

I.R.S. #8: THE PRE-GAME SHOW



File now until April 1 at <http://www.musicradio77.com/IRS.html>.

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“Fighting to Stay Free”

#191...March 2015

And now, ladies and gentlemen...

...what to expect from the 8th annual I.R.S. (“It Really Shoulda” been a Top 10 hit!) Top 104, to be revealed over pre-tax deadline weekend (Friday April 10, and Sunday April 12) over RewoundRadio.com?

After seven years of doing this (and, by the way, I never expected it to be an annual thing, but I’m glad it’s turned out that way), I’ve noticed certain patterns emerge. Here’s what we’ve seen and expect to see, but remember, there’s still lots of time to impact this year’s list, if you haven’t yet filed your I.R.S. form.

WHAT’S NUMBER ONE? Like *Seinfeld*, for all but one of its seven years, the I.R.S. Top 104 has been a show about nothing: “Nothing But a Heartache,” that is. The Flirtations’ anything-but-a-smash from

1969 has grabbed the top rung four times and finished second twice (it came in at an unspectacular #47 our first year in 2008). For most of those four years the song topped the list, it wasn't even close.



So, what's the secret of "Heartache's" success, and can it repeat in 2015? While the song always shows up prominently on I.R.S. forms, rarely is it at the top, yet the high rankings have given it enough points to take the prize.

What could give "Heartache" a headache? For starters, it could be any of the other three songs to have topped the 104 (Orpheus' "Can't Find the Time," Bruce Springsteen's "Born to Run" and the Critters' "Mr. Dieingly Sad"). Then there are the other tunes that have hung around the top long enough but have never taken the prize. Will Peppermint Rainbow be saying they're the champs after that Sunday, or will the Magic Lanterns light their way to the top?

This year's race may be too close to call at this moment, but that could very well change in the final week, as most rush to file their I.R.S. form (see? it's the same situation as that other one).

WILL THE 60s REIGN? Since 2008, you could take any slice of the Top 104 - top 10, 20, 40 or the whole darn thing - and songs from the 1960s have always claimed a huge share of activity. Focusing on the top 10, here's how it's shaken out:

YEAR - # of songs from the 1960s

2008 - 8

2009 - 8

2010 - 7

2011 - 9

2012 - 8

2013 - 8

2014 - 8

This isn't to suggest there aren't as many worthy 'really shouldas' from the 1970s, rather it reflects the median age of those filing. As more younger participants join the fun, we should see a gradually increasing share for 70s songs. There's the oft-chance, based on the returns until now, that a small shift could happen with #8. It can't remain Christie, Lighthouse and Springsteen every year.

WILL THE 80s SHOW UP? It's become a bone of contention for the younger end of I.R.S.-ers: many songs are worthy but few have made it that high. The few that have drawn a consensus over the years: the Romantics' "What I Like About You," Split Enz' "I Got You," Diesel's "Sausalito Summernight," the Go-Go's "Our Lips Are Sealed," Modern English's "I Melt With You" and Greg Kihn Band's "The Breakup Song (They Don't Write 'Em)."

Select others, such as the Vapors' "Turning Japanese," Rick James' "Super Freak" and Charlie Dore's "Pilot of the Airwaves" have come close, a couple of others have made it in for one year (such as Peter Gabriel's "In Your Eyes" and Salt-n-Pepa's "Push It") but there really hasn't ever been a rush of 80s matching the enthusiasm for the lesser hits of that era. While we've taken some measures to fix that - hitting up 80s-based social media groups, and applying heavier weighting to later songs filed on multiple forms - it's not likely to turn this around.

WILL ALL OF THE "ELITE 9" RETURN? Only nine songs have made the Top 104 every year since the first. While four of those nine - "Heartache," "Can't Find," "Shame, Shame" and "Born to Run" - are sure to get their tickets punched again, there are no guarantees, as is the case each year, for the lower-finishing five (Martha & the Vandellas' "Come and Get These Memories," Ike & Tina Turner's "River Deep - Mountain High," Steve Alaimo's "Every Day I Have to

Cry,” the Byrds’ “I’ll Feel a Whole Lot Better” and the Dells’ “There Is”).

