

ROCK FILE 4

incorporating Rock File 1

CHART LOG OF AMERICAN/BRITISH
TOP 20 HITS, 1955-1974

STEPHEN NUGENT,
WITH ANNIE & PETE FOWLER

AMERICAN CHART TOPPERS
BRITISH CHART TOPPERS

EDITED BY

CHARLIE GILLETT & SIMON FRITH

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PREFACE TO THE LOG OF AMERICAN AND BRITISH TOP 20 HITS

The American material was compiled by Stephen Nugent from *Billboard*, January 1955 through December 1974. Below, *Billboard's* managing editor Eliot Tiegel explains the process of computing each week's top 100 records, from which our top twenty is drawn.

The British material, which is printed in italics, was compiled by Pete and Annie Fowler from the *New Musical Express* (January 1955 through December 1958), *Record Mirror* (January 1959 through December 1968), and *Music Week* (formerly called *Record Retailer*, January 1969 through December 1974).^{*} The *Music Week* chart is compiled by the British Market Research Bureau in association with the BBC and the British record industry. Here, Alisa Walker of BMRB explains the procedure.

How The Charts Are Compiled

Part 1: Britain

by Alisa Walker (*British Market Research Bureau*).

What causes the most anger, anguish and controversy within the record industry of any country? The answer is simple – The Charts, that weekly sampling of sales which purports to be a guide to the best-selling singles and albums. They are everybody's favourite Aunt Sally, criticized for being inaccurate, accused of being rigged, a cause for joy and celebration when a company's records are doing well, a source of irritation and frustration when they aren't. In fact, charts

^{*} A print strike prevented *Record Mirror* from going to press from July 4 to August 9, 1959, when the *New Musical Express* chart was used. Because no chart is compiled in Britain during Christmas week, every record which was in the previous week's chart has been credited with an extra week as the same position.

are largely misunderstood, with an industry which lives by them often unaware of the systems by which they are devised. In the UK, for instance, only firm sales across the counter are considered, in America the amount of airplay is an important factor, in France the chart is based on an independent sampling of the record-buying public.

In this series, *Music Week* examines methods of chart-compilation in five different countries.

The charts used by *Music Week* and the BBC are compiled by the British Market Research Bureau, which is a long-established company engaged in a wide range of other market research activities. BMRB has been compiling the charts since the beginning of 1969 and the financial backing for the charts comes from *Music Week* and the BBC, of course, but also substantially from the record companies through their organization, the British Phonographic Industry. Currently the annual cost of producing the charts is in excess of £56,000. All aspects of the charts are discussed on a regular basis with these organizations.

The aim of the charts is to provide the best possible estimate, within the finance available, of the relative popularity of records and the measure of popularity which is used in sales to individual consumers. As will be seen elsewhere in this survey of record charts, sales to individuals are not the only thing which might be used to measure popularity, and this aspect will be discussed later.

The sales figures which are used to compile the charts are obtained from a panel of dealers, who write down in a special booklet the serial numbers of records as they sell them across the counter. The panel used by BMRB numbers 300 out of the 4,000 or so dealers in this country which stock a full range of records. The panel is designed to represent all the different types of shops selling records, in the correct proportions. Lists of dealers are provided by the major record companies and these lists are used to establish the profile of record shops in this country and the sample is then selected to represent this universe.

Obviously, it is very easy to select a list of record shops

that is fully representative of the business in Great Britain, by size of shop, area, type of shop and so on: it is quite another matter to persuade all those shops to provide detailed information to BMRB about their sales each week. Fortunately, there are dealers who are willing to carry out this quite onerous task and a little bit of persuasion sometimes brings in a few of the dealers who are not so enthusiastic initially. However, there are still problems which arise with the sample of shops, so that it is never a perfect representation of the universe. One of these problems is the unwillingness of two important multiples, Boots and Smiths, to provide comprehensive sales information from a sample of their shops. However, the third of the large multiples, Woolworths, has been providing sales information from a sample of its stores and these have been included in the chart compilations since the beginning of this year. BMRB continually makes efforts to improve the representativeness of the panel of shops and obviously there is a certain amount of turnover among the panel which is part of this process.

Each week, BMRB sends a new 'diary' to the members of the panel to arrive by Friday, and the dealer starts using the diary on Monday morning, noting down the serial numbers of each record as he sells it. The dealer continues with this process throughout the week and he then posts the diary in the envelope provided by BMRB, after he closes the shop on Saturday night. The diaries are then delivered to BMRB first thing on Monday morning: if they do not arrive in the first post they are too late to be used, given the tight time schedule involved in processing the charts.

When the diaries arrive at BMRB, Wyn Barton and her team check each diary individually, crossing through all the blank spaces so that nothing can be added to the information and looking for patterns of sales which might appear suspicious or unusual.

