

TOP 20 ONE-HIT WONDERS

WORDS BY STEVE O'BRIEN

The 50s was full of brilliant, timeless songs, sometimes by artists who could never quite manage to crack that second smash. Join us as we explore the best of the decade's one-hit wonders...

One-hit wonders are often the most mocked of all artists. But there are songs by singers and groups more successful than those flash-in-the-pan stars that remain far less loved. The curse of the one-hit wonder, though, is that your song is almost always better remembered than you are. Most rock'n'roll fans know *Earth Angel*, but can they name the group behind it? How many who have jiggled to *Sea Cruise* know that it's Frankie Ford who first sang it? And *Here Comes Summer*? Could you name the artist behind that sun-dappled classic? Here, we celebrate those solitary hits and the oft-forgotten artists behind them...



20 DON ROBERTSON The Happy Whistler Capitol (1956)

Rarely has a song been so perfectly titled as Don Robertson's US No.9 and UK No.8-charting ditty, a light-as-air number with no lyrics or singing whatsoever, just Don whistling happily along for two minutes and 33 seconds. Truth is, Robertson was no vocalist and far more content behind the scenes, going on to write songs for such artists as Elvis Presley (*Anything That's Part Of You, Starting Today*), Jerry Lee Lewis (*I Can't Seem To Say Goodbye*) and Al Martino (*I Love You More And More Every Day*). As such, he was inducted into the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1972.



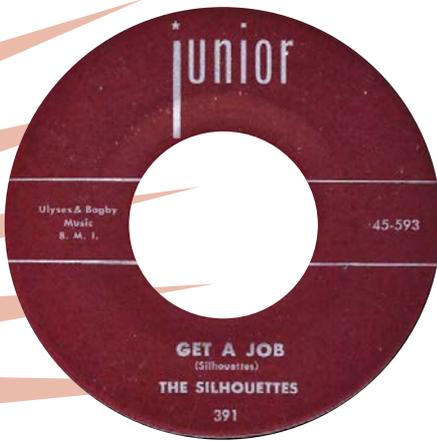
19 CHUCK MILLER The House Of Blue Lights Mercury (1955)

Born in Wellington, Kansas, Chuck Miller first signed to Capitol in 1953, having cut his teeth in the clubs of Los Angeles. Most of his earliest work for the label was pretty forgettable – MOR ballads and disposable novelty discs – but his sole hit (for Mercury, which he'd joined in 1955), an R&B-styled reworking of the 1946 song, *The House Of Blue Lights*, showed he had more rhythm than most of his easy listening stablemates. After being dropped by Mercury, Miller recorded an album for Imperial in 1959, *Now Hear This! Songs Of The Fighting 40s*. Sadly, nobody bought it.



18 JIMMY BOWEN I'm Stickin' With You Roulette (1957)

Not the host of TV darts quiz *Bullseye*, but a New Mexico-born rockabilly belter whose only hit (written by himself and Buddy Knox) would peak at No.14 on the Billboard Hot 100. With further singles tanking, he moved into music production, working with – among others – Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Bert Kaempfert and Sammy Davis, Jr. He's also credited on the soundtrack to 1971 counter-culture flick *Vanishing Point* and, as a label boss, helped launch the careers of a host of country luminaries including Glen Campbell, Kenny Rogers and Hank Williams Jr.



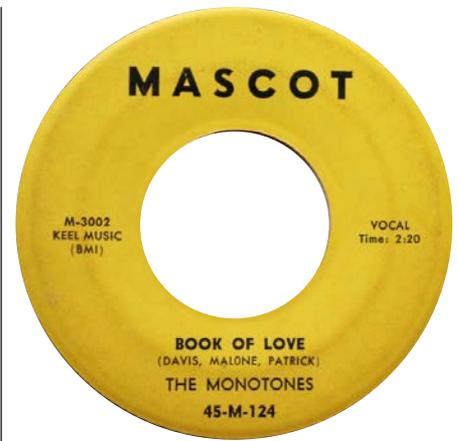
17 THE SILHOUETTES
Get A Job
 Junior/Ember (1957)

