



## CHUCK BERRY: FATHER OF ROCK & ROLL



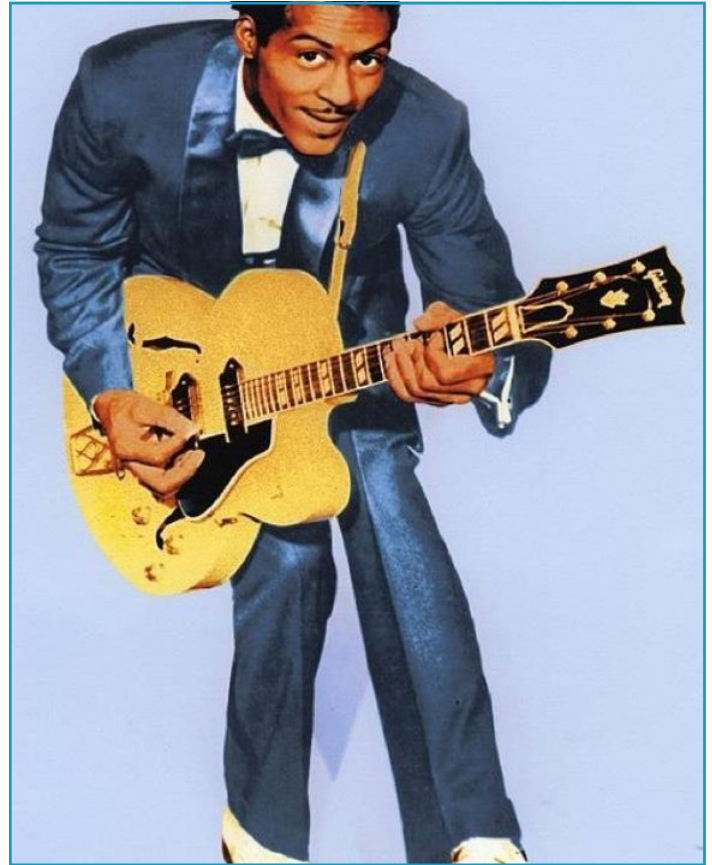
While many artists are rock pioneers, Chuck Berry is considered the first who put it all together: the country guitar sounds, the rhythm & blues beat, and lyrics for a young generation. In just a few songs, he created the instructions for how to make rock & roll.

Born October 18, 1926, in St. Louis, Missouri, Berry grew up in a middle-class African American neighborhood, the fourth of six children. The radio introduced him to boogie-woogie, blues, swing, and “hillbilly,” or early country songs. After classmates cheered his singing in high school, Berry decided he wanted a music career.

In his early twenties, he became a popular performer in St. Louis clubs and was making the electric guitar an important new instrument. Soon he began writing his own songs by changing lyrics and notes of songs he already knew.

His big break came on May 21, 1955, while recording at Chess Records in Chicago. Berry borrowed the basic sound of “Ida Red,” a country song, then added new words and used his electric guitar to turn it into a new song, the lively “Maybellene.”

By year’s end, “Maybellene” had sold a million copies, and Berry saw he had found a new audience: Black and white teenagers with money who were searching for music they could relate to. Though Berry was much older than most of his fans, he wrote songs from a younger point of view about topics like driving, dating, and going to school.



“Everything I wrote about wasn’t about me, but about the people listening,” he said.

From 1955 to 1965, Berry recorded songs considered the foundation of rock & roll. Berry was a dazzling performer and toured alone. He was confident that backup musicians in every city he visited would already know his songs and could play behind him because his songs were so popular and so well known.

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### LISTEN

“Johnny B. Goode,” “Maybellene,” “Roll Over Beethoven,” “School Day,” “Rock & Roll Music”



## CHUCK BERRY: FATHER OF ROCK & ROLL (CONTINUED)

Berry's influence continues to this day. He was among the first class of the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, inducted in 1986. In 2000, when Berry received the Kennedy Center Honors Award, President Bill Clinton called him "one of the 20th century's most influential musicians."



### CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. Explain two reasons why Berry was interested in a career in music.

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2. How did Berry's write his first hit "Maybellene"?

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3. Why is Berry called the "Father of Rock & Roll?" Highlight evidence in the text for your answer.

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