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YOU'RE MISSING: Charley Patton

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Posted: 07/31/2012

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"If I made records for my own pleasure, I would only record Charley Patton songs." -- Bob Dylan

[Charley Patton](#) threw open the door for what we've come to call the blues. His influence seemingly spans the entirety of guitar music from the early 1900s on. He is the father of the Delta blues, which constitute the dark, creepy void between the blues and hell.

Though clearly an essential figure in the history of music, his life is shrouded in mystery. Patton was born sometime between 1887 and 1894 in Hinds County, Mississippi. He was born to Bill and Anne Patton, but it's said he was raised by former slave and bluesman Henderson Chatmon. Patton had strange features, making his race a subject for debate, bouncing between Caucasian, African American, Mexican, and Native American. In truth, he was black, white, and Cherokee. When Patton was very young, his family moved to Dockery Plantation, near Ruleville, Mississippi. It was here that Patton met blues guitarist Henry Sloan. (If Patton is a grandfather of the blues, Sloan is a great-grandfather.) Patton would learn Sloan's ways and by the time he was 19, had become an established performer. During his time, he was well-known and very successful across the southern states, and even played an annual show in Chicago.

Musician and musicologist Robert Palmer described Patton as a "jack-of-all-trades" bluesman, playing deep Delta blues, hillbilly music, traditional 19th century ballads, and country dance music. Patton even preceded Hendrix, Townshend, and the likes with his stagmanship, playing guitar behind his head, at his knees, and behind his back. He made his first recording in 1929, featuring 14 songs released on the Paramount label.

American guitarist John Fahey, considered Patton the "Pilgrim of the Ominous" and "a pioneer in the externalization through music of strange, weird, even ghastly emotional states."

It was Patton's unique rhythmic picking and body-of-the-guitar-percussion that made his sound inventive and legendary. It's said, using this style, Patton could jam on a number for 30 minutes or more. His popping bass notes precede that of the funk era. His voice also propelled him to legendary blues status. It's a deep, rough bellowing sound -- (which greatly influenced Chicago bluesman Howlin' Wolf) -- and delivered his personal viewpoints on life in Mississippi, social mobility, imprisonment, nature, morality and every other kind of hardship imaginable. His histrionic live performances were said to bring the house down, and his credibility as a drinker and womanizer are right on par with other blues greats.

Late in his life, Patton moved to Holly Ridge, Mississippi with his wife, the famed singer Bertha Lee. He died a year later, leaving behind a lengthy catalogue including songs like "Green River Blues," "I'm Going Home," and "A Spoonful Blues," just to name a few. His influence can be drawn all across the board, but it's found most heavily in other blues artists such as Muddy Waters, Robert Johnson, Son House, Muddy Waters, Pop Staples, and John Lee Hooker.



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