

On Sunday, October 29, 2023, the monthly meeting of the Atlanta Audio Club was held at the Oak Grove Methodist Church classroom. It ran from 2 pm through about 5 pm, and there were around 25 attendees at this meeting. This meeting featured a presentation on early rock and roll innovators that inspired generations of other musicians, presented by club members Paul Tarver and Dan Wittmayer.

Steve Gooding, president of the club, opened the meeting by reminding folks of an upcoming live music event at the Dunwoody North Driving Club on Sunday, December 10 featuring a 12-piece classical music orchestra. He then introduced our first speaker, Dan.

Dan drew a diagram showing how big bands evolved into jazz then into “jump” bands, then rhythm and blues and then into rock & roll and also into soul music.

Dan then played several pieces that all have been “designated” as the “first rock and roll song.” First up was “Rocket 88” about the Olds Rocket 88 automobile. Another was “Good Rocking Tonight.” Yet another was “The Fat Man” and yet another was “Blues Shouter” by Big Joe Turner. Any of these could be considered the first rock and roll song, Dan said. Dan described how innovation inspires quotation, how inspiration leads to fusion, but copying exactly is plagiarism.

Dan ended his portion of the program by playing “Twistin Ghost”. After a break, next up was Paul Tarver showing how early (1940’s and 1950’s) guitarists inspired later guitarists such as Jimmy Hendrix, etc. to innovate their playing techniques. One of these was Charlie Christian who used an EH150 amp with his 1936 Gibson guitar so he could “stand out” while playing with the Benny Goodman sextet. Another influential guitarist was Link Wray who added distortion to his amplified sound by poking holes in his guitar speaker.

Paul discussed Ray Charles and how he crossed over multiple music genres. He also discussed Steve Cropper of the Booker T and the MG’s Band, the house band for a recording studio (Stax Records).

Paul also described the use of the “slap back echo” technique in recording songs such as “Great Balls of Fire.” We watched a brief video on the use of this early technique.

The club sincerely thanks Dan and Paul for another one of their excellent presentations. The club also thanks Dan Wittmayer and his assistant David Mansfield for setting up some excellent snacks and drinks.

Minutes written by Thomas Horner, Secretary, Atlanta Audio Club.