The diaries are then counted to establish exactly which ones have arrived on time (these days it is in excess of 75 per cent most weeks), so that if any area (or any shop size) is under-represented because of postal problems, the diaries which have arrived from that area can be given an additional

weighting to redress the balance. This process continues all through Monday morning, with about five people working on it, and the information is then transferred on to punched cards ready for feeding into the computer. Each serial number is individually tapped out by a punch card operator and this process takes about 60 girl-hours every week. Sometime during the course of Monday night the punch cards are taken to the computer, and the sales information is processed to produce a chart ready for use on Tuesday morning.

The chart produced by the computer is just a list of serial numbers which must be translated into titles and artists, but even when this has been done, the process is far from complete. Wyn Barton starts work before seven o'clock each Tuesday morning and scrutinizes the chart which the computer has provided. Sometimes there are serial numbers to be added together (for example, if a particular record is available on an import number as well as the British number), or incorrectly written serial numbers to be totalled (which often happens when a company introduces a new prefix, until the dealers and their assistants get used to it). Eventually, a Top 50 Singles chart is compiled and the breakers are selected and then the charts are telephoned through to *Music Week* and the BBC.

At this stage the chart is still provisional, for there are further security checks which must be carried out before the chart may be published and broadcast. One of these checks is a series of telephone calls to 50 record dealers who are *not* part of the panel to check whether the patterns of sales revealed in the chart compiled from the panel of shops is reflected amongst record shops which do not compile chart returns. Each new entry, fast-riser and breaker has to pass a statistical test at this telephone check and if there are insufficient correct answers for a record it must be taken out of the charts. Only when all the records have satisfactorily passed the telephone check can the chart be confirmed to *Music Week* and the BBC.

In addition to the charts themselves, the data is used to compile record company share statistics: these are provided to the BPI member-companies who subscribe to the charts

and they are also used to compile the Market Survey which *Music Week* publishes every quarter. These company and label shares take into account *all* sales, not just sales of items which appear in the charts: There are a few questions which crop up again and again in connection with the charts and some of these will be outlined below and answers given.

How accurate are the charts?

As far as reflecting the overall sales pattern in Britain is concerned, there are two important factors which must be right: the sample of shops must be as close to representing reality as possible, and the shops which complete returns must do the job well. If both these things work perfectly the charts will give a very accurate picture of the relative sales levels of different records, although, since the chart is based on a sample of shops and not on all shops, there will still be some inaccuracies. However, we know that it is the case that neither the sample of shops nor the task that they carry out is perfect: we have noted some of the drawbacks of the sample of shops above, and it is obvious that dealers will sometimes forget to write down a serial number, or make a mistake once in a while. However, we believe that imperfections of this nature are not systematic and do not affect particular records or companies more than others.

A further problem is that the number one sells very much more than the number two in the average week, and the number two much more than the number three and so on. This is true until the position 30 is reached, and after this the records are all selling at very much the same level. This means that the charts are attempting to measure differences which are in fact very small, and it means that inaccuracies will occur at the lower end of the chart.

How well are the charts coping with these problems, then? Last year, BMRB carried out a validation exercise covering 100 singles and 100 albums: the record companies were asked to provide ex-factory sales information for the records selected and to give these sales for the whole 'life' of the record in the case of singles and for six months in the case of

albums. Generally speaking there was a very close relationship between these figures and those provided by BMRB's panel of shops, although there are a few which do not quite fit the pattern as well as the others.

Another illustration of the reliability of the chart information lies in the Forecasts which are denoted in the *Music Week* chart by an arrow. These forecasts are calculated by BMRB on the basis of the sales information from the panel of shops, and in four cases out of five the forecast is proved correct on the following week.

Why do the dealers have to write down all record sales when so few records ever reach the charts?

If only a selection of records were covered for compiling the charts, it would never be quite certain that something had not been excluded from the list to be covered which should have been included. With the system employed, every record gets an equal chance of being recorded in the diaries and this must be a fairer system. Additionally, the company share information has to take into account the sales of records that are not in the charts, as well as the top sellers.

Why can't an easier system be devised that would make the dealers' job easier?

The only system we can think of which would be scrupulously fair and which would also cut down the work the dealer has to do would be one using serial number tags on records. The dealer would merely have to remove a tear-off or sticky tag from each record and return these to BMRB: this would obviously be an easier and more foolproof system than the one used at present, but the costs of converting all the necessary machinery to tag records in this way has proved an obstacle to this development.

Why use dealers' sales at all – why not manufacturers' sales?

The charts are produced every week and they must reflect sales on a weekly basis therefore. If manufacturers' sales

were used, there would be all sorts of unusual patterns occurring, particularly at the beginning of a record's life, when more records may be sent out to shops in the first week than in any other week of the record's life. By counting sales over the counter, these bulk sales patterns do not occur.

Why are shops included in the BMRB panel which do not necessarily stock the vast majority of releases? Why not use just those shops which have the widest range of records in stock?

