

Rock On: The Del Shannon Story

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Before picture fades in we hear rock music, faint at first.

ON SCREEN GRAPHIC: Del Shannon was one of the handful of 1960s American Rock 'n' Rollers to survive the crushing tide of the British Invasion.

EXT. HAWAIIAN ESTATE - NIGHT

FEBRUARY 8, 1990

A private beach house with its own pool and all the amenities.

INT. HAWAIIAN ESTATE - CONTINUOUS

Moving through the house, the music increases in volume. Instruments are strewn about with small amps and a drum kit.

Follow the music to

INT. HOME STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

The music, DEL SHANNON'S latest track "Walk Away," is now full on. Four MUSICIANS listen, tapping their feet, playing air guitar. But these aren't just any musicians. It's the TRAVELING WILBURYS: GEORGE HARRISON, TOM PETTY, BOB DYLAN and JEFF LYNNE.

PETTY

So what do the Wilburys think?

HARRISON

Del's voice sounds as powerful as ever. And I love the clapping - if that's what it is.

LYNNE

Actually, it's Tom, Del and me slapping our bums.

That cracks George and Bob up.

LYNNE (CONT'D)

We were fully clothed at the time.

More laughter.

DYLAN

He sounds great. Where's he been?

LYNNE

Writing and touring.

PETTY

He put everything he had into this. Even canceled a tour.

HARRISON

Do we go on without Roy or not?

LYNNE

Not only do we go on, we add someone.

EXT. CANYON COUNTRY, CALIFORNIA - DAY

We move down a long driveway to a beautiful home nestled among trees. A new Cadillac sits in the driveway.

INT. WESTOVER CANYON COUNTRY HOME - DAY

We're inside another musician's home. We push past walls lined with gold records for "Runaway," "Little Town Flirt," "Hats off to Larry" and others. This is the home of Charles Weedon Westover aka 60s legend DEL SHANNON.

INT. WESTOVER HOME - CONTINUOUS

As the phone rings, the unmoving figure in the leather rocking chair, Del Shannon, remains motionless.

The answering machine clicks on.

DEL (V.O.)

'Hi, you've reached Del Chuck Shannon.
Leave your message after the tone.'

SFX: BEEP

PETTY (V.O.)

'Hey Del, it's Tom. Are you there?
Pick up.'

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. WESTOVER HOME -COOPERSVILLE, MICHIGAN - NIGHT

1946

This modest home in a small farming community is twenty miles outside of Grand Rapids.

INT. WESTOVER LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Twelve-year-old CHARLES WESTOVER plays a beat-up ukulele as he listens to country artist HANK WILLIAMS on the family radio. When "Calling You" ends, he pulls a worn Sears catalog page out of his back pocket featuring an acoustic guitar for five dollars. His mother LEONE WESTOVER peeks in on him.

LEONE

You're getting better and better all
the time, Chuck.

CHARLIE

Thanks, mom. If I had something with
six strings, I'd be even better.

EXT. WESTOVER HOME - COOPERSVILLE - NIGHT

Charlie's dad BERT parks his truck and takes a long swig of
beer before tossing the can into a pile on the floor.

INT. WESTOVER LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Bert's immediately hit by Charlie's guitar playing.

BERT

You get that Goddamned guitar out of
here or I will.

Charlie stops playing and heads for his room.

INT. CHARLIE'S BEDROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Leone sticks her head in.

LEONE

You can play for me anytime, Chuck.

Charlie smiles at his mom.

INT. LIVING ROOM

BERT

What ever happened to peace and quiet,
home sweet home and all that crap?

INT. COOPERSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Charlie's in class. He's playing his guitar there, too.
Classmate KAREN keeps looking at him. And vice-versa.

TEACHER

Charles Weedon Westover!

He stops.

CHARLIE

Yes, ma'am?

TEACHER

Congratulations. You have just broken
the camel's back.

Class snickers.

INT. BOYS' LOCKER ROOM - LATER

Principal RUSS CONRAN escorts Charlie inside.

CONRAN

You can play in here before and after school but only if you pay attention in class.

CHARLIE

Did she kick me out forever?

CONRAN

No but she did mumble something about this going in your permanent record.

CHARLIE

Is there such a thing?

CONRAN

If there is, I've never seen it.

EXT. COOPERSVILLE CITY STREETS - LATER

Charlie, carrying books and guitar, walks with KAREN.

