

Roy Orbison

Roy Orbison, rock 'n' roll singer and songwriter, was born to Orbie Lee and Nadine Orbison on April, 23, 1936, in Vernon, Texas. The family moved to the small West Texas oil town of Wink in 1946.

In 1949, at age 13, he organized his first band, "The Wink Westerners", and when not singing with the band he spent his time playing guitar and writing songs. The band appeared weekly on KERB radio in Kermit, Texas. Orbison graduated from Wink High School in 1954. He attended University of North Texas in Denton, Texas for a year, and enrolled at Odessa Junior College in 1955 to study history and English. The Wink Westerners had some success on local television, being given 30 minute weekly shows on



KMID and then KOSA. One of the guests on their show was Johnny Cash, who advised them to seek a contract with his Record producer Sam Phillips of Sun Records. Having renamed The Wink Westerners as "The Teen Kings", Orbison left college in March 1956, determined to give music a serious try, and headed for Sun Records in Memphis, Tennessee.

Orbison had his first chart hit, "Ooby Dooby" for Sun in 1956. The song was one of the first in the new rock 'n' roll style known as rockabilly - a frantic mixture of country music and rhythm and blues developed by Elvis Presley and Sun label owner Sam Phillips. Unlike label-mates Carl Perkins, Johnny Cash, and Jerry Lee Lewis, Orbison had little chart success. He left Sun, and signed with Monument Records in 1959.

At Monument, he began to develop his own unique style of singing and songwriting. He began writing his own songs in earnest, either alone or in collaboration with Joe Melson and later Bill Dees. His first record, "Uptown" was moderately successful. The release of "Only The Lonely" catapulted him into international pop stardom with its immediate rise to the top of the charts (#2 in the US, #1 in the UK). His follow-up single, "Running Scared" also went to #1.

Unlike many artists, Orbison maintained his success as the British Invasion swept America in 1964. His single "Oh, Pretty Woman" The Beatles stranglehold on the Top 10, soaring to A Hot 100 No. 1 Hits of 1964 (USA) on the Billboard magazine. The record sold more copies in its first ten days of release than any 45rpm up to that time and would go on to sell more than seven

million copies. Many of his hits remain popular today, such as "Crying," "Blue Bayou," and "It's Over." Two of his songs were featured prominently in major Hollywood films – the song "In Dreams" was integral to the cult favorite *Blue Velvet*, and the Julia Roberts vehicle *Pretty Woman* was named for Orbison's megahit "Oh! Pretty Woman."

In 1988, a television special brought Orbison to the attention of a younger generation. "*Roy Orbison and Friends, A Black and White Night*", was recorded at the Coconut Grove in the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles in 1988, Orbison was accompanied by an all-star band, organized by musical director T-Bone Burnett: on piano was Glen Hardin, who had played for Buddy Holly as well as working with Elvis Presley for a number of years; lead guitarist James Burton had also played with Presley; male background vocals, with some also playing the guitar, came from Bruce Springsteen, Tom Waits, Elvis Costello, Jackson Browne, J.D. Souther, and Steven Soles; and K.d. lang, Jennifer Warnes, and Bonnie Raitt provided female background vocals.

Shortly after this critically acclaimed performance, Orbison joined Bob Dylan, George Harrison, Jeff Lynne and Tom Petty to form the Traveling Wilburys, achieving substantial commercial and critical success. Once again at the top of the charts, he died of a heart attack, the night of December 6, 1988, at his mother's home in Hendersonville, Tennessee.