

FENDER PLAYERS CLUB MUDDY WATERS

Muddy Waters—the name looms large in the annals of the American musical form known as the Blues. He's the King Bee, the Hootchie-Cootchie Man, the Mojo Man, the Mannish Boy, the M-A-N. But in the life and music of Muddy Waters lies much more than the Blues.

McKinley Morganfield, you see, invented the BAND as we know it, and everyone from the Rolling Stones to Blink-182 to Lonestar can be traced back in time to the south side of Chicago, to the instrumentation Muddy put together in those ghetto clubs.

McKinley Morganfield – Muddy Waters - was born on April 4, 1915, into a place and time when grinding poverty and manual labor was the black American's lot in life. Despite these grim obstacles, the Mississippi Delta country where Muddy Waters grew up was culturally rich and vibrant. In the juke joints and at countless social gatherings, music gave people the medium to express their joys and pains, and the Delta experience gave birth to the unique music form we know as the blues. Seminal country blues artists Robert Johnson, Charley Patton, Son House, John Lee Hooker and many others hailed from the Clarksdale area.

By the time he was 17, Muddy was playing the acoustic country blues all along the Delta circuit of juke joints, fish fries and socials, preferring from an early age the colorful life of the entertainer to the sweat and toil of the field.

"The story was that Muddy didn't really like to work in the fields," says Bill Morganfield, one of Muddy's sons. "He would try to sleep all day and play all night."

Muddy's most significant mentor in Mississippi was Son House, and even well into his electrified Chicago days, Muddy still considered his playing style related more to Robert Johnson and Son House than to any of his electrified contemporaries.

In the 1940s, America entered World War II and things began to slowly change for black Americans. The war effort created a supply of jobs available to blacks in Northern cities. Many citizens of the South relocated, and enormous black communities grew up in places like Detroit and Chicago.

In 1942, still in Mississippi, Waters was approached by Alan Lomax, who was then travelling the byways of America, recording folk music for the Library of Congress. Pointed to Muddy's cabin, Lomax met the budding bluesman and recorded two of his songs, "Country Blues" and "I Be's Troubled."

When Muddy received copies of the record several months later, along with 20 dollars for his time, the direction of his life resolved firmly on music. It was becoming clear to Muddy Waters that, with his music, he had a shot for a better life far beyond Stovall Plantation. One day in 1943, Muddy called in sick to work, packed up and boarded the train for Chicago.

On the South Side of Chicago, the thousands of working Southern immigrants needed entertainment in the evenings, and a blues scene had already developed by the time Muddy hit town. Led by Big Bill Broonzy, Chicago blues was a city-slick contrast to the Delta blues most new arrivals were accustomed to.

Muddy Waters set about at once adapting his skills to this new blues world. The loud South Side clubs overwhelmed the acoustic blues player, so Muddy followed the lead of other blues guitarists at the time and picked up an electric guitar and amplifier.

It was in those early days of experimenting with amplification and with different instrumentation line-ups that Muddy made his lasting contribution to the sound of Chicago blues and, by extension and influence, the sound of rock'n'roll. By 1945, Muddy had teamed up with bluesman Jimmy Rogers, and the two began putting together a band that went beyond

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the small combos and acoustic ensembles that had up to that point characterized blues. The country blues elements of violin and mandolin were replaced by harmonica, a second guitar and piano.

The prototype electric blues band eventually featured Muddy on guitar, Rogers on bass, Little Walter Jacobs on harmonica, Sunnyland Slim on piano and Babyface Leroy Foster on drums. Electrified and amplified throughout, the group rose to the task of making music in the noisy big-city clubs.

It was in 1947 that Muddy made his first recordings for Leonard and Phil Chess. The Chess brothers' Aristocrat Records was, in today's terms, a small indie label which offered mostly jazz and blues to black audiences. After backing Sunnyland Slim, Muddy recorded two of his own acoustic numbers, "Gypsy Woman" and "Little Anna Mae." The Chess brothers were unenthusiastic, and very little came of Muddy's first record.

