

Chuck Berry was the true “Father of Rock n Roll”

By **James Williams** - March 19, 2017



Chuck Berry was the true rock n roll pioneer. A one of a kind personality

It has been said by everyone from Eric Clapton to Bruce Springsteen that Chuck Berry invented “Rock n Roll,” as we know it. I would say at the least he added the element of showmanship to the new style of music.

Over the course of my career I directed three of his concerts and he never disappointed. He knew what the crowd wanted and he gave them everything he had.

During a series of concerts I directed in the 1980’s with *The Stray Cats*, I once asked Lee Rocker who jumped, jived and wailed on the upright bass for rockabilly about the bands

love for Berry's music. They often saluted Berry by playing at least one or two of his songs every performance they ever gave. Roker loved to praise his long time idol.

"If there was a Mount Rushmore of rock 'n' roll, Chuck Berry would be dead center," said Roker.

"He's one of the architects of rock 'n' roll," Roker said. "And in addition to his music, I have to say that one of the things he brought to rock 'n' roll was incredible lyrics. I don't know if he's [ever] been equaled.

"When you look at 'Memphis, Tennessee,' with 'Last time I saw Marie she's waving me good-bye / With hurry home drops on her cheek that trickled from her eye,' it just doesn't get better," Roker said.

Chuck Berry came on the scene with "Maybellene" and it shot out of America's radios like a rocket in the summer of 1955, one hard, true thing remains clear after those 62 years:

Nothing like it ever existed before.

Berry's opening solo on "Johnny B. Goode" is the single most iconic performance in rock history. Every rock guitarist since is in his debt. In addition, Berry wrote and sang at least two dozen rock 'n' roll classics, including "Roll Over Beethoven" and "Back in the U.S.A.," many of them recorded at Chicago's Chess Studios in the 1950s and '60s and later covered by countless artists, including the Beatles, Beach Boys and Rolling Stones.

"If you tried to give rock and roll another name, you might call it 'Chuck Berry,'" John Lennon once said.

Here's why: There was no category that could safely contain it. It charted No. 1 on the rhythm and blues charts, which was where most black recording artists such as Berry could be found. But its beat and its sensibility were just as deeply rooted in the predominantly white traditions of country blues and western swing.



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Berry was the most innovative of rock 'n' roll's founding big daddy's pushing the boundaries to their limits in the 1950s to full boil, Fats Domino, Little Richard and Jerry Lee Lewis were great showman but not like Berry.

Rolling Stone magazine once declared that rock guitar began with Berry and, once again, it's not hard to make the case. Berry's licks and riffs, fluid, supple and multi-tiered, remain electrifying enough to empower wave upon wave of guitarists seeking more blues in their

rhythms and more rhythms.

As matter of fact *Rolling Stone*, also listed Berry as the 6th greatest rock and roll guitarist of all time. Berry's rapid style and rhythmic drive was derived from swing jazz and the hybrid boogie-woogie played by another St. Louis musician, pianist Johnnie Johnson, who would become his often-unsung collaborator.

The teens of the 1950's and early 1960's identified with Berry's lyrics and their endless struggle with adult authority, and championed the idea that fun was just as much a part of growing up as preparing to be an adult. He was able to use upbeat songs to point out racism ("Brown Eyed Handsome Man") and satirized the workday runaround ("Too Much Monkey Business").

Berry was a one of a kind entertainer and he will be missed.

For those who aren't familiar with Berry's work allow me to share these few songs with you.

3. You Can't Catch Me-4:47
4. Downbound Train-7:32
5. Promised Land-10:24
6. Roll Over Beethoven-12:49
7. Brown Eyed Handsome Man-15:14
8. Rock and Roll Music-17:34
9. Oh Baby Doll-20:08
10. Too Much Monkey Business-22:48
11. Johnny B. Goode-25:44
12. Havana Moon-28:26
13. School Day-31:35
14. Reelin' and Rockin'-34:19
15. Sweet Little Sixteen-37:36
16. Around and Around-40:39
17. Carol-43:21
18. Memphis-46:11
19. Beautiful Delilah-48:23
20. Anthony Boy-50:34
21. JoJo Gunne-52:29
22. Back in the USA-55:17
23. Come on-57:45
24. Nadine-59:36
25. No Particular Place To Go- 1:02:11



James Williams

Jim Williams is the Washington Bureau Chief, Digital Director as well as the Director of Special Projects for Genesis Communications. He is starting his third year as part of the team. This is Williams 40th year in the media business, and in that time he has served in a number of capacities. He is a seven time Emmy Award winning television producer, director, writer and executive. He has developed four regional sports networks, directed over 2,000 live sporting events including basketball, football, baseball hockey, soccer and even polo to name a few sports. Major events include three Olympic Games, two World Cups, two World Series, six NBA Playoffs, four Stanley Cup Playoffs, four NCAA Men's National Basketball Championship Tournaments (March Madness), two Super Bowl and over a dozen college bowl games. On the entertainment side Williams was involved with Berman Concerts and directed over 500 concerts for Showtime, Pay Per View and MTV Networks.