The charts as compiled by BMRB are designed to measure the relative popularity of records, as measured by sales. A sale is a sale wherever it takes place, and if it takes place in a shop which only stocks the Top 30 singles, it is a sale worth counting as much as the one which takes place in a singles specialist outlet. The main thing to ensure is that the smaller range shop is not over-represented in the panel: at the same time, the picture would be quite wrong if the chart were compiled from shops which stock a very wide range of singles to the exclusion of the non-specialist.

Part 2: America

Eliot Tiegel (*Billboard*)

Billboard Magazine's charts – the national surveys of pop, country, classical, easy listening, jazz and soul music, are a powerful tool used by all facets of the music, recording, broadcasting, and talent buying-selling segments of the entertainment industry.

To many people the methodology of preparing these national surveys is one major mystery, as well it should be, since this is a herculean task which amazes many people week after week.

Yet there is an organized, sound basis for preparing the statistics, based on field research which involves an alert, aggressive and musically oriented staff of young, hip researchers working out of the magazine's Los Angeles headquarters.

Bill Wardlow, the director of chart operations, is the

contact man for representatives of all the record labels who come up to the magazine's offices early in the week to bring up new product and provide information on airplay action and sales movement of product already released which the company wants *Billboard* to be alert to.

Billboard never relies on what a record manufacturer tells the research staff in terms of what that information will do for a chart position. Instead, the information is used as guideline, often alerting the research staff to be on the watch for a product which is being released or is being promoted in a major way and sometimes this can mean exposure in the marketplace.

As for the methodology for the Hot 100: This chart is compiled from a panel of dealers and one-stops representing thousands of dealers. 'We also eyeball rackjobber chart listings by such major firms as Heilicher, ABC Record & Tape Sales and Musical Isle in compiling the Hot 100,' Wardlow says.

'The dealers and one-stops utilized in our panel which we telephone weekly on Friday and Monday, are dealers recommended to us by all record labels.' They are identified to the research staff by the use of a form which breaks down their musical speciality, if any, such as classical, country, pop, plus the percentage of their business which might be software as opposed to hardware (equipment), to make certain they are key music dealers in their market.

'We need to know the key dealer in each market,' Wardlow says. Calls are made by the chart department people using a checksheet which has been prepared and mailed to the sources earlier. 'The checklist includes all those products on the current chart plus additional important products we are checking.'

Wardlow says as many as 185 titles will be checked for the Hot 100 whereas the published chart only lists 100 titles plus ten bubbling-under titles.

'The dealer-one-stops are asked to rate the products as far as movement as very good, good or fair. For very good, we assign 20 points; for good 10 points and for fair five points. We also ask them for their top 15 products and assign 15

points to their first choice working down to one point for number 15. We also use radio from the bottom of the chart to the top. In other words, products can come on to the chart by radio airplay itself or by heavy disco play or by a combination of radio, disco play and sales.

'We canvass over 124 radio stations and these are stations that have been recommended to us by the top record promotion men of all labels.

'We do an overlay of these stations and qualify them as to their importance in moving product saleswise.' Ratings, Wardlow points out, do not always mean a station has the power to affect sales. All of the stations used in the survey also appear in the other radio feature called Singles Radio Action. The stations used for the Hot 100 are rated one, two, four and six depending on their strength in their marketplace. The weight of a single based on its cumulative radio play is totalled and included in the sum total which now includes dealer and one-stops and is printed on a computer sheet for Wardlow's review.

The final chart is made from this Hot 100 computer printout. The printout has the week's sales of each product, the week's top 15 sales points, the total radio points for the week and a comparison of the previous week's points. 'I do not position the chart exactly on the computer printout,' Wardlow says, 'because there are many other factors involved such as whether the artist is on tour, where there are TV spots currently being played on the artist's product, whether there are radio spots on the product and whether the single is tied into an LP or whether the LP is tied into a single because both products would then help each other on their respective charts.

'The computer does not place product on the Hot 100.' All positioning is done by Wardlow on the basis of information at hand.

On calls to radio stations, the researcher gets information on playlists, which songs they are rotating, what new music they are playing, and what extra songs they are using. 'If the product is printed on the station's playlist that week, it is considered for radio points. Our radio input information is

cut off as of Tuesday evening. Our last information to come in is from the important RKO General chain.'

Sometimes a single is dropped off the chart after four downward weeks. This was done in the past, Wardlow says, after an item had dropped below 40 and if it had a downward trend after three weeks. But that is not always the case. 'In the case of hot artists they could stay on the chart for many weeks. There is no set figure for how many weeks a single can stay Number One.'

Wardlow emphasizes that by doubling the number of radio stations contacted, the survey now reflects secondary markets as well as major ones. Product is now more current when it makes the chart and the information is being received faster than in the past because all the data is collected by telephone - which speeds up the process by two weeks easily.

Incidentally *Billboard* has been running charts since 1937 - the first music publication to publish national best-selling listings.

Over 1,000 products are checked weekly for the surveys. Once a week after the charts have been put together, Wardlow dictates a justification report explaining the placement of each and every product on all the surveys. It is a record of just what happened and why.

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