

THE EARLY '60s



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The New Christy Minstrels



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By December 3, 1963, barely eight days after a grieving nation had laid to rest its 35th president, John F. Kennedy, people were trying to get their lives back to normal. In New York, Broadway producer David Merrick was putting the final touches on a new musical set to open at the St. James Theater in January: *Hello, Dolly!* starring Carol Channing.

Today it was time to record the title song, and the song's publisher had arranged for veteran jazzman Louis Armstrong to do it. At the age of 62, Armstrong was the most famous trumpet player in the world—a veteran of the rich New Orleans tradition that was the very cradle of jazz itself. In the 1940s and 1950s, his limber, gravelly voice had become as instantly recognizable as his trumpet. In fact, his recent hit records had emphasized his singing more than his trumpet playing.

Louis looked over the music and shook his head in dismay. Behind him were members of his regular jazz band, the All Stars; but there was also a cadre of violin players and, of all things, a banjo player. Though the banjo had been a staple in early jazz bands (including his own), Louis had not played with one for years. But one of his great abilities was his skill at taking any sort of pop material and making something memorable out of it. He nodded, and the banjo began its eight-bar introduction.

The tape started rolling, and Louis began to get the feel of the song. It had possibilities after all; the string section stayed in the background, and soon the All Stars had created a two-and-a-half-minute showcase. In a matter of days, the tape was sold to Kapp Records, and eight weeks later **Hello, Dolly** appeared on the *Billboard*

charts. By May of 1964, it reached No. 1 and became the first hit to push the Beatles out of the top spot.

It also helped make Merrick's show one of the favorites of the season, subsequently became the highlight of the film version (in which Armstrong, performing the title song, stole the show from Barbra Streisand), won a Grammy for Song of the Year, was loaned to Lyndon Johnson for his 1964 presidential campaign (*Hello, Lyndon*)—and was recorded over 200 times between 1964 and 1966. Frank Sinatra called his version *Hello, Louis* in tribute to this original and in recognition of the fact that a Broadway show tune could still blow rock 'n' roll off the charts.

Also almost ubiquitous in the early '60s was the folk music revival. The Kingston Trio, a West Coast group consisting of three clean-cut college types named Bobby Shane, Nick Reynolds and Dave Guard, had helped inaugurate the movement in 1958 with their million-selling *Tom Dooley*.

In October 1961, the trio played Boston and heard for the first time an act that was to become their main competition on the folk circuit: Peter, Paul and Mary. The new group was just introducing a haunting song by veteran folk singer and composer Pete Seeger—**Where Have All the Flowers Gone**. The Kingston Trio loved it and rushed into a New York studio to beat Peter, Paul and Mary at recording it. Producer Voyné Gilmore thought it was too long for a pop single, but the trio insisted on doing all five verses. Released in December 1961, the song became the group's next big hit (one of 17 in a five-year period); a second version was cut live in a concert by the trio, and this became a centerpiece of their LP

College Concert in February 1962.

The New Christy Minstrels were named after the pre-Civil War minstrel troupe that helped introduce the songs of Stephen Foster to the American public. The new group was formed at the height of the folk revival, in 1961 in New York City, by a young Kansan named Randy Sparks. Unlike most folk-singing groups, the Minstrels often included as many as 10 singers, and many of the members contributed arrangements and originals.

Their 1963 hit **Green Green** was co-authored by Sparks and fellow member Barry McGuire, who sang lead on the record (and later had an eclectic solo career). The Minstrels performed the song all over the place, from the White House to Vietnam to the San Remo Festival in Italy. The folk revival also helped renew the career of Burl Ives, a veteran folk singer from the 1940s who had popularized such chestnuts as *Blue Tail Fly*. By the early 1960s, he was recording in Nashville and enjoying a string of country-flavored hits, such as 1961's **A Little Bitty Tear**.