KAREN

You never took a lesson?

CHARLIE

Nope. Taught myself.

KAREN

Wow, that's amazing. I took piano lessons but the teacher kept banging my hands on the keys when I didn't get it right. So I quit.

CHARLIE

Music can really take you anywhere. You can be having a good day and it makes it great. Or if it's a bad day, a good song makes it better. That's what I like about it.

KAREN

I love hearing you talk about music.

She kisses him quickly.

CHARLIE

So, you know, the prom's coming up.

KAREN

I do know.

CHARLIE

Would you like to go with me?

KAREN

Yes!

He smiles big, she hugs him and they walk on, hand in hand.

INT. CHARLIE'S BEDROOM - COOPERSVILLE - NIGHT

Charlie's lost in his guitar playing when his mom enters.

LEONE

I knocked but you didn't hear me.

He stops strumming.

LEONE (CONT'D)

Karen's on the phone for you.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

An ashen Charlie is on the phone, voice low, desperate for some privacy from his parents sitting nearby.

CHARLIE

But it's next week...Whataya mean you changed your mind?..You're going with *him*?..No, if I was interested in her, I would've asked her in the first place. Bye.

Crushed, he hangs up.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Charlie takes out his rejection on his guitar, strumming furiously as his fingers bleed onto the pick guard.

EXT. THE CARPET OUTLET LOADING DOCK- BATTLE CREEK, MICHIGAN

1958

Charlie, now 25, sits on a long roll of carpeting, scribbling in a well-worn spiral notebook, taking occasional bites of lunch. Boss PETER VICE gets out of his Cadillac DeVille.

VICE

Charlie, you're gonna need another notebook soon.

CHARLIE

When I hear it in my head, I have to get it down.

VICE

You got a title already?

CHARLIE

Little Runaway.

VICE

Back at the Hi-Lo tonight?

CHARLIE

Yeah. The manager wants to talk. I hope he's not firing me.

EXT. LASALLE HOTEL - BATTLE CREEK, MICHIGAN - NIGHT

The Hi-Lo Club is on the ground floor of this three-story flop-house. A sign announces "DOUG DEMOTT and THE MOONLIGHT RAMBLERS."

INT. HI-LO CLUB - THAT NIGHT

More dump than club, its rectangular room has a bar with stools on the left and opposite that, tables in front of a long upholstered built-in bench.

A ratty curtain frames the tiny stage where the band plays Elvis's "Don't." DOUG sings and plays guitar, sixty-year-old LOREN is on "slap" bass and Charlie is on lead. Small amps sit on chairs; a single snare drum is unattended. When Loren starts to nod off, Charlie gives him a quick nudge.

DEMOTT

Charlie's going to sing our last one. And he plays a mean lead on it, too. Thanks for coming. We'll see ya all right back here tomorrow night.

As they play "Jailhouse Rock, it's clear that Charlie's talent outweighs Doug's. And he can actually sing. When a fight breaks out at the bar, the band doesn't miss a beat.

INT. HI-LO CLUB - LATER

The Club MANAGER pulls DeMott aside.

CLUB MANAGER

I'm making a change.

DEMOTT

If you want us to play something else, we can do that.

CLUB MANAGER

I'm putting Westover in charge.

EXT. BROWN'S TRAILER PARK - BATTLE CREEK, MI - LATE NIGHT

Charlie pulls into this modest well-kept trailer park.

INT. WESTOVER TRAILER - NIGHT

A proud Charlie watches his one-year-old son CRAIG sleeping in his crib. Wife SHIRLEY joins him.

SHIRLEY

I thought I heard you come in.

They embrace.

CHARLIE

I've been promoted. If you play your cards right, I might be able to get you in for free.

She kisses him.

SHIRLEY

Come to bed and tell me all about it.

EXT. HI-LO CLUB - ANOTHER NIGHT

"Charlie Johnson and The Big Little Show Band" headline.

INT. HI LO CLUB - CONTINUOUS

The music is more polished as Charlie, Loren, a new GUITARIST and drummer DICK PARKER play Chuck Berry's "Sweet Little Sixteen."

INT. HI-LO CLUB - LATER

The guys pack up their stuff.

PARKER

I've got someone you should meet.

CHARLIE

Shirley and I are very happy.

PARKER

Funny. Another musician. Plays accordion and piano.

CHARLIE

We're a rock band, not Lawrence Welk.

