

B.B. King

| B.B. King | |
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| King performing at the Fox Theater in Oakland, April 2009 | |
| Background information | |
| Birth name | Riley King |
| Also known as | B.B. King |
| Born | September 16, 1925 |
| Origin | Itta Bena, Mississippi, United States |
| Genres | Blues, soul blues, jazz, blues-rock, electric blues, rhythm and blues, soul |
| Occupations | Musician, singer, songwriter, record producer |
| Instruments | Guitar, vocals, piano |
| Years active | 1949–present |
| Labels | Geffen/Interscope/Universal, Bullet Records, RPM Records, Crown, ABC, MCA, Reprise/Warner Bros., Virgin/EMI |
| Associated acts | Bobby Bland, Eric Clapton, Pappo |
| Website | www.bbking.com ^[1] , www.bbkingmuseum.org ^[2] |
| Notable instruments | |
| Lucille | |

Riley B. King (born September 16, 1925), known by the stage name **B.B. King**, is an American blues guitarist and singer-songwriter acclaimed for his expressive singing and fluid, complex guitar playing.

Rolling Stone magazine ranked him at #3 on its list of the "100 greatest guitarists of all time".^[3] According to Edward M. Komara, King "introduced a sophisticated style of soloing based on fluid string bending and shimmering vibrato that would influence virtually every electric blues guitarist that followed."^[4] King has been inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

Early life

King was born in Indianola, Mississippi, to Albert King and Nora Ella Farr.

In 1930, when King was four years old, his father abandoned the family and his mother married another man. Because Nora Elle was too poor to raise her son, King was raised by his maternal grandmother Elnora Farr in Kilmichael, Mississippi.^[5]

King grew up singing in the gospel choir at Elkhorn Baptist Church in Kilmichael. At age 12, he purchased his first guitar for \$15.00^[5] although another reference indicates he was given his first guitar by his cousin, Bukka White. In 1943, King left Kilmichael to work as a tractor driver and play guitar with the Famous St. John's Quartet of Inverness, Mississippi, performing at area churches and on WGRM in Greenwood, Mississippi.^{[6] [7]}

In 1946, King followed his cousin Bukka White to Memphis, Tennessee. White took him in for the next ten months.^[5] However, King shortly returned to Mississippi, where he decided to prepare himself better for the next visit, and returned to West Memphis, Arkansas, two years later in 1948. He performed on Sonny Boy Williamson's radio program on KWEM in West Memphis, Arkansas where he began to develop a local audience for his sound. King's appearances led to steady engagements at the Sixteenth Avenue Grill in West Memphis and later to a ten-minute spot on the legendary Memphis radio station WDIA. "King's Spot," became so popular, it was expanded and became the "Sepia Swing Club."

Initially he worked at the local R&B radio station WDIA as a singer and disc jockey, where he gained the nickname "Beale Street Blues Boy", later shortened to "B.B."^{[8] [9]} It was there that he first met T-Bone Walker. *"Once I'd heard him for the first time, I knew I'd have to have [an electric guitar] myself. 'Had' to have one, short of stealing!"*, he said.^[10]

Career

1949-2005

In 1949, King began recording songs under contract with Los Angeles-based RPM Records. Many of King's early recordings were produced by Sam Phillips, who later founded Sun Records. Before his RPM contract, King had debuted on Bullet Records by issuing the single "Miss Martha King" (1949), which did not chart well. "My very first recordings [in 1949] were for a company out of Nashville called Bullet, the Bullet Record Transcription company," King recalls. "I had horns that very first session. I had Phineas Newborn on piano; his father played drums, and his brother, Calvin, played guitar with me. I had Tuff Green on bass, Ben Branch on tenor sax, his brother, Thomas Branch, on trumpet, and a lady trombone player. The Newborn family were the house band at the famous Plantation Inn in West Memphis."^[11]

King assembled his own band; the B.B. King Review, under the leadership of Millard Lee. The band initially consisted of Calvin Owens and Kenneth Sands (trumpet), Lawrence Burdin (alto saxophone), George Coleman (tenor saxophone),^[12] Floyd Newman (baritone saxophone), Millard Lee (piano), George Joyner (bass) and Earl Forest and Ted Curry (drums). Onzie Horne was a trained musician elicited as an arranger to assist King with his compositions. By his own admission, he cannot play chords well^[13] and always relies on improvisation. This was followed by tours across the USA with performances in major theaters in cities such as Washington, D.C., Chicago, Los Angeles, Detroit and St. Louis, as well as numerous gigs in small clubs and juke joints of the southern US states.

