

## **“Roll Over Beethoven”**

An Article by Frank Daniels

### **Chess Singles Label Styles**

**Label 50** – June 1950 through September 1957

This label appears on 45 RPM and 78 RPM singles.

“CHESS” appears at the top, with chess pieces to the side and through the logo.

The 45 RPM singles have the colors swapped, with the white color replaced by silver.



**Label 57** – October 1957 through March 1961

Blue, black, or gold label with CHESS running vertically down the left side.

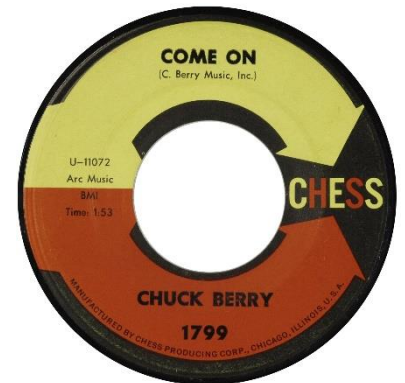
Chess released singles at 78 RPM only for potential hits after 1958, with the latest known 78 being Chuck Berry's "Let it Rock" in late January 1960.

Some singles continued to use the blue label until March 1963.



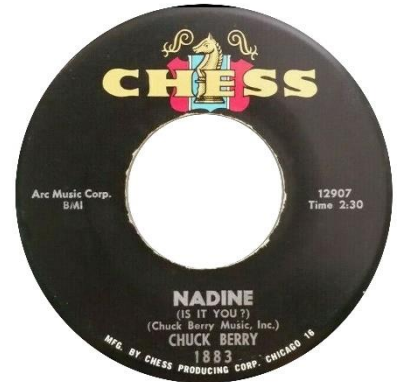
**Label 61** – April 1961 through March 1963

Yellow, red, and black label with arrows pointing to CHESS. CHESS appears at the right side.



**Label 63** – March 1963 through October 1966

Black label with CHESS in front of a shield at the top.

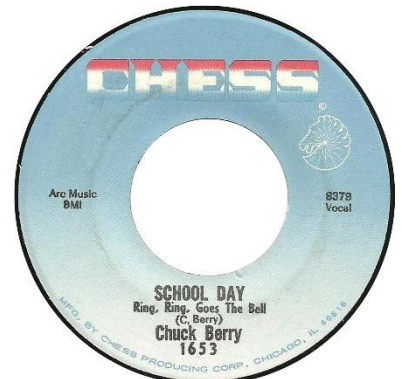


**Label 66** – November 1966 through July 1971

Light blue label with CHESS in red, white, and blue at the top.

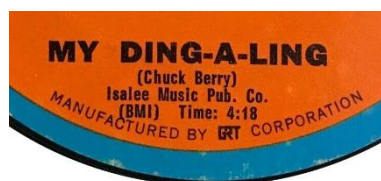
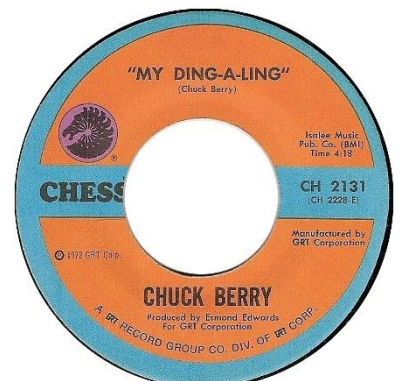
In March 1969, Chess became part of General Recorded Tape (GRT), but the label style remained the same for two more years.

One pressing plant kept this label into 1972.



**Label 71** – July 1971 through July 1975

Orange and turquoise label with rim print reading "A GRT Record Group Co., Div. of GRT Corp." or "Manufactured by GRT Corporation." While it seems as though one of the two wordings ought to have been "first" and the other "second," both appear on singles from 1971 all the way through 1975.



**Label 71p** – August 1975 through July 1977

Orange and turquoise label with rim print reading “A GRT Record Group Co., Div. of GRT Corp.” or “Manufactured by GRT Corporation.” In August 1975, GRT was losing money. They sold Chess Records to the All Platinum Record Group. Within two more years, Chess was not releasing any more singles.



