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### ERIC CLAPTON'S BIOGRAPHY

by Barry Houlehen.

With a career spanning four decades, Eric Clapton is widely recognized as rock music's great bluesman guitarist. From the British Invasion of the Sixties to the present day, Clapton's resume is a history of the genre: the Yardbirds, John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, Cream, Blind Faith, Derek and the Dominoes, a distinguished solo career, and collaborations with the likes of B.B. King, Howlin' Wolf, Duane Allman, and the Beatles.

In his early, formative years as a guitar player, he was influenced by Muddy Waters' *Best of Muddy Waters* album, which inspired him to play electric, as well as Jimmy Reed's *Jimmy Reed at Carnegie Hall*, Furry Lewis, Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, and later, Freddie King.

Clapton's career began in 1963 when, as a little-known 18-year-old guitarist in England, he joined the newly formed Yardbirds. Though his stint with the group lasted less than two years, his recordings with the group showed a developing blues-rock hybrid guitar style. He left the group in 1965 due to dissatisfaction with the more commercial style their songs were taking -- in particular, the song "For Your Love."

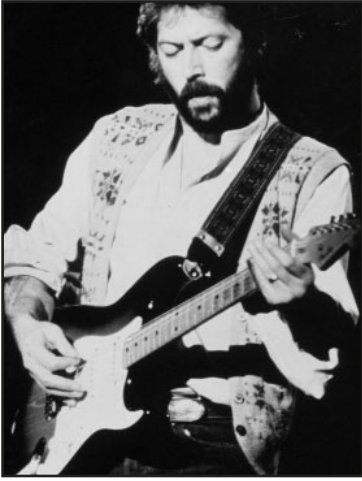
He soon was invited to join John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, a groundbreaking blues-rock outfit whose leader had a knack for discovering talent and whose ever-changing lineup continues to this day. (Among the other Sixties talents who did time in the Bluesbreakers were John McVie, Mick Taylor, and Jack Bruce, later of Fleetwood Mac, the Rolling Stones, and Cream, respectively.) Clapton recorded one album with the Bluesbreakers: *Bluesbreakers With Eric Clapton*, but it was this LP that established him as a guitar hero playing leads on Mayall originals and covers by Otis Rush and Freddie King, and led to the famous "Clapton is God" graffiti in England.

Clapton left Mayall in 1966 to form Cream with Jack Bruce on bass and Ginger Baker on drums, creating rock's first power trio and inspiring legions of musicians with their powerful rhythm section and Clapton's blues solos applied to a free-form rock sound. Cream lasted only a little more than two years but their four albums, including *Fresh Cream* and *Disraeli Gears*, had a profound influence on rock music.

In 1968, Clapton had the distinction of playing on the Beatles' "White Album." Friend George Harrison invited Clapton into the studio in part because the presence of a guest musician put the other Beatles on their best behavior at a time when there was tension in the group, and the result was Clapton's famous guitar solo on Harrison's "While My Guitar Gently Weeps."

After Cream broke up because of personality conflicts, Clapton in 1969 formed the short-lived group Blind Faith with Steve Winwood (of Traffic), Ginger Baker, and Rich Grech. The group lasted for an album and a tour, producing only 40 minutes worth of new material; however that material included now-classic pieces such as "Presence of the Lord" and "Can't Find My Way Home." On the tour Clapton became friends with their opening act, Delaney and Bonnie Bramlett, who were playing their own southern blues-rock style of music. After the end of Blind Faith, Clapton went on tour with

## FENDER PLAYERS CLUB ERIC CLAPTON



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Delaney & Bonnie & Friends, and got to know the musicians who would later form the core of Derek and the Dominoes. He also appeared live with John Lennon's *Plastic Ono Band*, which resulted in the album *Live Peace in Toronto*.

In the summer of 1970 he released his first solo album, *Eric Clapton*, produced by Delaney Bramlett. The album produced the hit "After Midnight" (written by J.J. Cale) and introduced a new side of Clapton's sound. It was at this point that Clapton switched from the humbucking pickup sound of the Gibson guitars he used in Cream and Blind Faith, and began using Fender Stratocasters® with single coil pickups. Other famous songs from this LP include "Let It Rain" and "Blues Power."

Clapton put together the Derek and the Dominoes lineup later that year with three members of the Delaney & Bonnie group. They went on tour and then recorded a double album, *Layla and Other Assorted Lovesongs*, with Allman Brothers guitarist Duane Allman sitting in and then joining the group. The double LP's title cut, "Layla," was to become Clapton's signature song, and the album is generally considered to be Clapton's masterpiece, but the group did not last long, leaving their second album unfinished in 1971.

At this point, Clapton temporarily retired from music because of his addiction to heroin. He played George Harrison's "Concert for Bangladesh" and then went into seclusion for about a year and a half. It wasn't until 1973 that he performed again, and in 1974, off of drugs, he recorded *461 Ocean Boulevard*, which made it to number one on the charts and produced the hit "I Shot the Sheriff," written by Bob Marley. Other standouts on the LP are "Mainline Florida" and "Motherless Children."

For the rest of the decade, Clapton released a series of mostly successful albums that blended blues, country and rock, and which gave him several hit singles. *There's One in Every Crowd* and *No Reason to Cry* were followed in 1977 by one of his biggest successes, *Slowhand*, with its songs "Lay Down Sally," "Cocaine," "The Core," and "Wonderful Tonight."

The Eighties found Clapton's career in a temporary slowdown, but with a 1985 hit "Forever Man" from *Behind the Sun*. In 1992 it swung back into high gear following his acoustic album, *Unplugged*, recorded for MTV and featuring a poignant ballad for his lost son, "Tears in Heaven." The Nineties found Clapton alternating between his blues roots, as in the all-blues CD *From the Cradle*, and his more pop sensibilities, as in 1998's *Pilgrim*.

Clapton's output has not slowed down in the new century, with the Grammy-winning collaboration with B.B. King, *Riding With the King*, in 2000, and 2001's *Reptile*. He has been inducted three times into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, for the Yardbirds in 1992, Cream in 1993, and as a solo artist in 2000.