

“Ten Top Rock ‘n Roll Hits for Special Events”

by Tom Conway

As your organization prepares for its next major special event, annual meeting, awards ceremony, gala or luncheon, here are recommendations for music from the early years of rock ‘n roll (1956-1978). They were chosen for their inspirational qualities, memorable melodies or just plain fun. Please note this list is the opinion of one fund-raising consultant; you may wish to add others by [clicking here](#). Also, these songs were chosen for playing at an event, and are not my favorite all-time hits (note absence of the Stones, Ray Charles and Jimmy Buffet)! However, with those caveats, here are my nominees:

➤ **Crystal Blue Persuasion**

Whether inspired by verses from the Bible or other references, this moving piece describes a new world coming with love, peace and brotherhood for all. Great horn and organ work.

Artist: Tommy James & The Shondells
Album: Cellophane Symphony
Year Issued: 1969
U.S. Chart Rank: #2

➤ **Don’t Be Cruel**

Early Elvis, with a rockabilly beat, an unaffected melody and easy to understand lyrics. Good costume or 50’s theme party music. Released as a single with “Hound Dog,” it is the only recording in history to have both sides reach #1 in the United States.

Artist: Elvis Presley
Album: Elvis’ 30 #1 Hits
Year Issued: 1956
U.S. Chart Rank: #1

➤ **Good Vibrations**

A rock ‘n roll symphony written by Brian Wilson, with simple lyrics, but very unusual sounds. The last #1 hit for the Beach Boys until “Kokomo.” Everyone knows the words until you try to sing them.

Artist: Beach Boys
Album: Smile
Year Issued: 1966
U.S. Chart Rank: #1

➤ **Hang On Sloopy**

The official rock song of the State of Ohio, and consistently played by the OSU marching band. The lyrics were as direct as they could be in 1965. The McCoys, led by guitarist and lead singer, Rick Derringer, were a one-hit wonder . . . but, what an adaptation of the song “My Girl Sloopy” – “Sloopy, let your hair down girl, let it hang down on me.”

Artist: The McCoys
Album: Best of The McCoys
Year Issued: 1965
U.S. Chart Rank: #1

➤ **I Can See Clearly Now**

One of two hits by Johnny Nash (the other was “Stir It Up”), this is a great song for a celebratory event. With backup by Bob Marley’s Wailers, this #1 hit is all about courage, hope and perseverance. It was recorded in London.

Artist: Johnny Nash
Album: I Can See Clearly Now
Year Issued: 1972
U.S. Chart Rank: #1

➤ **Old Time Rock And Roll**

This recording will excite any crowd. Expect them to get up, clap their hands and move to the aisles! If you play the extended version (nearly six minutes), make sure the paramedics are available!

Artist: Bob Seger
Album: Stranger in Town
Year Issued: 1978
U.S. Chart Rank: #28

➤ **Someday We’ll Be Together**

Another song that speaks of a better place and time; good to use as an instrumental/ background music. While credited to Diana Ross and The Supremes, only Diana’s voice is on the recording; all others are studio musicians.

Artist: The Supremes
Album: Cream of the Crop
Year Issued: 1969
U.S. Chart Rank: #1

➤ **Turn! Turn! Turn! (To Everything There Is A Season)**

Pete Seeger wrote the music and adapted the lyrics from the Book of Ecclesiastes in 1962. The Byrds, led by Roger McGuinn, made it their second #1 hit in 1965. Both religious and secular non-profits can use it to highlight a message or describe change. My personal favorite!

Artist: The Byrds
Album: Turn! Turn! Turn!
Year Issued: 1965
U.S. Chart Rank: #1

➤ **Twist and Shout**

A classic cover by The Beatles of an Isley Brothers hit. If you want people to dance, play this song. However, don't play it too loudly as John Lennon screams both the lyrics and chorus.

Artist: The Beatles
Album: Please Please Me
Year Issued: 1963
U.S. Chart Rank: #2

➤ **What a Wonderful World**

Recorded near the end of his decades-long career, this tune introduced Satchmo to a new generation. The slow delivery, long-held notes and deep voice of Louis Armstrong brings some listeners to tears. Use it as a "sing-a-long." And, yes, you've heard it in the Robin Williams movie, *Good Morning, Vietnam*.

Artist: Louis Armstrong
Album: What a Wonderful World
Year Issued: 1968
U.S. Chart Rank: #32

The Also Rans --- Songs that were close, but no cigar!

➤ **Brown-Eyed Girl**

Artist: Van Morrison
Album: Blowin' Your Mind
Year Issued: 1967
U.S. Chart Rank: #10

➤ **He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother**

Artist: The Hollies
Album: He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother
Year Issued: 1969
U.S. Chart Rank: #7

➤ **I Can't Help Myself (Sugar Pie Honey Bunch)**

Artist: The Four Tops
Album: The Four Tops
Year Issued: 1965
U.S. Chart Rank: #1

➤ **I Heard It Through the Grapevine**

Artist: Marvin Gaye
Album: I Heard It Through the Grapevine
Year Issued: 1968
U.S. Chart Rank: #1

➤ **Joy To The World**

Artist: Three Dog Night
Album: Naturally
Year Issued: 1971
U.S. Chart Rank: #1

➤ **Na Na Hey Hey Kiss Him Goodbye**

Artist: Steam
Album: Jock Rock, Vol. 1
Year Issued: 1969
U.S. Chart Rank: #1

➤ **RESPECT¹**

Artist: Aretha Franklin
Album: I Never Loved A Man The Way I Love You
Year Issued: 1967
U.S. Chart Rank: #1

Comments, questions, recommendations for additional songs or ideas for another list are welcome . . . just [click here](#).

Tom Conway, president of Conway Company, Fund-Raising Counsel, was a drummer in high school and college. Today he can be found "drummin" on his car's dashboard listening to oldies while driving to counsel non-profit clients. Tom can be reached at 877.526.3430, or on the web: www.conwaycompany.com.

Information for songs obtained from www.songfacts.com and CD liner notes.

¹Non-profit organizations are urged to comply with all relevant copyright laws when using music for special events.