The dividing line between the new rock 'n' roll and the more conventional pop was sometimes not as clear as the pundits made it seem. One case in point was the Everly Brothers, Don and Phil, teen heartthrobs who, in spite of their youth, had discerning taste in what kinds of songs suited their distinctive harmonies. One they found was **Let It Be Me**. The song, originally titled *Je t'appartiens*, was by a French club singer named Gilbert Becaud and had been a hit of sorts in 1957 for Jill Corey.

Don Everly heard it, however, on a Chet Atkins guitar album and only later found it had words. The Everlys' producer, Archie Bleyer, a veteran of the *Arthur Godfrey Show*, wrote a string arrangement, brought the boys from Nashville to his New York studio and cut the song as one of his last collaborations with the brothers. The popularity of the Everlys' version generated numerous

specialized in country songs, but by the 1970s she re-asserted her R&B roots and returned to the Los Angeles scene.

Another singer with a widely varied background was Frank Ifield, whose **I Remember You** reached No. 5 on the charts in 1962. Schooled in traveling tent shows and circuses, Ifield began making his mark in New Zealand and Australia in the 1950s. Moving to England, he did winning versions of *Lovesick Blues* and *The Wayward Wind* but seemed unable to crack the American market. He finally did with *I Remember You*, a World War II favorite from a Dorothy Lamour film called *The Fleet's In*.

Other great songs from the era came from performers who saw that LP albums were becoming as important as singles. Arthur Ferrante and Louis Teicher, two Jul-

Bobby Vinton



covers by people like Glen Campbell and Bobbie Gentry, Willie Nelson, and soul singer Linda Jones.

Tiny Brenda Lee, whose brassy voice and bubbling personality had made her a child prodigy in the mid-1950s (a regular on both Steve Allen's and Perry Como's TV shows), won her initial fame with rockers like *Dum Dum* and *Rockin' around the Christmas Tree*. But in 1960, she had her biggest hit yet with a classic love ballad, **I'm Sorry**. Co-written by a Springfield, Missouri, rockabilly singer named Ronnie Self, *I'm Sorry* was an international success, spurring a Paris critic to call Lee "the most dynamic artist since Judy Garland."

Another stylistic switch was a soulful version of the country and Western classic **Release Me** by a 27-year-old rhythm and blues singer named Esther Phillips. Like Brenda Lee, "Little Esther" was making waves by the time she was 13, singing for bandleader Johnny Otis around Los Angeles. But Phillips burned out after seven or eight years of modest success in the R&B field and returned home to Houston.

Executives from New York-based Lenox Records rediscovered her in 1962 and talked her into doing an album of country songs—in Nashville with veteran Nashville sidemen. For a time, she was stereotyped as a black singer who



liard piano students who played twin-piano arrangements of the classics, entered the pop field in 1960 with **Theme from The Apartment** and turned out a series of 30 LPs in the next decade.

Al Martino, whose Italian ballad style graces **I Love You Because** and converts this venerable country song into a club favorite, was beginning to sell more albums than singles, running up three top-10 LPs between 1963 and 1965. The Lettermen, a smooth harmony trio from Los Angeles, saw no fewer than 32 LPs chart during the 1960s, but one of their few top 10s was **When I Fall in Love** (1961). Like so many other recordings from the early '60s, it became a standard of sorts, entering the repertoires of dozens of other pop artists who took good material where they found it.

—Charles K. Wolfe

DISCOGRAPHY

- 1. Hello, Dolly** Louis Armstrong and the All Stars • *Music and lyrics by Jerry Herman. Kapp 573 (1964).*
- 2. My Kind of Girl** Matt Monro • *Music and lyrics by Leslie Bricusse. Warwick 636 (1961). Courtesy of Warwick Records.*
- 3. I Love You Because** Al Martino • *Music and lyrics by Leon Payne. Capitol 4930 (1963). Courtesy of Capitol Records, Inc., under license from CEMA Special Markets.*

4. Never on Sunday The Chordettes • *Music by Manos Hadjidakis. English lyrics by Billy Towne. Cadence 1402 (1961). Courtesy of Barnaby Records, Inc., by arrangement with Celebrity Licensing Inc.*