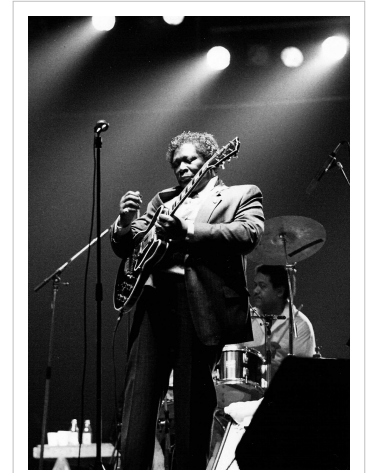
In the winter of 1949, King played at a dance hall in Twist, Arkansas. In order to heat the hall, a barrel half-filled with kerosene was lit, a fairly common practice at the time. During a performance, two men began to fight, knocking over the burning barrel and sending burning fuel across the floor. The hall burst into flames, which triggered an evacuation. Once outside, King realized that he had left his guitar inside the burning building. He entered the blaze to retrieve his beloved \$30 guitar, a Gibson semi-hollow electric. Two people died in the fire. The next day, King learned that the two men were fighting over a woman named Lucille. King named that first guitar Lucille, as well as every one he owned since that near-fatal experience, as a reminder never again to do something as stupid as run into a burning building or fight over women.

King meanwhile toured the entire "Chitlin' circuit" and 1956 became a record-breaking year, with 342 concerts booked. The same year he founded his own record label, Blues Boys Kingdom, with headquarters at Beale Street in Memphis. There, among other projects, he produced artists such as Millard Lee and Levi Seabury.

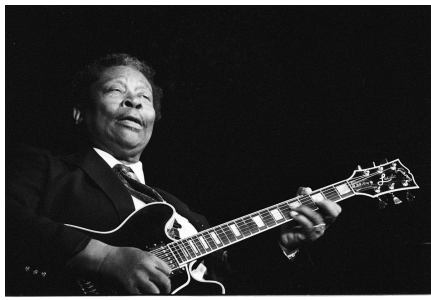
In the 1950s, B.B. King became one of the most important names in R&B music, amassing an impressive list of hits including "3 O'Clock Blues", "You Know I Love You," "Woke Up This Morning," "Please Love Me," "When My Heart Beats like a Hammer," "Whole Lotta Love," "You Upset Me Baby," "Every Day I Have the Blues", "Sneakin' Around," "Ten Long Years," "Bad Luck," "Sweet Little Angel", "On My Word of Honor," and "Please Accept My Love." In 1962, King signed to ABC-Paramount Records, which was later absorbed into MCA Records, and then his current label, Geffen Records. In November 1964, King recorded the *Live at the Regal* album at the Regal Theater in Chicago, Illinois.

King won a Grammy Award for a tune called "The Thrill Is Gone";^[14] his version became a hit on both the pop and R&B charts, which was rare during that time for an R&B artist. It also gained the number 183 spot in *Rolling Stone* magazine's *500 Greatest Songs of All Time*. He gained further visibility among rock audiences as an opening act on The Rolling Stones' 1969 American Tour. King's mainstream success continued throughout the 1970s with songs like "To Know You is to Love You" and "I Like to Live the Love".

King was inducted into the Blues Hall of Fame in 1980. In 2004 he was awarded the international Polar Music Prize, given to artists "in recognition of exceptional achievements in the creation and advancement of music."^[15]



Performing with his famous guitar,
Lucille



B.B. King in concert in France 1989

From the 1980s onward he has continued to maintain a highly visible and active career, appearing on numerous television shows and performing 300 nights a year. In 1988, King reached a new generation of fans with the single "When Love Comes to Town", a collaborative effort between King and the Irish band U2 on their *Rattle and Hum* album. In 2000, King teamed up with guitarist Eric Clapton to record *Riding With the King*. In 1998, King appeared in *The Blues Brothers 2000*, playing the part of the lead singer of the Louisiana Gator Boys, along with Clapton, Dr. John, Koko Taylor and Bo Diddley.