The Silhouettes netted themselves a million-selling No.1 with this doo-wop classic, yet the record-buying public stayed away from every subsequent release from the Philadelphia-formed outfit. Despite the lack of hits, the group went on to perform with such names as Sam Cooke, Jackie Wilson and Clyde McPhatter before splitting in 1968. The original members reformed in the 80s and continued to work until 1993. *Get A Job* has been a long-time film soundtrack favourite, popping up in 1973's *American Graffiti*, in *Trading Places* 10 years later and *Stand By Me* in 1986.



16 THE CRESCENDOS
Oh Julie
 Nasco (1957)

Formed early in 1957, doo-wop outfit The Crescendos performed their only hit (Billboard No.5) with backing vocals from 16-year-old singer Janice Green, who happened to be auditioning at Globe Recording Studios that day. Two more singles on Nasco – *School Girl* (again with Green backing) and *Rainy Sunday* – followed, both of which failed to land commercially, and the band (plus Green, who'd never officially joined) were dropped by the label. They'd disbanded by 1959, while Green went on to work on sessions by The Four Seasons and others.



15 THE MONOTONES
Book Of Love
 Mascot/Argo (1957/58)

It's not often a toothpaste commercial inspires a hit single, but it was after Monotones leader Charles Patrick caught an ad for Pepsodent and noticed the line, "You'll wonder where the yellow went/ When you brush your teeth with Pepsodent," that he was inspired to pen the lyrics, "I wonder, wonder, wonder who, who wrote the book of love." The song peaked at Billboard No.5, but despite waxing a host of more novelty-themed follow-ups, including *Zombi* and *The Legend Of Sleepy Hollow*, more hits were sadly not forthcoming.



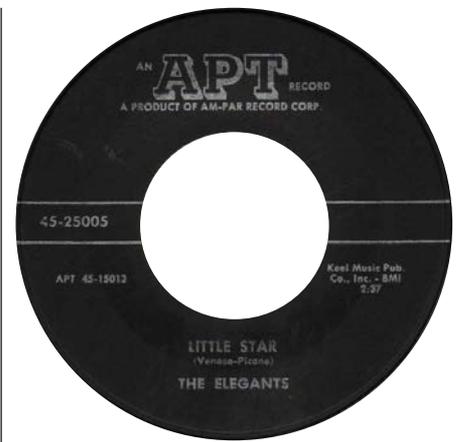
14 RONALD & RUBY
Lollipop
 RCA (1958)

This annoyingly infectious novelty hit came courtesy of Ronald & Ruby, aka Ronald Gumm and Beverly 'Ruby' Ross, a rare – for the time – interracial singing duo. They'd started out as songwriters, composing such tracks as *Frankenstein Rock*, *Don't Come To My Party* and *The Ghost Of Love*. As Ronald & Ruby, they released several singles after the No.20-charting *Lollipop*, but none were hits. After her brush with singing stardom, Ross continued as a writer, penning tracks such as *Candy Man* (for Roy Orbison) and *Judy's Turn To Cry* (for Lesley Gore).



13 JODY REYNOLDS
Endless Sleep
 Demon (1958)

Better known in the UK via Marty Wilde's version, it was Jody Reynolds who first had a hit with *Endless Sleep*, which the young rock'n'roller had written after hearing Elvis Presley's *Heartbreak Hotel*. With lyrics telling the story of a teenager whose girlfriend has gone missing after a row, many record companies turned it down for being too depressing, until the Demon label took it on. Despite selling over a million copies and hitting No.5 in the US, Reynolds' follow-up single *Fire Of Love* only reached an underwhelming No.66, his last Hot 100 entry.



