

Grapevine

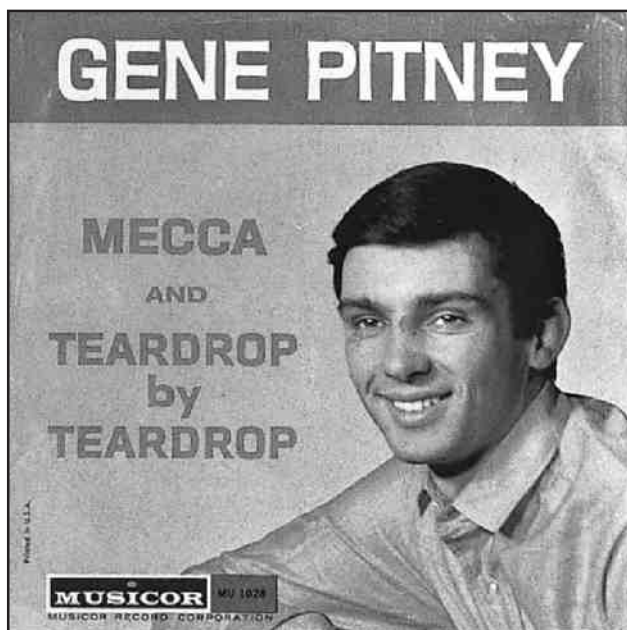
Gene Pitney, 1940-2006

Singer/songwriter and Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame member (2002), Gene Francis Allan Pitney, age 66, died unexpectedly of natural causes in his Hilton Hotel room April 5, 2006, in Cardiff, Wales. He was midway through a 23-city United Kingdom tour; he had just played Cardiff's St. David's Hall and was scheduled to perform next in Bristol. According to his family and Small & Pietras Funeral Home, the "Rockville Rocket," as he was affectionately called, was born Feb. 17, 1940, in Hartford, Conn., correcting previously published data of his birth in 1941. Raised in Vernon's Rockville section in Tolland County, he, wife Lynne, and three sons had resided in Somers since 1970.

In September 1958, local entrepreneur John F. Rys (1933-79) recorded Pitney's first recordings and compositions, "Darkness," "Runaway Lover," "So Tired" and "Victory." Nearly all are a cappella demos with vocal group The Embers. Though not issued until 1992 (by Relic Records), these four sides are excellent and show how influenced he was by singer Clyde McPhatter. A fifth Pitney composition, "Tremble," features a Larry Lee (Harper) lead with The Embers. In 1959, Pitney recorded four songs for Decca Records with Ginny Mazarro as Jamie & June, followed by a rare recording as Billy Bryan (Blaze Records). Finally, in 1960 under his own name, Pitney recorded a single release on Festival Records — his own composition "Please Come Back" backed with Otis Blackwell's "I'll Find You."

Pitney's career as a major artist began in earnest in 1960. As a songwriter, some of his songs became hits for The Crystals ("He's A Rebel"), Ricky Nelson ("Hello Mary Lou [Goodbye Heart]"), and Bobby Vee ("Rubber Ball"). Non-hits covered by others include "Loneliness" by The Kalin Twins and "Today's Teardrops" by Roy Orbison.

As a singer, he joined Art Talmadge's Musicor Records in late 1960, recording



hits such as the Phil Spector-produced "Every Breath I Take" ('61), "I Wanna Love My Life Away" ('60), "I'm Gonna Be Strong" ('64), "It Hurts To Be In Love" ('64), "Mecca" ('63), "Town Without Pity" ('61), plus Burt Bacharach-Hal David songs including "(The Man Who Shot) Liberty Valance" ('62), "Only Love Can Break A Heart" ('62) and "Twenty Four Hours From Tulsa" ('63). Pitney was also one of the first artists to cover a Mick Jagger-Keith Richards song, "That Girl Belongs To Yesterday" ('64).

In all, Pitney recorded more than 20 Musicor albums, including country albums with George Jones and Melba Montgomery and albums sung in Italian and Spanish. In 1989, his duet re-recording with Marc Almond (formerly of Soft Cell) of his composition "Something's Gotten Hold Of My Heart" was a Top U.K. hit. In October 2005, Joseph A. Angiolillo Jr.'s book *Gene Pitney, His Climb To International Success* was published. In March 2006, the BBC aired excellent TV and radio interviews with Pitney, detailing how he prepared for this tour, how he met Jagger and Richards, what CD projects he was preparing and how his career began. These are available on the Web at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/4884316.stm> and www.bbc.co.uk/wiltshire/content/articles/2006/04/05/gene_pitney_interview_feature.shtml.