2006–present: farewell tour and later activities

Aged 80 at the time, on March 29, 2006, King played at Hallam Arena in Sheffield, England. This was the first date of his United Kingdom and European farewell tour. He played this tour supported by Northern Irish guitarist Gary Moore, with whom King had previously toured and recorded, including the song "Since I Met You Baby". The British leg of the tour ended on April 4 with a concert at Wembley Arena. And on June 28, 2009 King returned to Wembley arena to end a tour around Great Britain with British blues icon John Mayall. When questioned as to why he was embarking on another tour after already completing his farewell stint, King jokingly remarked that he had never actually said the farewell tour would be his last.^[16]

In July King went back to Europe, playing twice (July 2 and 3) in the 40th edition of the Montreux Jazz Festival and also in Zürich at the Blues at Sunset on July 14. During his show in Montreux at the Stravinski Hall he jammed with Joe Sample, Randy Crawford, David Sanborn, Gladys Knight, Lella James, Earl Thomas, Stanley Clarke, John McLaughlin, Barbara Hendricks and George Duke. The European leg of the Farewell Tour ended in Luxembourg on September 19, 2006, at the D'Coque Arena (support act: Todd Sharpville).

In November and December, King played six times in Brazil. During a press conference on November 29 in São Paulo, a journalist asked King if that would be the actual farewell tour. He answered: "One of my favorite actors is a man from Scotland named Sean Connery. Most of you know him as James Bond, 007. He made a movie called *Never Say Never Again*."

In June 2006, King was present at a memorial of his first radio broadcast at the Three Deuces Building in Greenwood, Mississippi, where an official marker of the Mississippi Blues Trail was erected. The same month, a groundbreaking was held for a new museum, dedicated to King.^[17] in Indianola, Mississippi.^[18] The museum opened on September 13, 2008.



B.B. King at Roy Thomson Hall, Toronto, Ontario (May 2007)

In late October 2006, he recorded a concert CD and DVD entitled *B.B. King: Live* at his B.B. King Blues Clubs in Nashville and Memphis. The four night production featured his regular B.B. King Blues Band and captured his show as he performs it nightly around the world. It was his first live performance recording in 14 years.

On July 28, 2007, King played at Eric Clapton's second Crossroads Guitar Festival with 20 other guitarists to raise money for the Crossroads Centre for addictive disorders. Performing in Chicago, he played "Paying the Cost to Be the Boss", "Rock Me Baby" and "Thrill is Gone" (although the latter was not published on the DVD release) with Robert Cray, Jimmie Vaughan and Hubert Sumlin. In a poignant

moment during the live broadcast, he offered a toast to the concert's host, Eric Clapton, and also reflected upon his own life and seniority. Adding to the poignancy, the four-minute speech — which had been underlaid with a mellow

chord progression by Robert Cray throughout — made a transition to an emotional rendition of "Thrill is Gone". Parts of this performance were subsequently aired in a PBS broadcast and released on the *Crossroads II* DVD.

Also in 2007, King accepted an invitation to contribute to *Goin' Home: A Tribute to Fats Domino* (Vanguard Records). With Ivan Neville's DumpstaPhunk, King contributed his version of the title song, "Goin' Home".

In 2007 King performed "One Shoe Blues" on the Sandra Boynton children's album *Blue Moo*, accompanied by a pair of sock puppets in the video.

In June 2008, King played at the Bonnaroo Music and Arts Festival in Manchester, Tennessee; he was also the final performer at the 25th annual Chicago Blues Festival on June 8, 2008, and at the Monterey Blues Festival, following Taj Mahal. Another June 2008 event was King's induction into the Hollywood Bowl Hall of Fame alongside Liza Minnelli and Sir James Galway.

