaint "old Cape Cod." Or maybe the innocent Norman Rockwell America described by Debbie Reynolds' "Tammy." Whatever the case, as American society became more and more complex, pop songs offered a first-class ticket to get away from it all.

The most colorful musical fad of the year was the calypso boom set off by Harry Belafonte. Though he was born in Harlem and broke into show business singing jazz and blues and acting, he did spend five years of his childhood in Jamaica. After discovering American folk music (and

rediscovering his Jamaican musical roots) in New York clubs, he released an LP in 1956 called *Calypso*; it became a bestseller and yielded two popular singles at the start of 1957: **Banana Boat (Day-O)** and **Jamaica Farewell**.

Many of the songs in the album were drawn from folk sources in the islands, but the "Lord Burgess" credited as composer for these two hits was in fact one Irving Burgie, a Long Island resident who had received musical training at Juilliard. *Banana Boat* was actually a work song collected in Jamaica in the late 1940s and published in a book of folk songs in 1952 by folklorist Tom Murray. It was about the all-night work of the boat loaders and originally described the banana stalks as "six hand, seven hand, eight hand" instead of the "feet" Burgie used. *Jamaica Farewell* was also based on a traditional air that Burgie rewrote. Belafonte's old friend Millard Thomas set the song's mood with his guitar.

Close on the heels of these entries on the charts came other calypso-flavored efforts. One of the finest was **Marianne** by Terry Gilkyson and the Easy Riders, made up of Frank Miller and Richard Dehr. Gilkyson was a Pennsylvania native who had previously sung with the Weavers and written *The Cry of the Wild Goose*. *Marianne* was based on a Bahamian folk song, and it features Dehr on lead.

The same trio later backed Frankie Laine on his **Love Is a Golden Ring**, which made the bestseller list a month or so after *Marianne*. Laine had already tried cowboy songs like *High Noon* and inspirational pieces like *I Believe*, and he further showed his versatility by entering the folk realm with *Golden Ring*. His other hit of the year was **Moonlight Gambler**, in which he returned to the more fully orchestrated style of Ray Conniff.

Romance of a different sort was provided by Pat Boone, Middle America's clean-cut answer to Elvis Presley. Though Boone made his initial reputation by doing cover versions of rhythm and blues and rock 'n' roll songs, he was a fine ballad singer in the classic sense, and in 1957 he actually had more hits than his rival Elvis.

The biggest song of the year, in fact, was Pat's **Love Letters in the Sand**. He recalls: "That was a song Randy Wood of Dot Records liked ever since Bing Crosby recorded it many years before. . . . It didn't sound commercial to me—it didn't seem like the kind of thing that was happening then." Nonetheless, Boone agreed to try a recording of it, and soon Dot had no less than three different versions in the can.

Then came Pat's movie *Bernardine*, and Dot needed a B side for the title song; Wood convinced 20th Century Fox that *Love Letters* would be perfect; it was added to the film and released as a backup for the *Bernardine* single. DJs soon began taking more interest in the B side, and it climbed onto the charts for a stay that was to exceed six months. "I don't know what the song had, and I still don't," says Boone of the 1931 chestnut; millions of fans, however, did, and they made *Love Letters* his all-time bestseller.

One of his other chart toppers of the year was **April Love**, the title song from his second film. It too harked back to an earlier age, being the product of two veteran Hollywood film composers, Paul Francis Webster and Sammy Fain, who had written for Bing Crosby, Doris Day and others.

Another Hollywood team, Jay Livingston and Ray Evans, was responsible for Debbie Reynolds' No. 1 hit, **Tammy**. A favorite ingenue since 1952, Reynolds signed on for the lead in *Tammy and the Bachelor* in 1957, a movie about a country girl who falls in love with a pilot. At one point in

the script she was to gaze pensively out a window while singing a song her great-grandmother used to sing. "It had to have an old folk-type flavor," recalled Evans. The writers got busy, and Debbie was pleased with the result. "I cut it with just a piano player," she recalled, "and we shot the scene as I lip-synched." Later more instruments were overdubbed, with an arrangement ghost-written by no less than Henry Mancini.

None of this impressed the bosses of Coral Records, the music arm of Universal, the studio that made the film. Obligated to release the title song, they refused to let Debbie re-record it and lifted their single directly off the sound track. Though longer than average, *Tammy* caught on. "I had just married Eddie Fisher," said Reynolds. "He had had 31 straight hits—and for me to have one was startling."

The year's most dramatic debut came from another folk-style singer, a 24-year-old from Camas, Washington, named Jimmie Rodgers—not to be confused with the country legend from the 1920s. After gaining experience singing in the Air Force and at logging camps in the Northwest, Rodgers got to New York, won an *Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts* TV contest and auditioned for Roulette Records. After some confusion—he had forgotten to leave his address with the Roulette producers—Rodgers got into the studio. As his first effort he cut **Honeycomb**, a song written three years earlier by Bob Merrill, whose bouncy '50s hits included *The Doggie in the Window*.

As *Honeycomb* robed atop the charts, Rodgers followed up with **Kisses Sweeter than Wine**. Behind its composer credits of "Paul Campbell" and "Joel Newman" were the real folk artists of the Weavers and blues great Leadbelly. Both had previously recorded the song, adapting it from an Irish source called *Drimmer's Cow*.

Andy Williams



Two veterans from an earlier age showed they could adapt to the new rock-influenced sound of 1957. Nat King Cole, who started his career as a jazz pianist (and later came to include in his nightclub act a song called *Mr. Cole Won't Rock and Roll*), showed he was perfectly capable of handling rhythm and blues in **Send for Me**. Replete with honking sax, three guitars and a "boodily boodily" backup group, the record became one of Cole's top sellers.