12 THE ELEGANTS
Little Star
 Apt (1958)

A doo-wop take on the nursery rhyme, *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star* isn't exactly the most obvious idea for a No.1 single, but The Elegants' solitary 1958 hit – written by group members Vito Picone and Arthur Venosa – was exactly that, turning the 19th century English lullaby into something danceable. Rumour has it that the reason for The Elegants' lack of hits thereafter was because they refused to pay payola to a prominent New York DJ, which inhibited airplay of their follow-up singles. Despite their lack of chart success, they continued to perform well into the 21st century. ➔



11 THE BELL NOTES
I've Had It
Time (1958)

Formed in Long Island, New York, The Bell Notes refined their sound performing at a bar owned by the father of future Aerosmith guitarist Ray Tabano (in fact, he and Aerosmith frontman Steven Tyler would occasionally play between Bell Notes sets). *I've Had It* was the band's first recording, landing at No.6 on the Billboard Hot 100. There were several more singles that followed, but with *Old Spanish Town* peaking at No.76 and *Shortnin' Bread* cresting at a paltry No.96, it would be *I've Had It* that The Bell Notes would be remembered for.



10 THE DANLEERS
One Summer Night
Amp 3/Mercury (1958)

The Danleers released a string of 7" discs between 1958 and 1964, but only one – *One Summer Night* – charted, peaking at No.7 on the Billboard. What a hit, though, having been covered numerous times since, including by The Diamonds (who had a No.22 entry with the song in 1961) and The Beach Boys in the 90s. By the end of the decade, The Danleers were no more, though original member Jimmy Weston later formed a new version of the band. The original line-up came back together in 1988 for a reunion show at the Westbury Music Fair on Long Island.



09 JERRY KELLER
Here Comes Summer
Kapp (1959)

Despite hitting the No.1 spot in the UK (and No.14 on the Billboard Hot 100) with this self-penned easy listening earworm, Arkansas-born pop singer Jerry Keller never managed another hit song on either side of the Atlantic. Keller is, however, credited as writer on *The Legend Of Shenandoah*, recited by actor James Stewart in the 1965 Western film *Shenandoah*, and he can be spotted in 1977 movie *You Light Up My Life*, playing an orchestra conductor, as well as in 1978's *If Ever I See You Again* as the main character's business partner.



08 THE VIRTUES
Guitar Boogie Shuffle
Hunt (1958)

So named because of founding member Frank Virtue, The Virtues enjoyed their only chart hit with this rocking reworking of Arthur Smith's country favourite *Guitar Boogie*. The instrumental made No.5 in the US, while also becoming a sheet music smash. A run of subsequent singles – including *Flippin' In*, *Virtue's Boogie Woogie* and *Vaya Con Dios* – all flopped. A reworking of their only hit, however, managed No.95 in 1962, while they also provided the jingle for Pepsi's new lemon-lime drink, Teem. Virtue moved into music production soon after.



07 THE PENGUINS
Earth Angel (Will You Be Mine)
Dootone (1954)

One of the first rhythm and blues songs to cross over into the pop charts, The Penguins' evergreen 45, *Earth Angel*, would peak at No.8 on the Billboard Hot 100. Amazingly, though, it wasn't even the A-side. Dootone released *Hey Senorita* in late 1954 as the intended main attraction, only DJs started playing its flip instead, giving the L.A. doo-wop outfit their only chart hit. They were signed by Mercury, alongside The Platters, on a two-for-one deal, only it was the other group that benefited from the label's backing and The Penguins eventually split in 1962.



06 THE CHORDS
Sh-Boom
Cat (1954)

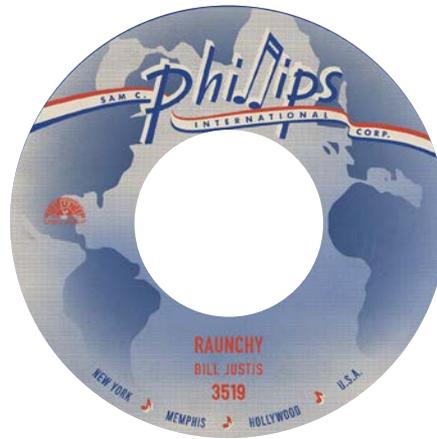
The Chords' most famous track was, like The Penguins' *Earth Angel*, the underside of their first single. The A-side was a doo-wopped cover of an old Patti Page number, *Cross Over The Bridge*, but it was the self-penned *Sh-Boom* that DJs started spinning, sending it into the Top 10 in the US. A later name change to The Chordcats (after Gem Records informed them that one of the groups on its roster was called The Chords) couldn't stop them from being one-hit wonders and the band split in 1960. The group's last surviving original member, Floyd McRae, passed away in 2013.