In July 2008, Sirius XM Radio's Bluesville channel was re-named **B.B. King's Bluesville**.

On December 1, 2008, King performed at the Maryland Theater in Hagerstown, Maryland.^[19] On December 3, King and John Mayer were the closing act at the 51st Grammy Nomination Concert, playing "Let the Good Times Roll" by Louis Jordan. On December 30, 2008, King played at The Kennedy Center Honors Awards Show; his performance was in honor of actor Morgan Freeman.

In Summer 2009 B.B. King started a European Tour with concerts in France, Germany, Belgium, Finland and Denmark.

In March 2010, King contributed to Cyndi Lauper's album *Memphis Blues*, which was released on June 22, 2010.

King performed at the Mawazine festival in Rabat, Morocco, on May 27, 2010.^[20]

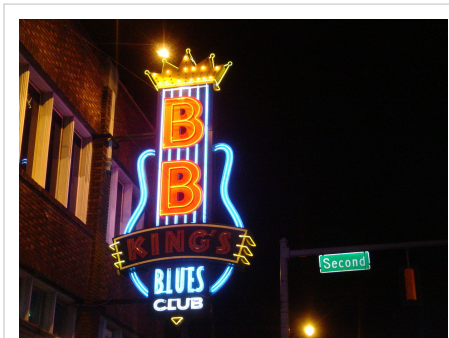
Over a period of 52 years, B.B. King has played in excess of 15,000 performances.^[21]



European Tour 2009, Vienna, July 2009

B.B. King's Blues Club

In 1991, B.B. King's Blues Club ^[22] opened on Beale Street in Memphis, and in 1994, a second club was launched at Universal City Walk in Los Angeles. A third club in New York City's Times Square opened in June 2000. Two further clubs opened at Foxwoods Casino in Connecticut in January 2002^[23] and another in Nashville in 2003.^[24] A club in West Palm Beach opened in the fall of 2009^[25] and an additional one, based in the Mirage Hotel, Las Vegas, is due to open in the winter of 2009.^[26] In 2007, A B.B. King's Blues Club in Orlando opened on International Drive. The Memphis, Nashville, Orlando, West Palm Beach and Las Vegas stores are all the same Company.



Sign outside B.B. King's Blues Club on Beale Street, Memphis

Philanthropy

In 2001, King signed on as an official supporter of Little Kids Rock, a non-profit organization that provides free musical instruments and instruction to children in underprivileged public schools throughout the US. He sits on LKR's Honorary Board of Directors.

TV appearances

B.B. King has made guest appearances in numerous popular television shows, including *The Cosby Show*, *The Young and the Restless*, *General Hospital*,^[27] *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, *Sesame Street*,^[28] *Married... with Children*, *Sanford and Son*, and *Touched by an Angel*. He has also made a cameo in the movie *Spies Like Us*.^[29]

Personal life

King has been married twice, to Martha Lee Denton, 1946 to 1952, and to Sue Carol Hall, 1958 to 1966. Both marriages ended because of the heavy demands made on the marriage by King's 250 performances a year.^[5] It is reported that he has fathered 15 children.^[5] He has lived with Type II diabetes for over twenty years and is a high-profile spokesman in the fight against the disease, appearing in advertisements for diabetes-management products.

King is an FAA licensed Private Pilot and learned to fly in 1963 at Chicago Hammond Airport in Lansing, IL (now Lansing Municipal Airport - KIGQ).^[30] ^[31] He frequently flew to gigs, but under the advisement of his insurance company and manager in 1995, King was asked to only fly with another licensed pilot and as a result King stopped flying around age 70.^[32]

His favorite singer is Frank Sinatra. In his autobiography King speaks about how he was, and is, a "Sinatra nut" and how he went to bed every night listening to Sinatra's classic album *In the Wee Small Hours*. King has credited Sinatra for opening doors to black entertainers who were not given the chance to play in "white dominated" venues; Sinatra got B.B. King into the main clubs in Las Vegas during the 1960s.^[33]

