



FATHER OF ROCK 'N ROLL

Although rock 'n roll has morphed into a mainstream musical genre, Chuck Berry is still hailed as its progenitor.

BY MEL CHILDS

CHARLES EDWARD “CHUCK” ANDERSON BERRY was born in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1926. His life was shaped by the strife and struggle of his generation—the cessation of a recent world war, impending financial crises from the Great Depression, Jim Crow laws, racial tension and public lynchings. Although the external odds were formidably stacked against his success, this did not deter Chuck Berry from going on to become one of the most influential musicians of today.

Berry exhibited his inclination toward music as a youth. He first demonstrated his talent at Sumner High School, a high school in St. Louis that vaunts many notable black legends such as Arthur Ashe, Dick Gregory and Tina Turner. He took on many odd jobs after high school to make a living, but nothing held his interest more than playing at nightclubs. His big break came when he met Muddy Waters in Chicago in 1955. Waters put Berry in contact with the record company executive Leonard Chess. At Chess Records, Chuck recorded “Maybellene,” a hit record that sold millions and reached number one on *Billboard* magazine’s R & B chart.

Although Berry’s first hit earned him acclaim as an R & B artist, his style of music was poised to bridge the racial divide in music. *New York Times* pop music critic Jon Pareles described Chuck Berry’s music as “polyracial,” a type of music that cut across racial and socioeconomic gaps to make everyone rock and roll.

Berry’s music did not just bring together a divided nation, it spawned many styles of music that succeeded him. He influenced musicians across the board from the Beatles, Bruce Springsteen, The Jackson 5, L.L. Cool J., Mos Def, and Juicy J. His new Album, *Chuck*, is a testament of music’s unifying magic that will live on, forever.

“All in all, it was my intention to hold both the black and white clientele by voicing the different kinds of songs in their customary tongue.”

Celebrities’ Pay Tribute to Chuck Berry:

“To us [The Beatles], he [Chuck Berry] was a magician making music that was exotic yet normal at the same time. We learnt so many things from him which led us into a dream world of rock ‘n’ roll music.” —Paul McCartney

“Chuck Berry rolled over everyone who came before him—and turned up everyone who came after him. We’ll miss you, Chuck. Be good.” —President Barack Obama

“Chuck Berry merged blues and swing into the phenomenon of early rock ‘n roll. In music, he cast one of the longest shadows. Thank you, Chuck.” —The Jacksons