PARKER

Does it hurt to let the guy audition?
(MORE)

PARKER (CONT'D)

He's got this weird keyboard; very out of this world.

INT. HI-LO CLUB - EARLY EVENING

Dick Parker's friend MAX CROOK arrives with cases of equipment. Loren unpacks his bass.

DICK

Hey, Max. Glad you could make it. That's Loren. Charlie should be here --

Charlie arrives with his guitar.

CHARLIE

Charlie Westover. Good to meet you.

They shake hands then Max unpacks and sets up his keyboard. It's unlike anything anyone's seen.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Is that the -- ?

MAX

Musitron.

A double-keyboard sits atop a three-legged stand with an amp, a speaker and custom electronics boxes. Cables are attached, tubes hum and glow and Max does some runs. Charlie, Dick and Loren all look at each other.

MAX (CONT'D)

You wanna start with a cover or an original?

EXT. HI-LO CLUB - NIGHT

PEOPLE line up outside the door and around the corner.

FAN #1

At least we're early. Last week I couldn't buy a seat. Fire Marshall's a dick. Said it was too crowded.

INT. HI-LO CLUB - LATER

The band plays Bobby Freeman's "Do You Want To Dance." They've got a better, tighter sound.

INT. HI LO CLUB - ANOTHER DAY

Charlie and the guys rehearse in the empty club when the front door opens slowly. A sharp-dressed black MAN peers inside apprehensively.

It's Ann Arbor disc jockey OLLIE MCLAUGHLIN. Max signals the band to stop playing.

MAX
Hey Ollie, come on in.

Ollie sets down a portable reel-to-reel tape machine.

MAX (CONT'D)
Sorry you can't come to a show.

OLLIE
This isn't Detroit. I know how things work.

MAX
Guys, this is *the* Ollie McLaughlin. From WHRV. He got me my first deal with Dot Records.

Handshakes all around.

CHARLIE
Charlie Johnson.

OLLIE
Max speaks highly of you. Let's not waste any time. What have you got?

As Ollie sets up his tape recorder, the band gets back onstage. They play Charlie's original "Living in Misery." And Max's instrumental "Hi-Lo Boogie." They finish off with "Hound Dog." Ollie smiles and applauds politely. Charlie hands him another tape.

CHARLIE
Thanks, Ollie. There's more on this.

Charlie flips the tape box over to point out four song titles.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
"The Search" and "I'll Always Love You" are mine and Max wrote the two instrumentals "Mr. Lonely" and "Seventh Hour."

OLLIE
I like what I heard. Let me give this a listen and if it's as good, I'll talk to some producers I know.

CHARLIE
Sounds good. Thanks for coming.

EXT. DETROIT MOVIE THEATER - DAY

An older building with offices above on Alexandrine Street.

INT. TALENT ASSOCIATES - DAY

Ollie stops the tape he's been playing for co-owners HARRY BALK and IRV MICAHNIK in their tiny office.

HARRY

I've bailed Little Willie John out of jail for the last time. I could use a nice clean teen idol.

EXT. DETROIT MOVIE THEATER - ANOTHER DAY

Charlie and Max approach.

CHARLIE

His office is in a movie theater?

MAX

I told ya. He owns some downtown theaters. Runs talent shows out of them, too.

INT. TALENT ASSOCIATES - CONTINUOUS

Charlie and Max sit in the cramped waiting room. Photos of Little Willie John, Johnny and the Hurricanes and some lesser-known artists line the wall. No receptionist is present.

A very harried Irving arrives, smiles at Charlie and Max and disappears inside the office.

INT. TALENT ASSOCIATES - DAY

Harry shakes his head at Irving's late arrival.

HARRY

You look like shit. Y'know, it might help to put our business ahead of your business with your bookie.

IRV

Yeah, yeah.

Harry opens his office door.

HARRY

Come on in, guys.

INT. HARRY AND IRV'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Charlie and Max sit opposite Harry and Irv.

HARRY

We like your stuff. Ollie's got a good ear.

CHARLIE

Thanks.

HARRY

We want to sign you to Talent Associates and set up a recording session in New York.

He hands them each a contract.

HARRY (CONT'D)

Standard industry contract. Think about a name change while you're at it. Charles Westover doesn't exactly pop. And if we do business, you're younger, single and childless.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - LATER

Charlie and Max flip through the contract over coffee.

CHARLIE

Five years is a long time.