



MY FIRST TIME:

Jackie DeShannon

By Steven Gaydos

LAST YEAR'S ANTHOLOGY ALBUM RELEASE of singer-songwriter Jackie DeShannon's early 1970s Capitol Records masters, "Stone Cold Soul," was a potent reminder of her impressive vocal chops, which powered her 1965 anthemic early flower power hit, "What The World Needs Now," written by Burt Bacharach and Hal David.

After penning a string of '60s hits such as Brenda Lee's "Dum Dum," "When You Walk in the Room" for the Searchers, "Don't Doubt Yourself, Babe" for the Byrds and "Come and Stay With Me" for Marianne Faithfull, DeShannon had her own 1969 mega-hit with her composition (with Randy Myers and Jimmy Holiday), "Put a Little Love in Your Heart." In 1982, DeShannon wrote (with Donna Weiss) the blockbuster hit "Bette Davis Eyes." Inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 2010, DeShannon's first mention in *Variety* was in 1957, when she was up-and-coming rock and roll vocalist "Jackie Dee," and her Gone Records release, "I'll Be True," garnered an upbeat *Variety* review.

As a performer, you're associated with the '60s, not the '50s. But "I'll Be True" in 1957 wasn't even your first record.

I was living in Illinois and while I was still in high school, I signed with Gone Records. I did whatever I could to advance my career. I was on a local radio show, and I did "record hops," sometimes I'd perform on stage in a local movie theater before the movie played.

What finally moved the needle for you and got you on the road to becoming a national recording act?

I was on a local record hop and Eddie Cochran was performing in town. He heard me sing and told me, "You need to come out to California. You'll really make your mark out there."

Rock and roll was really breaking out at the time. Who were you listening to?

I used to listen to WLAC radio station out of Nashville. They had a midnight show where they played what were called "race" records. I loved Jimmy Reed, the Chantels and I see that music as the foundation of everything I've done. It was all on the shoulders of the blues artists on WLAC, the ones who did the original versions of the songs, not the records by the white artists that covered them.

What did you find when you arrived in Los Angeles?

I found myself surrounded by musicians who brought the same influences. Don Peake, Leon Russell, James Burton, Glen Campbell, Mike Post. Many of the guys were from the South, but those guys could play ANYTHING. I walked into the studio one day and heard Tommy Tedesco playing Andre Segovia. It was all a wonderful blend and producers Dick Glasser and Jack Nitzsche were able to bring so much of it together.

There were very few female artists with control over their careers at that time. A decade later it was common, but not in the early '60s. Was that a problem?

The worst thing about that time was that I was not able to realize my vision. A woman at that time couldn't go into the studio and be in control of their sessions. Even Carole King benefitted from having a male songwriting partner.

You toured with the Beatles on their first tour. I'm sure you were pretty clear on where they were headed.

The first time I met Paul McCartney, he said, "We know who you are. We've heard all your song demos."



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