WHY SO MUCH TURNOVER EVERY YEAR? Blame it simply on how many great songs never made it to the top 10. Most who file tend to drop a few and add a few each year, and the regular influx of new filers always shakes things up a bit. While there’s still plenty of consistency from one year to the next, as well as over all eight years – explaining how some titles can return to the Top 104 after as much as a six-year absence (as Sam & Dave’s “Hold On, I’m A Comin’” did in 2014) – expecting close to a third of the Top 104 to change every year has become more the rule than the exception.

IS ROCK DEAD ON THE I.R.S.? Pop hits in top 40’s second-tier rotation have always fared better on the Top 104 than those songs that also lived on rock FM, even if they fared just as well on top 40. There have been exceptions here and there with one- or two-timers like Kansas’ “Carry On Wayward Son,” Emerson, Lake & Palmer’s “Lucky Man” and the Cars’ “Just What I Needed” – and of course Bruce – but it’s mostly been about those songs top 40 owned. And that’s probably the answer right there: as classic rock radio keeps many of the 70s and some of the 60s rock-based songs alive, there’s probably less of an urgency to see them make the Top 104. Although early returns suggest there may be a major breakthrough by a rock classic this year.

IS R&B LIMITED TO MOTOWN AND “FAUX-TOWN”? The Sam & Dave situation suggests that’s the case, although “There Is” has always been the anomaly here. Marvin & Tammi, Martha, the Supremes, Four Tops, Miracles and Motown-era Spinners comprise the majority of the R&B tracks each year, with Motown-sounding songs like “Heartache,” the Foundations’ “At the Top of the Stairs” and J.J. Jackson’s “But It’s Alright” rounding out the usual bunch. Granted, last year doo-wop had better representation than usual, with “Since I Don’t Have You” and “I Only Have Eyes for You” joining “In the Still of the Night,” but the jury’s out on whether this can happen again as filers get younger.

WILL THERE BE A “LESLEY GORE EFFECT”? Last year we saw a “Beatles effect” coming off the well-publicized 50th anniversary of the British Invasion, with an unprecedented three songs by the group landing in the Top 104. Lesley Gore did the same trick a year earlier, for no reason except that they were three great pop hits that shoulda been top 10 (“California Nights,” “Look of Love” and “Maybe I Know”). Now, sadly, there is a reason, and it looks as if those three will easily return, while other songs of hers may make a run for the first time.



The 8th annual I.R.S. might be her party.

WHAT SURPRISES CAN BE EXPECTED? If I told you, they wouldn't be surprises, would they? Every year, a few songs make big splashes their first year in the Top 104 (as Mama Cass' “Make Your Own Kind of Music” did in 2014) or gather enough mentions and points to soar up the list relative to the year before (as Sniff 'n the Tears' “Driver's Seat” did, also last year). The 8th annual I.R.S. Top 104 will certainly be no exception.

That's why you'll want to make sure your I.R.S. form makes it here by April 1, and to tune in starting April 10th to hear how they all finished for 2015. Here's that link again: <http://www.musicradio77.com/IRS.html>. Note that when you file, you 'really oughta' include your mail address, in case you're a randomly selected winner of Dann Isbell and Bill Carroll's must-have chart resources *Ranking the '60s* (<http://www.amazon.com/Ranking-60s-Comprehensive-Listing-Golden/dp/1492156280>) and *Ranking the '70s*.

ONE LAST “THING”: No need to wait for the April 12 conclusion of the 8th annual I.R.S. Top 104 to check out Sundays on Rewound Radio, when I host *That Thing with Rich Appel* at 6pm Eastern. It’s meant as a loving tribute to the Drake-and-friends take on top 40 during the 60s and 70s, so if you loved that and don’t mind a little more talk at the breaks (yes, we’ve got them), join us at RewoundRadio.com and at our group at <https://www.facebook.com/ThatThingRichAppel>.



Check out my *Billboard* “Revisionist History” and “Hot 100’s Hottest Weeks” stories at <http://www.billboard.com/author/rich-appel-4314453>.

Hz So Good online (current issue, and archive back to 2010) at <http://www.60s70s.org/HzSoGood/>.

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Rich Appel is a talented and experienced writer about the radio and music industries. He's written Hz So Good since 1996, and written for Billboard since 2011. His services are available for your publication or website. Contact Rich at richappel@verizon.net.