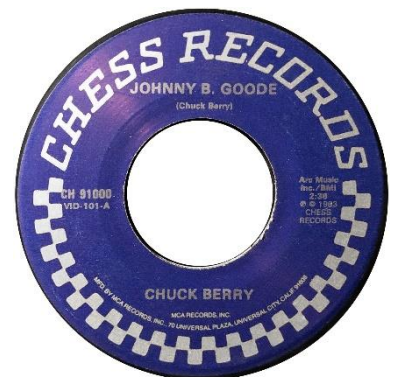
**Label 82** – April 1982 through December 1983

Nostalgic “chess piece” label with rim print reading “A Division of Sugar Hill Record, Ltd....” All Platinum Records had been part of a group that, by 1979, included Sugar Hill Records. By 1982, the owners decided to retire most of the subsidiary labels – keeping the Sugar Hill banner. They relaunched Chess in April 1982.



**Label 83** – December 1983 through January 1985

Blue label with chessboard squares across the bottom. Mfd. by MCA. MCA purchased Chess from Sugar Hill at the end of 1983, but by January 1985, they were struggling to keep the imprint going. Although Sugar Hill announced in 1985 that they were going to rerelease much of the Chess catalog, Sugar Hill's own financial struggles prevented them from taking much action, and in particular, there were no more singles on Chess. MCA let the label lie dormant until the 1997 release of compilation albums in the compact-disc format.



Meanwhile, the **Golden Goodies** label appeared on the market in about 1962, not only releasing Chess material but also using a typeface identical to what Chess was using on their main label. This label was a Chess budget subsidiary.



## Would Beethoven roll over in his grave?

When Chuck Berry began to write "Roll Over Beethoven," he was keenly aware of how difficult it was to get a song to become a hit all around the country. Following a signature guitar introduction, the lyrics begin by urging teenagers everywhere to write to their "local DJ," requesting that they hear "Roll Over Beethoven" on the radio. If you want to hear music like this, you're going to have to ask for it.

The second verse indicates that the listener has both the "rocking pneumonia" (a parody of "walking pneumonia") and the "rolling arthritis." Therefore, he needs "a shot of rhythm and blues." Both "rocking pneumonia" (1957) and "a shot of rhythm and blues" (1962) would be featured in song titles – by people whom Chuck inspired. He mentions catching the disease at a Rhythm Revue; this was a blues tradition going back at least to the 1920s.

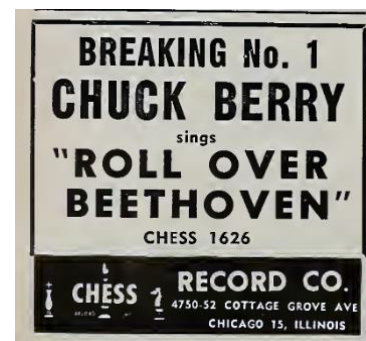
Urging partners to "reel and rock with one another" and referring also to Tchaikovsky, Chuck goes on to give his listener a warning stemming from rock and roll. First, don't step on his blue suede shoes (a reference to Carl Perkins, of course). "Hey diddle diddle" means not the poem but Checker Records blues musician, Bo Diddley – who also played a fiddle. Kids, as long as you have money for the jukebox, the rock and roll won't ever stop.

This was the first hit rock-and-roll song *about* rock-and-roll itself. It was the delineator of the generation, and Chuck knew it. The new music was replacing classical music, and all the parents' generation could do was to either enjoy it or to get out of its way.