— Eric S. LeBlanc

GRAPELEAVES



News & notes: The James Gang rides again! For the first time in 35 years James Gang members Joe Walsh, Jim Fox, and Dale Peters will tour together. The first show kicks off Aug. 9 at Colorado's Red Rocks Amphitheatre. Complete tour date info is available at jamesgangridesagain.com... This spring will find another band on the road for the first time in many years. Seattle's Alice In Chains members Jerry Cantrell, Mike Inez, and Sean Kinney haven't toured together as a band since 1996. A re-linked Chains will hit the stage May 26 at Lisbon, Portugal's Super Bock Festival. Helming the lead vocal duties will be William DuVall, lead singer of Comes With The Fall. AIC's original singer, Layne Staley, died of a drug overdose in 2002... Arthur Lee, leader of '60s psychedelic band Love, has been diagnosed with leukemia. According to fan site www.LoveWithArthurLee.com, Lee doesn't have health insurance. A Los Angeles benefit show for Lee is being organized for May or June. After serving a prison term from 1996-2001, Lee formed a new version of Love and toured, often playing the band's 1967 masterpiece *Forever Changes* in its entirety... Interior Secretary Gale Norton joined Priscilla Presley March 27 to announce the designation of Graceland as a National Historic Landmark, the highest such recognition accorded by our nation to historic properties. These special places are the actual sites where significant historical events occurred or where prominent Americans worked or lived and represent the ideas that shaped our nation. Fewer than 2,500 historic places carry the title of National Historic Landmark.

For couch potatoes: The first documentary film about singer/songwriter Gram Parsons — *Gram Parsons: Fallen Angel* (by Gandulf Hennig) — is being released by Rhino Home Video July 11. The DVD chronicles the short but astonishingly creative life of Parsons and the many myths surrounding him and features music and performances from his stints with The International Submarine Band, The Byrds, The Flying Burrito Brothers and from his solo albums. *Fallen Angel* also includes interviews with Parsons' colleagues and admirers Peter Buck, James Burton, Emmylou Harris, Chris Hillman, Bernie Leadon, Keith Richards, Dwight

Yoakam and others... There are two new titles in Music Video Distributors' *Under Review* series, *Velvet Underground, Under Review* and *Captain Beefheart, Under Review*. Each DVD features rare performances and interviews along with commentary and criticism from band members and music writers... Other recent DVD releases include Judas Priest, *Live Vengeance '82*. This 17-song set features the band's 1982 Memphis, Tenn., show ripping out fan faves such as "The Hellion/Electric Eye," "Heading Out To The Highway" and "Hell Bent For Leather." (Columbia/Legacy); Gillan, *Live Edinburgh 1980*, Bernie Tormé, *Stratocaster Gypsy* and After The Fire, *Live At Greenbelt* (Angel Air); Willy DeVille, *Live: In The Lowlands* and Otis Rush And Friends Featuring Eric Clapton And Luther Allison: *Live At Montreux 1986* (Eagle Vision).

Sites and sounds: *Goldmine* readers looking for music from the indie scene should check out Alexa Digital Radio (www.alexadigitalmusic.com). The Internet radio station specializes in music from independent artists (a recent visit found a playlist of 305 songs encompassing a multitude of music styles.) The site has its own media player that streams in hi-fi or lo-fi, and there is no fee to listen.

For analog kids: Among the many vinyl releases in April and May are: Beth Orton, *Comfort Of Strangers* (180-gram vinyl, Astralwerks); Al Green, *Greatest Hits* (180-gram, Getback Records); Donald Fagen, *Morph The Cat* (180-gram, Reprise); Ray Davies, *Other People's Lives* (V2); Ben Harper, *Both Sides Of The Gun* (Everloving); Dinosaur Jr., *Where You Been* and *Green Mind* (180-gram, Rhino); and The Flaming Lips, *At War With The Mystics* (180-gram, Warner Bros.). Classic Records is releasing The Who's *Direct Hits* on 150-gram vinyl. Originally released in 1968 by the United Kingdom independent label Track Records for the European market only, *Direct Hits* features single sides plus various album cuts including "I Can See For Miles," "Substitute," "Happy Jack" and "Pictures Of Lily." The tracks were all cut from the original full-track mono takes.

— Todd Whitesel