Jimmy Dorsey, one of the leading figures of the big-band era, was known in the mid-1950s mainly for the television show he shared with brother Tommy. Although depressed by Tommy's sudden death in November 1956, Jimmy had one last hurrah with a 1937 song called **So Rare**, which featured his alto sax over a heavy backbeat and chorus. "Jimmie took a lot of takes," recalls lead trumpeter Lee Castle. "He was trying to get a certain sound, and finally, after a long time, he got it." The disc came out in February and reached No. 2 on the charts. Sadly, Jimmie was unable to enjoy the success of his new big-band sound; in June he was dead of cancer at 53.

—Charles K. Wolfe

DISCOGRAPHY

- 1. Honeycomb** Jimmie Rodgers • *Music and lyrics by Bob Merrill. Roulette 4015. Under license from Rhino Records, Inc., by arrangement with Butterfly Entertainment Corp.*
- 2. Send for Me** Nat King Cole • *Music and lyrics by Ollie Jones. Capitol 3737. Courtesy of Capitol Records, Inc., under license from CEMA Special Markets.*
- 3. Rainbow** Russ Hamilton • *Music and lyrics by Russ Hamilton. Kapp 134.*
- 4. Love Is a Golden Ring** Frankie Laine • *Music and lyrics by Richard Dehr, Frank Miller and Terry Gilkyson. Backup vocals by the Easy Riders. Columbia 40856. Courtesy of CBS Special Products.*
- 5. Tammy** Debbie Reynolds • *Music and lyrics by Jay Livingston and Ray Evans. Coral 61851.*
- 6. Shangri-la** The Four Coins • *Music by Matt Maneck and Robert Maxwell. Lyrics by Carl Sigman. Epic 9213. Courtesy of CBS Special Products.*
- 7. White Silver Sands** Don Rondo • *Music and lyrics by Charles G. "Red" Matthews. Jubilee 5288. Under license from Rhino Records, Inc., by arrangement with Butterfly Entertainment Corp.*
- 8. In the Middle of an Island** Tony Bennett • *Music and lyrics by Nick Acquaviva and Ted Varnick. Columbia 49965. Courtesy of CBS Special Products.*
- 9. Banana Boat (Day-O)** Harry Belafonte • *Music and lyrics by William Attaway and Irving Burgie. RCA Victor 6771. Courtesy of BMG Music.*
- 10. Marianne** Terry Gilkyson and the Easy Riders • *Music and lyrics by Terry Gilkyson, Frank Miller and Richard Dehr. Columbia 40817. Courtesy of CBS Special Products.*
- 11. Love Letters in the Sand** Pat Boone • *Music by J. Fred Coots. Lyrics by Nick Kenny and Charles Keany. Dot 1557B.*
- 12. Old Cape Cod** Patti Page • *Music and lyrics by Claire Rothrock, Milt Yakus and Allan Jeffrey. Mercury 1100. Under license from PolyGram Special Products, a Division of PolyGram Records, Inc.*
- 13. Melodie d'Amour** The Ames Brothers • *Music by Henri Salvador. English lyrics by Leo Johns. RCA Victor 7046. Courtesy of BMG Music.*
- 14. So Rare** Jimmy Dorsey • *Music by Jerry Herst, lyrics by Jack Sharpe. Fraternity 755. Courtesy of Ace Records Ltd.*
- 15. Dark Moon** Gale Storm • *Music and lyrics by Neil Martin.*





14. **Dark Moon** Jimmy Dunbar • Music by Jerry West, lyrics by Jack Sharpe. Fraternity 755. Courtesy of Ace Records Ltd.
15. **Dark Moon** Gale Storm • Music and lyrics by Ned Miller. Dot 15558.
16. **Kisses Sweeter than Wine** Jimmie Rodgers • Music by Joel Neuman, lyrics by Paul Campbell. Roulette 4031. Under license from Rhino Records, Inc., by arrangement with Butterfly Entertainment Corp.
17. **Jamaica Farewell** Harry Belafonte • Music and lyrics by Lord Burgess. RCA Victor 6663. Courtesy of BMG Music.
- X 18. **Around the World** Victor Young • Music by Victor Young. Decca 30262.
19. **Round and Round** Perry Como • Music and lyrics by Lou Stallman and Joe Shapiro. Backup vocals by the Ray Charles Singers. RCA Victor 6815. Courtesy of BMG Music.
20. **April Love** Pat Boone • Music by Sammy Fain, lyrics by Paul Francis Webster. Dot 15660.
21. **Butterfly** Andy Williams • Music and lyrics by Bernie Lowe and Kal Mann. Cadence 1308. Courtesy of Barnaby Records, Inc.
22. **Fascination** Jane Morgan • Music by F. D. Marchetti, English lyrics by Dick Manning. Kapp 191.
23. **Moonlight Gambler** Frankie Laine • Music by Phil Springer, lyrics by Bob Hilliard. Columbia 40780. Courtesy of CBS Special Products.
24. **My Heart Reminds Me** Kay Starr • Music by Camillo Bagnoni, English lyrics by Al Stillman. RCA Victor 6981. Courtesy of BMG Music.

Gale Storm

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- 2 **Send for Me** Nat King Cole
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- 5 **Tammy** Debbie Reynolds
- 6 **Shangri-la** The Four Coins
- 7 **White Silver Sands** Don Rondo
- 8 **In the Middle of an Island** Tony Bennett
- 9 **Banana Boat (Day-O)** Harry Belafonte
- 10 **Marianne** Terry Gilkyson and the Easy Riders
- 11 **Love Letters in the Sand** Pat Boone
- 12 **Old Cape Cod** Patti Page
- 13 **Melodie d'Amour** The Ames Brothers
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