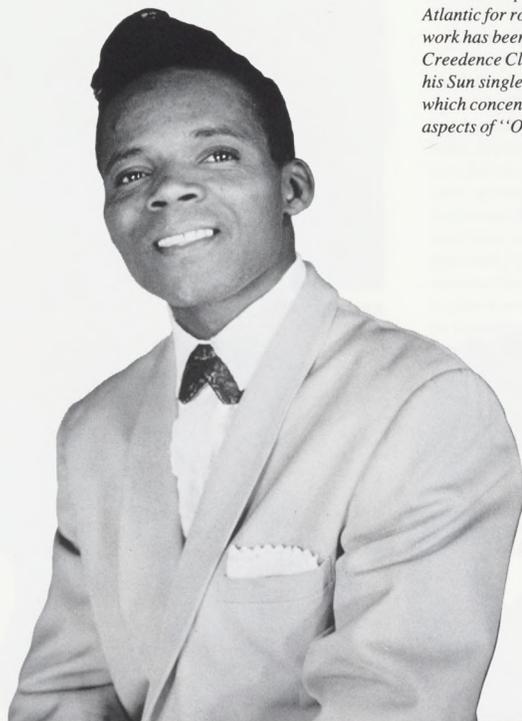


**ROY ORBISON**

Born April 23rd, 1936  
Vernon, Texas



**ESTHER PHILLIPS**



**HANK BALLARD**



Roy Orbison almost gave away "Only the Lonely" before recording the song himself in 1960; it was to be the first in a string of nine Top Ten hits that culminated in the summer of '64 with "Oh, Pretty Woman." Although Orbison had worked in the studio with some of the seminal producers at the dawn of rock and roll – with Norman Petty in Orbison's native Texas, with Sam Phillips in Memphis and with Chet Atkins in Nashville – before "Only the Lonely" he was better known as a writer than as a recording artist and had not yet embarked on his collaboration with Fred Foster on the Monument label, which would make him a worldwide star. As legend has it, Roy and co-writer Joe Melson were on their way from their Texas home to Nashville, Tennessee, when they decided to stop off in Memphis to see if Elvis Presley might be interested in "Only the Lonely." They arrived too early: Elvis was asleep. Moving on to Nashville, they then offered the tune to the Everlys, but the brothers were already recording new material. So Roy himself, on Monument, cut the song that would define his style, combining movie-worthy melodrama and doo-wop serenading into a heart-tugging tribute to the terminally lovelorn.

The songs that followed had the same slightly formal, though never stiff, confessional quality; they were deceptively plain-spoken, unfailingly elegant reveries on love, its beginnings and, more importantly, its endings. Orbison dressed in hipster black, favoring leather and slicked-back hair, and he liked to ride motorcycles; yet he came on like the shy loser in love who gives up everything except his dignity. The melancholy scenarios he created could be wistful ("Blue Bayou"), achingly sad ("It's Over") or the very stuff of cliffhanger romance ("Running Scared," the suspenseful bolero in which Roy, for a change, gets the girl). He had his playful side, too, amply displayed by his flirtatious growl on the enormously popular "Oh, Pretty Woman."

Orbison's audience in Europe, especially in Great Britain, was even larger than his following in the U.S. In 1963, during his second tour of England, he headlined a show that featured as his support acts two up-and-coming British combos, Gerry and the Pacemakers and the Beatles. His popularity in Britain has endured: in 1976, a compilation of his greatest hits topped the U.K. album charts. Orbison continues to perform on both sides of the Atlantic for rock and country audiences, and his work has been covered by groups ranging from Creedence Clearwater Revival, which revived his Sun single "Ooby Dooby," to Van Halen, which concentrated on the more lascivious aspects of "Oh, Pretty Woman."