

## Interview with Sparkle Moore

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**Interviewer:** Leah Branstetter

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*LB: I know a little bit about your musical background from reading your website, but I would love to hear more about how you came to play rock'n'roll/rockabilly.*

**SM:** Somewhere in the mid fifties, my personal exposure to the “new music” came when I went to a country concert and unexpectedly Bill Haley and his band performed. These guys were wild, and the public response to it was unlike anything anyone had ever seen, with songs like “Shake, Rattle, and Roll”. I had been singing and playing country and pop music prior to that time. But this new music was fantastic and was the turning point. I was a convert. Others heard it too. Elvis came on board covering the songs of Haley. I first heard Elvis on my crystal radio (believe that!). By this time, I was doing all the “new” songs. The Top Forty format on radio stations had just started. At any time, the same forty songs would get repeated air play. Therefore, anyone who listened soon became aware of the musical trends. But the mid-fifties was an unusual time for music. It was the beginning of “teen” music. The new mix of country and rock - (called “rockabilly”) - was a new phenomenon. There were few rockabilly artists at that time. It was just being born.

*LB: Were there any particular performers that inspired you as a young musician?*

Initially, as a young person, Sol Hoopii was my almost sole inspiration in playing Hawaiian music. I was dedicated to playing the Hawaiian steel guitar. All time vocal and entertainer inspiration came from Al Jolson (the movie “The Jolson

## Interview with Sparkle Moore

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Story”). The Ink Spots were a favorite. Many of the early Grand Old Opry singers were good. Hank Williams, the Blue Yodeler Jimmy Rodgers, Little Brenda Lee, Mahalia Jackson, Johnny Ray, were also inspirational.

During the 50’s, there were a lot of artists both before and after I recorded that were very impressive. I began playing early rock in 1955. I recorded in 1956. Some of my favorites were: Bill Haley (1954), Elvis (1954), The Platters (1955), Marty Robbins (“White Sport Coat”-1957), Ricky Nelson (1957), Little Richard (1955-56), Jerry Lee Lewis (1957), Roy Orbison (1956 I think).

*LB: What kinds of performance opportunities did you have?*

SM: After recording in 1956, teen sock hops were very popular, radio and TV stations, schools, bars, dance halls.

*LB: I'm also curious about your experience with Fraternity records. Why did you choose that label?*

SM: My manager, Grahame Richards, was also a DJ for KOWH in Omaha, Nebraska, and had a tremendous and influential sales ability. He found seven interested recording companies and wound up selecting Fraternity because it was a small label, probably more willing to invest more resources, and the owner of the company was a very persuasive individual. Plus they had just had a hit record.

*LB: What were the recording sessions like for you?*

SM: Honestly, strange, and slightly disappointing, in the sense that I had no

## Interview with Sparkle Moore

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control of sound. I wasn't accustomed to playing with an older established orchestra. I felt uncomfortable and thought the music didn't sound right. I wanted a lot of echo, etc., which never happened. The music wasn't loose enough I thought.

*LB: Am I correct that you wrote your own songs?*

SM: Yes.

*LB: Did you get any assistance from your record label or from anyone else?*

SM: My manager assisted in all aspects. No assistance from the record label. Also, wherever I played, the records seemed never available for purchase in that area.

*LB: In the pictures I have seen of you from the 50s, your fashion seems quite different from what other female performers at the time (especially those in pop or country music) were wearing.*

SM: There were no other rockabilly females at the time I recorded that I was aware of. I dressed the way all rockabilly performers dressed at that time. Flashy jacket and pants.

*LB: How did you develop your on-stage look?*

SM: Easy, I dressed like all of the other rock and roll singers.

## Interview with Sparkle Moore

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*LB: How did people react to the way you looked and sounded when you performed?*

SM: Always, the kids loved me. Parents seemed to go along with it. The bars were a different story. One bar owner said I was welcome to play in his establishment any time I wanted, but “wear something more sexy.” I told him “This is as sexy as I get. I sell music, not sex.” I never played there. It always irritated me to think a woman had to sell her flesh to perform a song, but the same criteria was not demanded from a man. Therefore, I continued to dress the way that was right for me.

Of interest, one time I was playing in a club getting no particular acclaim and I happened to look out the front windows. There were a bunch of kids out there with their faces against the glass. Due to age, they couldn’t come in. After that, I always tried to play at places where the kids could get in. ■