

***Maybellene***  
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.

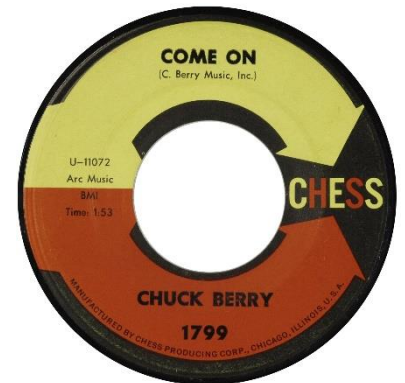
Chess released singles at 78 RPM only for potential hits after 1958, with the latest known 78 being Chuck Berry's "Let it Rock" in late January 1960.

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



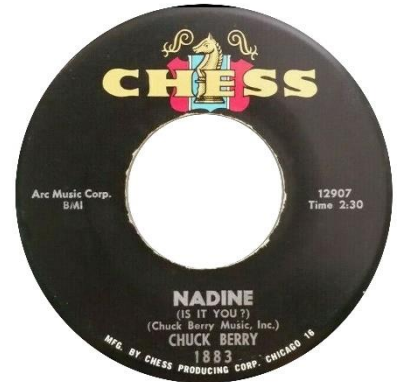
**Label 61** – April 1961 through March 1963

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.

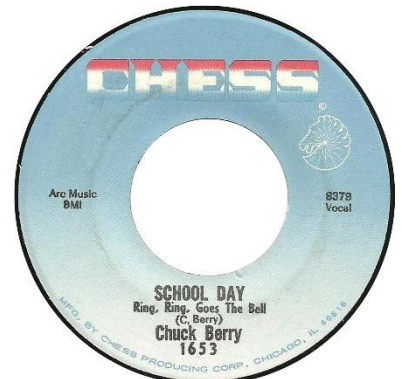


**Label 66** – November 1966 through July 1971

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

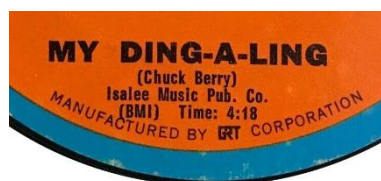
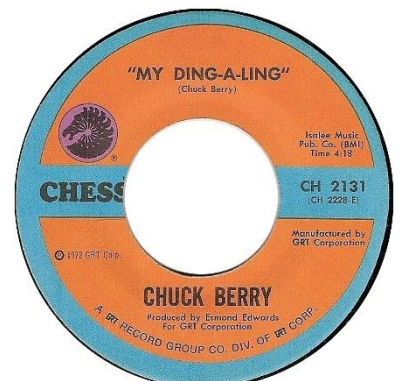
In March 1969, Chess became part of General Recorded Tape (GRT), but the label style remained the same for two more years.

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.



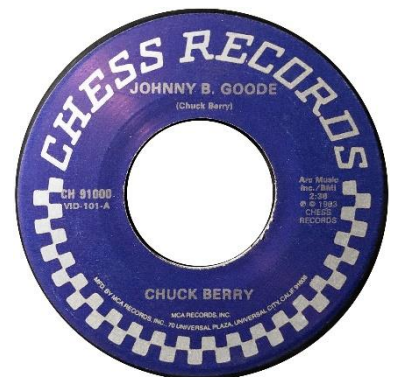
**Label 82** – April 1982 through December 1983

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.



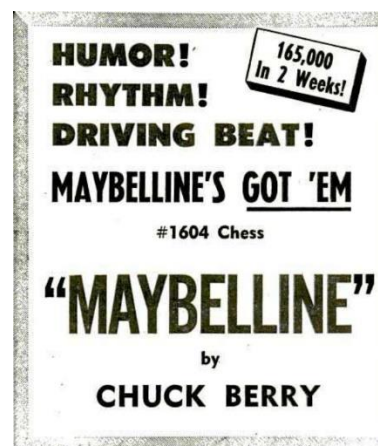
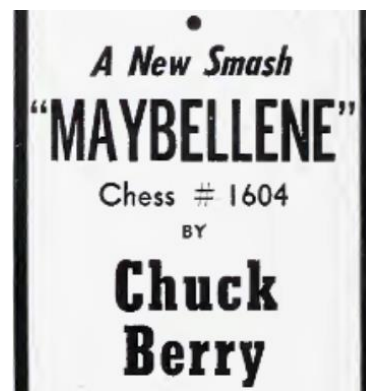
## Our story begins with a cow.

Charles Edward Anderson Berry remembered a poem that featured a cow named Maybellene. When Chuck created his first hit single, he needed a name, and that was the one he grabbed. Chuck was very much into poetry; as a result, he formed his own words (“motorvating”) and put together evocative stories with what he called “basic” rhythm-and-blues music to tell stories that his audience would appreciate. Combining that with his finely-detailed guitar skill, Chuck Berry became an important member of the generation of rock-and-roll innovators: a “cog in the wheel,” as he put it.

Apparently on Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> of May 1955, Chuck made a pilgrimage to Chicago to see Muddy Waters play, and to speak with him about music. As Chuck put it, “I quickly told him of my admiration for his compositions and asked him who I could see about making a record.... Those very famous words were, ‘Yeah, see Leonard Chess. Yeah, Chess Records over on Forty-seventh and Cottage.’” After being told that the Chess brothers would want to hear a demonstration tape of four songs, Chuck rushed home and recorded the demo. Taking it back to Chicago with him, Chuck’s account indicates that he gave them six songs – including what would become both sides of his first single. Chess liked what he heard, and on May 21, 1955 (Saturday), Chuck’s musical combo laid down the single. Chuck played electric guitar and sang, while Johnnie Johnson accompanied him on piano. They were backed by Willie Dixon (bass) and Ebby Hardy (drums), and Jerome Green added maracas as a finishing touch. The flip side featured the same band, but without the maracas.

