

Bo Diddley



Bo Diddley was one of those who took blues by the hand and led it into rock. Diddley's music includes every aspect of rock: the fuzzy, effect-wielding guitar, humor, volume (Diddley didn't necessarily play loud, but he always sounds like he was), sex, DIY aesthetic (the man built his first guitar, for heaven's sake), song-writing, rebellion, and – of course – rhythm. Not just any rhythm, either: *that* rhythm. His songs from the late '50s/early '60s are indelible moments of rock: "I'm A Man," "Bo Diddley," "Bring It To Jerome," "Who Do You Love." There wasn't a British Invasion band worth their name who didn't cover a Bo Diddley track, and there has not been a rocker since who hasn't used the Bo Diddley beat. *Rolling Stone's* list of the 100 Greatest Artists Of All Time put the former Ellas Otha Bates at 20, but his influence is so wide and deep that *Uncut* magazine ranked the 1958 release of Diddley's self-titled debut album as one of the "100 Music, Movie & TV Moments That Changed the World."

M.S. Dodds

Otis Rush



Revered by blues and rock musicians alike, legendary guitarist/vocalist Otis Rush is perhaps the most intense, soulful bluesman of his era. Since the '50s, when he had his first chart-topping hit on Cobra Records, "I Can't Quit You Baby," Rush has gone on to influence musicians such as Michael Bloomfield, Peter Green, Eric Clapton, Santana, Luther Allison, Jeff Beck, and Stevie Ray Vaughan.

Rush, along with Buddy Guy and Magic Sam, pioneered the West Side sound, a minor-key variation characterized by impassioned gospel-tinged vocals and bursts of arpeggio guitar riffs. His unique approach is offset by his left-hand technique – playing the guitar upside-down and backwards, Rush bent the strings downward for dramatic effect.

He moved to Chicago from Philadelphia, Mississippi in 1949 and made the decision to become a performer after seeing Muddy Waters. Waters, who brought the deep blues to Chicago, later cited Rush as being one of the deepest of deep bluesmen.

Beverly Zeldin-Palmer

Magic Sam



One of the great what-ifs of blues history. Many a musician met a premature demise (frequently at their own hands), but fate was especially cruel to Samuel Gene Maghett. Struck down by a heart attack just months after a star turn at the 1969 Ann Arbor Blues Festival, the 32-year-old trailblazer passed just as he had shaken off an uneven youth. Along with Otis Rush and Buddy Guy, Magic Sam turned the West Side upside down, engraving a new sound – elegant, wild, everything – on two albums frequently ranked among the blues' all-time greats, *West Side Soul* and *Black Magic*. What he had wasn't necessarily flash (though he had that in spades, too), but a concoction massaging the silk that would flow out of Curtis Mayfield's fingers up in Cabrini into the hard electric sound that made Chicago the blues' epicenter. Few artists ever come up with two masterworks like *West Side Soul* and *Black Magic*. That Sam was undeniably on the cusp of something even greater makes our loss all the more gutting.

Steve Forstneger

Mike Bloomfield



According to the site's stats, Mikebloomfield.com has averaged 60 visits a day for the last six years – not bad for a white, Jewish blues guitarist who died in 1981 and is best known for his performances on other people's albums. Mike Bloomfield crammed a lot of playing into his brief life. As a precocious Chicago teenager in the 1950s, he was sitting in with Muddy Waters. While a member of The Paul Butterfield Blues Band in the mid-'60s, he helped Bob Dylan go electric. He'd been a legend for almost half his life when heroin got him at 37.

Arsenio Orteza

Elmore James



All electric slide-guitar playing starts with Elmore James. Argue all you want whether he stole his songs from Robert Johnson or Tampa Red or whoever, because back in the day he was playing with them all and such didn't matter. What does matter is that in 1952 his "changety changety chang chang" slide riff on "Dust My Broom" changed everything – James electrified the blues in a way no one had heard before. It was not just electric. It was *loud*. It was a sound Les Paul was trying to achieve with his solid-body prototypes; a style that every kid who picks up a guitar for the first time is after; the holy grail that has been pursued by any rock guitar god worth his/her salt; and one for which it's a damn shame that there are no known live recordings of Elmore James to serve as final testament.

David C. Eldredge

Rick Nielsen



Rick Nielsen deserves a spot on this list for his guitar collection alone; he has reportedly owned more than 2,000 sweet axes, including at least one custom five-neck Hamer with 38 strings. (Storage space must be *cheap* in Rockford.) Equally impressive is his contribution to power pop. Nielsen is a master of sustain (how he stretches those chords on "Surrender") and showboating (as a white Chuck Berry on "I Want You To Want Me"). So what if he's self-taught? Without Nielsen, Robin Zander's vocals wouldn't have been so dreamy, and rock 'n' roll wouldn't be so fun. *At Budokan* knows best.

Mike Meyer

Curtis Mayfield



It's easy to forget what a guitarist Curtis Mayfield was. Obscured beneath forming The Impressions, helping give voice to the Civil Rights movement, recording one of the greatest soundtracks of all-time, and his nearly fatal accident was an ace. Blurring his skill further was the fact his big solo hits ("Superfly," "If There's A Hell Below") were bass-driven. But his style wasn't so subtle to be unnoticeable. Self-taught, Mayfield often tuned to a piano's black keys, though Vee-Jay Records' Calvin Carter explained it best in a 1981 interview: "I never met a guitar player who played the guitar the way Curtis did. Everything was on open strings, and it sounded very unusual. I don't care where you'd go, you'd always hear people say, 'Play me some Curtis Mayfield-type guitar,' and they'd know what you were talking about."

Steve Forstneger

Tom Morello



Tom Morello endured 18 years in Libertyville and graduated with honors from Harvard in 1986. Neither, though, had much to do with his greatest achievement: Rage Against The Machine (sorry Audioslave, your name fit your confined music). Rage ignited Molotov cocktails of post-"Bring The Noize" rap-metal, burning up the *Billboard* charts and dreaming of larger targets to torch. "I eagerly await the day the United States government goes down in flames," Morello told the *Chicago Tribune* in 1993. *Evil Empire* remains alt-rock's most volatile success – down with tradition, up with invention. Morello's molten guitar techniques evoked turntable scratches and Public Enemy's noise-effect cacophony. No DJ or PE required.

Mike Meyer

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Tom Morello by Sean Ricigliano