**Rock ‘n’ Roll America**

***Episode 1: Sweet Little Sixteen***

In Cold War mid-1950s America, as the new suburbia was spreading fast in a country driven by racial segregation, rock 'n' roll took the country by surprise. Out of the Deep South came a rhythm-driven fusion of blues, boogie woogie and vocal harmony played by young black pioneers like Fats Domino and Little Richard that seduced young white teens and, pre-civil rights, got black and white kids reeling and rocking together.

This fledgling sound was nurtured by small independent labels and travelled up from the Mississippi corridor spawning new artists. In Memphis, Elvis began his career as a local singer with a country twang who rocked up a blues song and sounded so black he confused his white listeners. And in St Louis, black blues guitarist Chuck Berry took a country song and turned it into his first rock 'n' roll hit, Maybellene.

Movies had a big role to play thanks to 'social problem' films exploring the teenager as misfit and delinquent - The Wild One showed teens a rebellious image and a look, and Blackboard Jungle gave them a soundtrack, with the film's theme tune Rock Around the Clock becoming the first rock 'n' roll Number 1 in 1955.

***Episode 2: Whole Lotta Shakin’***

As rock 'n' roll took off with teens in 1955, it quickly increased record sales by 300 per cent in America. Big business and the burgeoning world of TV moved in. Elvis made a big-money move to major label RCA instigated by Colonel Tom Parker, an illegal immigrant from Holland who had made his name at country fairs with a set of dancing chickens. Elvis made his national TV debut with Heartbreak Hotel and followed it with a gyrating version of Hound Dog that shocked America. PTAs, church groups and local councils were outraged. Rock 'n' roll was banned by the mayor of Jersey City and removed from jukeboxes in Alabama. Now Ed Sullivan would only shoot Elvis from the waist up.

The conservative media needed a cleaned-up version and the young, married-with-kids Christian singer Pat Boone shot up the chart, rivalling Elvis for sales. Not that this stopped rock 'n' roll. Jerry Lee Lewis again scandalised the nation with his gyrating finger in Whole Lotta Shakin' and the Everlys shocked with Wake Up Little Susie, both 45s being banned in parts of America.

It took bespectacled geek Buddy Holly to calm things down as a suburban down-home boy who, with his school friends The Crickets, turned plain looks into chart success. But by the end of 1958 the music was in real trouble. Elvis was conscripted into the army, Jerry Lee was thrown out of Britain and into obscurity for marrying his 13-year-old cousin and Little Richard went into the church.

***Episode 3: Be My Baby***

In the years bookended by Buddy Holly's death in early 1959 and The Beatles landing at JFK in spring 1964, rock 'n' roll calmed down, went uptown and got spun into teen pop in a number of America's biggest cities. Philadelphia produced 'teen idols' like Fabian who were beamed around the country by the daily TV show Bandstand. Young Jewish songwriters in New York's Brill Building drove girl groups on the east coast who gave a female voice to teenage romance. Rock 'n' roll even fuelled the Motown sound in Detroit and sound-tracked the sunshiny west coast dream from guitar instrumental groups like The Ventures to LA's emerging Beach Boys.

In the early 60s, rock 'n' roll was birthing increasingly polished pop sounds across the States, but American teens seemed to have settled back into sensible young adulthood. Enter the long-haired boys from Liverpool, Newcastle and London.