

## Entertainment News: Hail Hail Rocker Chuck Berry, Who Dies at 90

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ST. CHARLES COUNTY, MO – One of rock and roll music’s last living pioneers, Chuck Berry, was found dead in his home in St. Charles County, Missouri, on Mar. 18, 2017. He was the “Father of Rock ‘n Roll” for his hit songs in the 1950s, but Berry was also known for his controversies and live concert style. He was 90 years old.

Berry, along with Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, Little Richard and others in the 1950s, established the style of songs that influenced a generation of rock artists, including The Rolling Stones, The Beatles, Bruce Springsteen and virtually any other guitar hero who had to learn Berry’s song “Johnny B. Goode” to get to the next level. His most productive period came in Chicago, when he recorded songs that he wrote for Chess Records on the near south side. John Lennon once said, “If you tried to give rock and roll another name, you might call it ‘Chuck Berry.’”

Charles Edward Anderson “Chuck” Berry was born in St. Louis, Missouri, and had an interest in music from an early age. After first performing in high school, he was convicted of armed robbery while still a student, and served three years in jail during the 1940s. After release, he began to work some gigs and developed the guitar riffing that would become his signature. He traveled to Chicago in 1955, where blues master Muddy Waters suggested he contact Chess Records. He recorded his first hit record at their 2120 South Michigan Avenue studios, entitled “Maybellene.”

This began a string of hits from 1955 to the early 1960s, including “Roll Over Beethoven,” “School Days,” “Rock and Roll Music,” “Sweet Little Sixteen” and his most famous song, “Johnny B. Goode.” He came into concert prominence in 1957, when he appeared with Buddy Holly and The Everly Brothers in the “Biggest Show of Stars” revue, put together by legendary disc jockey Alan Freed. He also appeared in early rock ‘n roll movies, such as “Rock Rock Rock” (1956) and “Go Johnny Go” (1959).

In December of 1959, Berry was arrested for violating the “Mann Act,” after allegations that he had sex and transported an underage girl across state lines. After years of appeals, at the height of his early fame, he served a year-and-a-half sentence. After his release in 1963, the British invasion had begun, and many of the acts – including The Rolling Stones and The Beatles – were covering his songs. He signed with Mercury Records, and scored some additional 1960s hits including “No Particular Place to Go,” “You Never Can Tell,” and “Nadine.”

The rest of Chuck Berry’s career was characterized by his constant touring – where he inevitably would do his signature stage move, the “duck walk” – and worship from the generation of rock stars that were influenced by him. He scored his only number one hit in 1972, with the novelty song “My Ding-a-Ling,” and began his reputation of driving around the country and working for cash, which got him a third jail sentence in 1979 for income tax evasion. In 1986, director Taylor Hackford honored Berry with the documentary “Hail! Hail! Rock ‘n Roll,” which included appearances by rock artists Keith Richards, Eric Clapton, Julian Lennon and Linda Ronstadt, and that same year he was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

In his later years, Chuck Berry continued to tour, and settled in his hometown St. Louis area. Controversy continued to haunt him, as he was sued in the late 1980s for installing cameras in his the women’s bathroom at his restaurant, and by a former colleague (Johnnie Johnson) who claimed he co-wrote many of Berry’s greatest hits. From 1996 to 2014, he had a standing gig one Wednesday every month at a St. Louis club called Blueberry Hill. Declining health – including a collapse at his last concert appearance in Chicago – limited his later appearances, but he did announce recently that he had a new studio album coming out in 2017, his first since 1979, entitled simply “Chuck.”

Chuck Berry was discovered unresponsive at his home in St. Charles County, Missouri, and pronounced dead at the scene. He is survived by his wife of 69 years, Thematta “Toddy” Suggs, and four children. The rocker knew his legacy, once saying “In a way, it might be ill-mannered to try and top myself. The music I play is a ritual. Something that matters to people in a special way. I wouldn’t want to interfere with that.”

Source material for this article is from Wikipedia and CNN.com. Chuck Berry, 1926-2017



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