05 **BARRETT STRONG**
Money (That's What I Want)

Tamla (1959)

Co-written by Motown Records founder Berry Gordy with Janie Bradford, *Money (That's What I Want)* may have only peaked at No.23 in the US, but it remains one of the most covered songs of the 50s, being versioned by The Beatles, The Rolling Stones and The Flying Lizards amongst numerous others. In the years after his lone hit, Strong became one of Motown's go-to songsmiths, and had a hand in such classics as Marvin Gaye's *I Heard It Through the Grapevine* and Edwin Starr's *War*. He was inducted into the Songwriters Hall Of Fame in 2004.



04 **BILL JUSTIS**
Raunchy

Phillips International (1957)

It's rare for a one-hit wonder to have a song as garlanded as *Raunchy* has been in the 65 years since its release. Not only was this instrumental inducted into the Grammy Hall Of Fame in 1957, it was also the song that secured George Harrison's place in The Beatles (the then 14-year-old Harrison performed the track to John Lennon and Paul McCartney on the top deck of a Liverpool bus as an audition). Though a one-hit wonder in the UK and US (*Raunchy* peaked at No.2 in the US and No.11 in the UK), Justis did score a chart-topper in Australia in 1963 with *Tamoure*.



03 **FRANKIE FORD**
Sea Cruise

Ace (1959)

Penned by New Orleans legend Huey 'Piano' Smith, *Sea Cruise* has been covered by a multitude of artists including Herman's Hermits, Shakin' Stevens, Jerry Lee Lewis, The Beach Boys, Robert Gordon and even comedian Charlie Drake, but Frankie Ford's original recording is still the one to beat. It reached No.14 in the Hot 100, and would be the only single of Ford's to make it beyond the Top 70. Ford was drafted in 1962, and performed for troops in Vietnam, Japan and Korea. In the years after, he recorded occasionally, but mostly giggered in and around New Orleans.



02 **RAY SHARPE**
Linda Lu

Jamie (1959)

Ray Sharpe's one and only smash may not have been massive at the time (it peaked at Billboard No.46), but it's proved to have quite the afterlife, having been covered by such artists as The Rolling Stones, The Kingsmen, Johnny Kidd And The Pirates, The Flying Burrito Brothers and Tom Jones. Described by one record producer as "the greatest white-sounding Black dude ever", it was Sharpe himself who penned *Linda Lu*, with future singing star Lee Hazlewood in the producer's chair and featuring Duane Eddy on guitar and Al Casey on rhythm.

01 **PHIL PHILLIPS**
Sea Of Love

Mercury (1959)

Phil Phillips claims that he was paid just \$6,800 for recording this US No.2/UK No.3-charting smash, which went on to sell a remarkable one million copies. According to rock'n'roll legend, a gas meter reader heard Phillips – real name John Phillip Baptiste – practising the song and urged him to see a record producer by the name of George Khoury. *Sea Of Love* was released on Khoury's self-named independent record label, but did so well locally that Mercury picked it up for national distribution. Despite the song's success – its mega sales naturally saw it awarded a gold disc – Phillips received no further royalties during his lifetime. After being so savagely screwed over, the one-time bellhop pretty much gave up on music and a full studio album that he recorded failed to see the light of day. Despite his lack of recorded output, Phillips still performed prior to his death at the age of 94 in 2020, with one of his last gigs being at New Orleans Jazz Fest in 2005.

