

Blues Legend BB King Dead at 89

Blues legend B.B. King, who took his music from rural juke joints to the mainstream and inspired a generation of guitarists from Eric Clapton to Stevie Ray Vaughan, has died in Las Vegas. He was 89.

News of King's death, confirmed late Thursday on a Facebook page linked to the website of his daughter Claudette, triggered shockwaves across social media, with blues, rock and country music stars lining up to pay tribute.

King was hospitalized in April for a few days after suffering from dehydration related to Type 2 diabetes. In May he said in a Facebook post that he was in hospice care at his home.

Born on a plantation to sharecropper parents, he outlived his post-World War Two blues peers—Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Jimmy Reed, Lightnin' Hopkins and John Lee Hooker—to see the rough music born in the cotton fields of the segregated South reach a new audience.

"Being a blues singer is like being black twice," King wrote in his autobiography, "Blues All Around Me," of the lack of respect the music got compared with rock and jazz.

"While the civil rights movement was fighting for the respect of black people, I felt I was fighting for the respect of the blues."

GREATEST EVER?

In 2003, Rolling Stone magazine's list of the 100 greatest guitarists of all time ranked King at No. 3, behind only Jimi Hendrix and Duane Allman.

Chicago blues veteran Buddy Guy described King as "the

greatest guy I ever met".

"The tone he got out of that guitar, the way he shook his left wrist, the way he squeezed the strings... it was all new to the whole guitar playin' world...", Guy wrote in a posting on Instagram. "I promise I will keep these damn blues alive."

Rocker Bryan Adams said on Twitter that King was "one of the best blues guitarists ever, maybe the best. He could do more on one note than anyone"

Rapper Snoop Dogg, rocker Lenny Kravitz, Kiss frontman Gene Simmons, former Beatle Ringo Starr and U.S. country singer Brad Paisley were among others who posted tributes.

Born Riley B. King on Sept. 16, 1925 in Itta Bena, Mississippi, he began learning guitar as a boy and sang in church choirs.

After World War Two Army service, King sang on street corners to pick up money. In 1947 he hitchhiked to Memphis, Tennessee, where he learned from and played with his cousin, revered blues guitarist Bukka White.

King went from touring black bars and dance halls in the 1940s and '50s to headlining an all-blues show at New York's Carnegie Hall in 1970 and recording with the likes of Clapton and U2 in the '90s.

He had a deep, resonant singing voice and, despite having what he called "stupid fingers," an immediately recognizable guitar sound.

His unique style of trilling the strings with a fluttering left-hand vibrato, which he called "the butterfly," delivered stinging single-note licks that brimmed with emotion and helped shape early rock.

LUCILLE

King will for ever be associated with his trademark black Gibson guitars, all of which he christened Lucille in recollection of a woman who two men fought over in 1949 in an Arkansas dance hall where he was playing.

The men knocked over a kerosene lamp, setting fire to the building. King risked his life to retrieve his \$30 guitar.

In Memphis, King played in clubs and became a disc jockey at radio station WDIA, where he was known as the Beale Street Blues Boy. That was shortened to Blues Boy and then B.B., and those closest to him just called him B.

King became a star of the rhythm and blues charts and at his peak was on stage 300 nights a year and playing to audiences all over the world – including the former Soviet Union and China. He still toured regularly into his eighties.

In the 1960s, King enjoyed a resurgence as young British and American rockers discovered the blues as the roots of rock 'n' roll, building a new, mostly white following.

He won 15 Grammys, more than any other bluesman, starting in 1970 for the crossover pop hit "The Thrill Is Gone", according to the Recording Academy. In 1987, he received a lifetime award.

King was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1986 and awarded the National Medal for the Arts in 1990.

His two marriages ended in divorce with no children but he acknowledged fathering 15 with different women.

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