The following year, however, Muddy got another shot to record for the Chess brothers. This time, Muddy laid down his compositions "I Can't Be Satisfied" and "I Feel Like Going Home," backed only by Big Crawford on bass. Within 24 hours, the first pressing sold out. Muddy Waters was on his way.

Historians sometimes attribute the birth of Chicago blues to that "I Can't Be Satisfied" single in 1948, but the full sound and flavor of Muddy's band was yet to make it on record; he continued to record with just Big Crawford on bass.

As Leonard Chess' confidence in Muddy's vision grew, Muddy was able to record with his full band, and such landmark blues tracks as "Baby Please Don't Go," "Honey Bee," "Hootchie-Cootchie Man" and "Mannish Boy" went out into a grateful world.

In the clubs and on the later records, Muddy's full band transcended the concept of the bandleader-and-backing-band. Musicians wove together lead parts on harmonica, guitar and piano, creating the deft interplay that stands as one of the defining characteristics of Chicago blues.

The main reasons this transformation happened lie in the character of Muddy Waters. First of all, as a bandleader, Muddy was interested in working with and developing the brightest and best musicians. He took a paternal, supportive approach that allowed the virtuoso talents of many of his sidemen blossom. Players like Little Walter, Buddy Guy and Otis Spann found room to play in Muddy's band; and many a musician went from Muddy Waters' band to a successful career of their own.

Muddy was famous for keeping his bandmates out of all kinds of trouble. He also played a direct role in launching rock'n'roll in the '50s. Bo Diddley idolized Muddy and, as a young man, hid behind jukeboxes to watch Muddy perform. Muddy encouraged Diddley, as he did Chuck Berry. In his book, *Chuck Berry: The Autobiography*, Berry calls Muddy Waters "the greatest inspiration in launching my career. I was a disciple in worship of a lord."

Among the many young musicians Muddy took under his wing was a 22-year-old guitarist from Louisiana named Buddy Guy. Seeing the starving young firebrand's talent, Muddy immediately made him a disciple, sometimes rather roughly prodding the bashful young man into the fullness of his talent. Buddy would say later that "Muddy Waters was like a daddy to me."

Guitar pioneer Jimi Hendrix freely admitted that Muddy Waters was "the first guitarist he was aware of." Echoes of Muddy's work appear in Hendrix songs like "Hey Joe" and "Catfish Blues."

Just as the early American bluesmen and rock'n'rollers alike received the fruits of Muddy's musical innovations—most prominently the whole concept of the band—so too did many musicians abroad. When young British youths started getting hold of Chess platters by electrified Chicago bluesmen, the blues form exploded, influencing virtually every early

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British Invasion band.

White British musicians found the form liberating and bold, and the list of bands that sprung from the UK blues clubs is a complete Who's Who of 20th Century English music: Alexis Korner, Cyril Davies, Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck, Fleetwood Mac, Savoy Brown. Muddy and his fellow Chicago bluesmen touched off a tidal wave of music in the UK. The Rolling Stones took their name from a Muddy Waters song. British musicians admitted their debt to Muddy, a fact which led countless Americans to examine the neglected blues giants right under their noses.

The tidal wave of blues-influenced music that swept back into America from England helped resurrect Muddy's career. After a few disappointing releases, the active interest of younger American musicians like Michael Bloomfield, Johnny Winter and Bob Margolin kept Muddy in the forefront.

Johnny Winter's work with Muddy in the late '70s and early '80s marked the triumphant return of the great Muddy Waters. The faithful and loving production of late albums like *Hard Again* and *King Bee* capped off a legendary career and left Muddy Waters firmly in his place as the godfather of the blues and the progenitor of modern popular music.

On April 30, 1983, forty years after his historic train ride from Clarksdale to Chicago, Muddy Waters died of a cardiac arrest. As a guitarist, singer, bandleader and father-figure of music, McKinley Morganfield had few living equals. His influence touched us all, even though we may not always see the channels through which it has come. Through today's bands and guitarists, Muddy lives.

-- Eric Kingsbury, edited from the full version in *Fender Frontline* Vol. 27