### CHUCK BERRY

Roll Over, Beethoven (Arc, BMI)—Chess 1626—This side has humor, a driving beat and, most of all, Berry's own distinctive and wailingly primitive style. A natural for action. Flip is "Drifting Heart" (Arc, BMI)





**Chess 1626      “Roll Over Beethoven”/ “Drifting Heart”      (78 RPM)**  
First Appearance in Trade Magazines: May 19, 1956



**Monarch pressing (M)**



**Plastic Products pressing (P)**

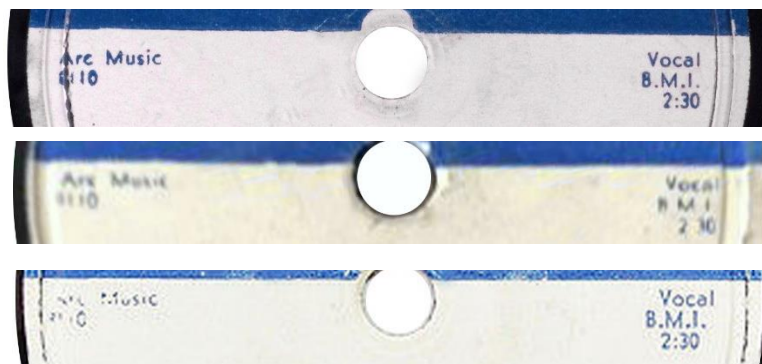
In addition to lacking the manufacturing statement that Monarch pressings have, the Plastic Products pressings seem to have come out in groups of small quantities, so that they had to order different printings of the label – over and over – as the single continued to sell well. These label printings differ by the location of the information on the label. The descriptions below indicate the information on the A-side of the single.

Label 78P(i) – The A in Arc Music lies to the left of 8110 below it. The V in Vocal is left-aligned with the B in B.M.I.

Label 78P(ii) – The A in Arc is left-aligned with 8110. The V in Vocal is over the . after the B in B.M.I.

Label 78P(iii) – The A in Arc is to the right of 8110. The V in Vocal is over the . after the B in B.M.I.

Label 78P(iv) – The A in Arc is to the right of 8110. The V in Vocal is over the left side of the M in B.M.I.





**Chess 1626 “Roll Over Beethoven”/ “Drifting Heart” (45 RPM)**

First Appearance in Trade Magazines: May 19, 1956

Promotional copies exist from Plastic Products. These copies have reversed colors (blue on top), DJ markings, and label print in red.



**Monarch pressing (M)**



**Plastic Products (P)**



Label 50P(i) – The A in Arc Music lies to the left of 8110 below it. The V in Vocal is left-aligned with the B in B.M.I. Berry’s author credit is closer to his name than to the title above it.

Label 50P(ii) – The same as 50P(i), but more space has been added below (Berry).

Label 50P(iii) – Similar to 50P(ii), but the credits on the right have been moved further to the right.

Label 50P(iv) – The A in Arc is to the left of 8110. The V in Vocal is over the right side of the B in B.M.I.

Label 50P(v) – The A in Arc is left-aligned with 8110. The V in Vocal is over the middle of the B in B.M.I.

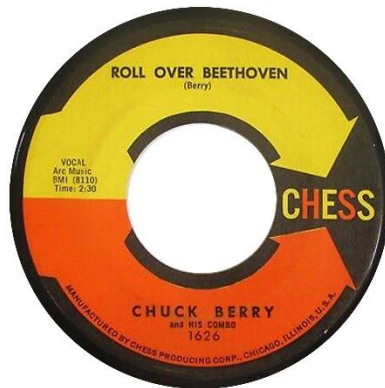
Label 50P(vi) – The A in Arc is left-aligned with 8110. The V in Vocal is over the left side of the M in B.M.I.

Label 50P(vii) – The A in Arc is to the right of 8110. The V in Vocal is left-aligned with the B in B.M.I.

Label 50P(viii) – The A in Arc is to the right of 8110. The V in Vocal is over the left side of the M in B.M.I.

The Monarch job numbers, Δ 9647 and Δ 9645, correspond to a pressing in the second week in May 1956.

Chess 1626 "Roll Over Beethoven"/ "Drifting Heart"  
Label 57



Label 61



Label GG62



Label 63



Label 66

Currently, no copies are known on Label 71. The A-side became part of the Blue Chip Series in 1972.