



# The 20 All-Time Greatest Chicago Guitarists

**P**erpetually under siege by synthesizers, jealous bandmates, "Guitar Hero," and its own practitioners, it's almost as if the guitar can't exist without more tension than what's going on between the neck and the bridge. So at *IE* we figured why not spray some gasoline on the fire and, for our annual Guitar Month, debate who Chicago's greats have been. "You mean like Terry Kath and Peter Cetera?" Kath = yes. Cetera's just the man who'll fight for our honor. *Anyway.*

You, our critic, are bound to pin us to the wall by the ass-end of your flying V and demand "What does *greatest* mean?" (At least, that's what our writers did when we posed the idea.) We didn't weigh much other than gut reaction, though in truth there was *some* element of popularity involved. My neighbor blasted such a sick power chord the other day it blistered paint in my kitchen; suffice it to say, Tony still isn't on this list. (Though he almost made Beverly Zeldin-Palmer's – see sidebar.)

But here, in its imminently denounced glory, is *Illinois Entertainer's* list of The 20 All-Time Greatest Chicago Guitarists.



## Buddy Guy

Naysayers will think Buddy Guy tops our list in some glad-handing tribute to Chicago's most prominent living bluesman. *Sheeeit.* Early in his prime he was muzzled by Leonard Chess and the Muddy Waters/Willie Dixon machine. But once loose, Guy not only co-sparked a revolution within West Side blues but owned his instrument and the eyes of anyone who saw him play it. "All-time" scrolls like this are notoriously subjective, but few could match Guy's combination of stylistic fusion, wrenching soul, technical brilliance, staggering influence (Hendrix, Clapton, Beck), and dazzling showmanship. Subtlety's not his strong suit, but if you wanna play bridge, get out your ballgown – this is a guitar list.

As little as 20 years ago his inclusion on (much less towering over) such a list was cast in murk. From the late '60s to late '80s he was in the wilderness, neglected by rock fans and still polarizing to trad blues snobs. But Guy's resurgence – begun with 1991's blistering *Damn Right, I've Got The Blues* and emboldened by 2001's brave, dynamic *Sweet Tea* – resuscitated him from artifact to restless ambassador. His place in history assured, Guy has turned his eye to making sure the city doesn't bury its crucial past the way it almost forgot him.

Steve Forstneger

## Muddy Waters

When future Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame inductee and Grammy winner Muddy Waters (aka McKinley Morganfield) came to Chicago in 1943 from Clarksdale, Mississippi, he had no idea he would alter the American musical landscape irrevocably, paving the way for a musical revolution.

Waters was the first Delta bluesman to make the successful transition from acoustic to electric blues guitar. He added other textures to the Delta moan of the lone blues guitarist, employing a four-piece band that would become the prototype for future blues and rock bands worldwide. Waters' heavily amplified slide guitar, his rich and powerful vocals, and his churchified delivery influenced generations of musicians from Otis Rush and Buddy Guy to Michael Bloomfield and Keith Richards. His sidemen were equally ferocious musicians like Little Walter, Otis Spann, James Cotton, and Pinetop Perkins. This new sound was captured masterfully by Chess Records in the '50s, with a string of hits such as "Louisiana Blues," "Long Distance Call," "Honey Bee," "I Can't Be Satisfied," "Rollin' Stone," and so many others.

In the 1972 documentary *Chicago Blues*, Waters matter-of-factly summed up his importance, stating "I think I'm responsible for Chicago Blues. I think I'm the man that set Chicago up for the real blues."

Beverly Zeldin-Palmer