For “Maybellene,” Chuck incorporated parts of the melody to the verses in the Western Swing song, “Ida Red.” He already had the song basically complete when he auditioned for Chess Records, although Leonard Chess and others would later take credit for parts of the song. A perfectionist, Berry spent 36 takes getting the A-side to sound just right, and it was not only right for the single, but it was right for the time as well.

Chess put out the single in mid-July, and immediately it took off – hitting the top spot on the R&B charts and making it to #5 on the pop chart. After “Maybellene” came out, Chuck was in high demand. He went from earning \$50 per week in clubs to making \$800 weekly, and then \$250 nightly.



### • Review Spotlight on . . .

#### RECORDS

CHUCK BERRY

Maybellene (Arc, BMI)—Chess 1604—Berry socks across an amusing novelty with ace showmanship and expressive good humor. The tune has a catchy rhythm and a solid, driving beat. Fine jockey and juke wax. Flip is “Wee Wee Hums” (Arc, BMI).

### ► CHESS New Releases to Watch

#1602—Chess

## “MANISH BOY”

by

MUDDY WATERS

#1604—Chess

## “MAYBELLENE”

by

CHUCK BERRY

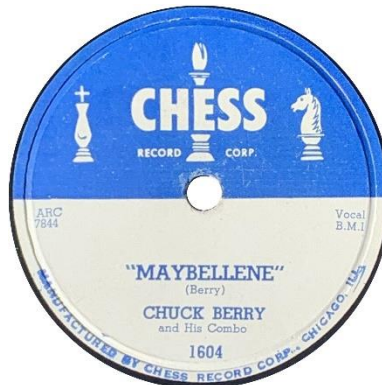
. . . Phil Chess of Chess and Checker Records visiting Detroit and Cleveland with two of their new releases. The Flamingos’ “I Want To Love You” and “Maybellene” by Chuck Berry. Len Chess, holding the fort



**Chess 1604      "Maybellene"/ "Wee Wee Hours"      (78 RPM)**  
 First Appearance in Trade Magazines:    July 23, 1955



**Monarch pressing: Arc above matrix number**



**ARC above matrix number**



**Matrix Number over ARC  
"And" capitalized**



**Matrix Number over ARC  
"and" in lower case**



The labels to the 78-RPM singles often appear washed out, to the point of looking gray rather than blue.



**Chess 1604 "Maybellene"/ "Wee Wee Hours" (45 RPM)**

First Appearance in Trade Magazines: July 23, 1955

Promotional copies exist from one east-coast pressing plant. These copies were copies with switched colors (blue on top) and additional red stampings.



**Monarch pressing: Arc above matrix number**



**ARC above matrix number**



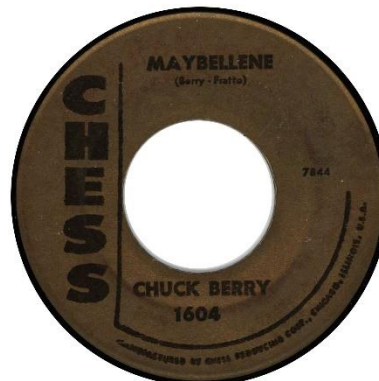
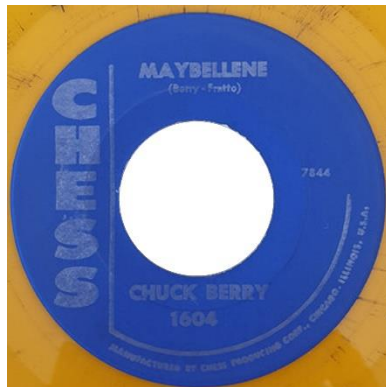
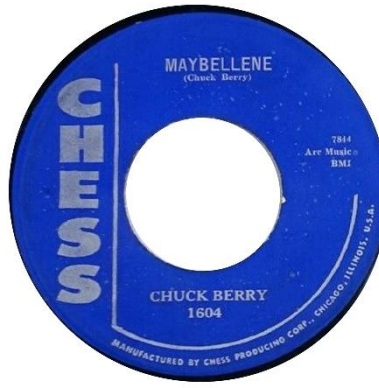
**Matrix Number over ARC  
"And" capitalized**



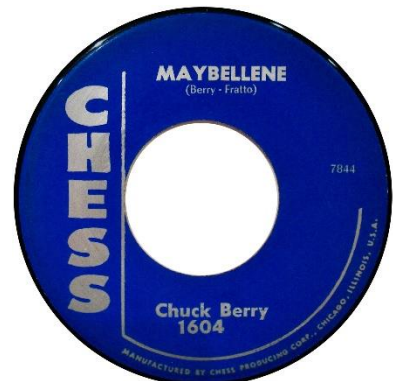
**Matrix Number over ARC  
"and" in lower case**

The Monarch job numbers, Δ 5101 and Δ 5104, correspond to a pressing in early July 1955.

Chess 1604 "Maybellene" / "Wee Wee Hours" (45 RPM)  
Label 57



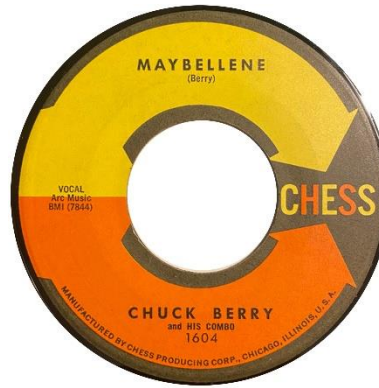
Gold Label



Label GG62



Label 61



Label 63



Label 66



Currently, no copies are known on Label 71.

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