5. Kiddio Brook Benton • *Music and lyrics by Brook Benton and Clyde Otis. Mercury 71652 (1960). Under license from PolyGram Special Markets, a Division of PolyGram Group Distribution, Inc.*

6. Don't Break the Heart That Loves You Connie Francis • *Music and lyrics by Benny Davis and Ted Murry. MGM 13059 (1962). Under license from PolyGram Special Markets, a Division of PolyGram Group Distribution, Inc.*

7. I Wanna Be Around Tony Bennett • *Music and lyrics by Johnny Mercer and Sadie Vimmerstedt. Columbia 42634 (1963). Under license from Sony Music Special Products, a Division of Sony Music Entertainment, Inc.*

8. I Remember You Frank Ifield • *Music by Victor Schertzinger, lyrics by Johnny Mercer. Vee-Jay 457 (1962). Courtesy of Capitol Records, Inc., under license from CEMA Special Markets.*

9. My Coloring Book Kitty Kallen • *Music by John Kander, lyrics by Fred Ebb. RCA Victor 8124 (1963). Courtesy of BMG Music/The RCA Records Label, under license from BMG Direct Marketing, Inc.*

10. Blue on Blue Bobby Vinton • *Music by Burt Bacharach, lyrics by Hal David. Epic 9593 (1963). Under license from Sony Music Special Products, a Division of Sony Music Entertainment, Inc.*

11. I'm Sorry Brenda Lee • *Music and lyrics by Ronnie Self and Dub Albritten. Decca 31093 (1960).*

12. Let It Be Me The Everly Brothers • *Music by Gilbert Becaud, English lyrics by Mann Curtis. Cadence 1376 (1960). Courtesy of Barnaby Records, Inc., by arrangement with Celebrity Licensing Inc.*

13. Green, Green The New Christy Minstrels • *Music and lyrics by Barry McGuire and Randy Sparks. Columbia 42805 (1963). Under license from Sony Music Special Products, a Division of Sony Music Entertainment, Inc.*

14. Those Lazy-Hazy-Crazy Days of Summer Nat King Cole • *Music by Hans Carste, English lyrics by Charles Tobias. Capitol 4965 (1963). Courtesy of Capitol Records, Inc., under license from CEMA Special Markets.*

15. Release Me Esther Phillips • *Music and lyrics by Estelle*

Esther Phillips

15. **Release Me** Esther Williams • Music and lyrics by Eddie Miller, Robert Yount and Dub Williams. Lenox 5555 (1962). Produced under license from Atlantic Recording Corp.

16. **A Little Bitty Tear** Burl Ives • Music and lyrics by Hank Cochran. Decca 31330 (1962).

17. **Deep Purple** Nino Tempo and April Stevens • Music by Peter De Rose, lyrics by Mitchell Parish. Atco 6273 (1963). Produced under license from Atlantic Recording Corp.

18. **When I Fall in Love** The Lettermen • Music by Victor Young, lyrics by Edward Heyman. Capitol 4658 (1961). Courtesy of Capitol Records, Inc., under license from CEMA Special Markets.

19. **Theme from The Apartment** Ferrante and Teicher • Music by Charles Williams. United Artists 231 (1960). Courtesy of EMI Records Group/EMI Records. Under license from CEMA Special Markets.

20. **Wives and Lovers** Jack Jones • Music by Burt Bacharach, lyrics by Hal David. Kapp 551 (1963).

21. **In the Misty Moonlight** Jerry Wallace • Music and lyrics by Cindy Walker. Challenge 59246 (1964). Recording courtesy of Masters International Inc., Nashville, Tenn.

22. **Crazy** Patsy Cline • Music and lyrics by Willie Nelson. Decca 31317 (1961).

23. **18 Yellow Roses** Bobby Darin • Music and lyrics by Bobby Darin. Capitol 4970 (1963). Courtesy of Capitol Records, Inc., under license from CEMA Special Markets.

24. **Where Have All the Flowers Gone** The Kingston Trio • Music and lyrics by Pete Seeger. Capitol 4671 (1962). Courtesy of Capitol Records, Inc., under license from CEMA Special Markets.



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