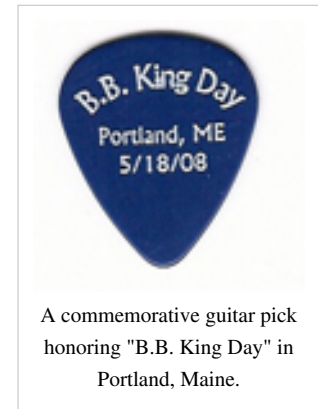
Honors and awards



B.B. King in 1990

- In 1980, he was inducted into the Blues Hall of Fame.^[34]
- In 1987, he was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.^[35]
- In 1990, he was awarded the National Medal of Arts.^[36]
- In 1991, he was awarded the National Heritage Fellowship from the NEA.^[37]

- King was awarded the Kennedy Center Honors in 1995. This is given to recognize "the lifelong accomplishments and extraordinary talents of our nation's most prestigious artists."^[38]
- In 2004, the Royal Swedish Academy of Music awarded him the Polar Music Prize for his "significant contributions to the blues".^[15]
- On December 15, 2006, President George W. Bush awarded King the Presidential Medal of Freedom.^[39]
- On May 27, 2007, King was awarded an honorary doctorate in music by Brown University.^[40]
- On May 14, 2008, King was presented with the keys to the city of Utica, New York; and on May 18, 2008, the mayor of Portland, Maine, Edward Suslovic, declared the day "B.B. King Day" in the city. Prior to King's performance at the Merrill Auditorium, Suslovic presented King with the keys to the city.^[41]
- In 2009, *Time* named B.B. King #3 on its list of the 10 best electric guitarists of all time.^[42]
- Each year during the first week in June, a B.B. King Homecoming Festival is held in Indianola, Mississippi.^[43]
- A Mississippi Blues Trail marker was added for B.B. King, commemorating his birthplace.^[44]
- On May 29, 2010, Sabrosa Park (at the small town of Sabrosa, north of Portugal) was renamed B.B. King Park in honor of King and the free concert he played before 20,000 people.



Grammy Awards

King was given a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 1987.^[45] As of 2009, he has won 15 Grammy Awards, of which ten have been the Grammy Award for Best Traditional Blues Album: in 2009 (for *One Kind Favor*), 2005 (*B. B. King & Friends: 80*), 2003 (for *A Christmas Celebration of Hope*), 2001 (for *Riding with the King*), 2000 (for *Blues on the Bayou*), 1994 (for *Blues Summit*), 1992 (for *Live at the Apollo*), 1991 (for *Live at San Quentin*), 1986 (for *My Guitar Sings the Blues*) and 1984 (for *Blues 'N' Jazz*). In 1982, he won the Grammy for Best Ethnic or Traditional Folk Recording (for *There Must Be a Better World Somewhere*). The Grammy for Best Ethnic or Traditional Folk was last given in 1986; the Grammy Award for Best Traditional Blues Album was first given in 1983. In 1997, he won a Grammy Award for Best Rock Instrumental Performance (with other artists, for "SRV Shuffle"). In 1971, he won the Grammy Award for Best Male R&B Vocal Performance (for "The Thrill Is Gone"). A Grammy Hall of Fame Award was given to "The Thrill is Gone" in 1998, an award given to recordings that are at least 25 years old and that have "qualitative or historical significance."^[46]

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- [8] "B.B." is normally written with no space between the letters.
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External links

- B. B. King's Blues Clubs (<http://www.bbkingclubs.com/>)
 - Official B. B. King-website (<http://www.bbking.com/>)
 - The official signature B. B. King guitar, by Gibson (<http://www.gibsoncustom.com/flash/products/signature/lucille/lucille.html>)
 - Official B. B. King Museum website (<http://www.bbkingmuseum.org/>)
 - World Blues-One of the oldest B. B. King websites on the net (<http://www.worldblues.com/>)
 - B. B. King UK Fan Site (<http://www.bluesboyking.com/>)
 - B. B. King, The Ed Sullivan Show (<http://www.edsullivan.com/artists/bb-king>)
 - B. B. King (<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0454475/>) at the Internet Movie Database
 - B. B. King (<http://musicbrainz.org/artist/dcb03ce3-67a5-4eb3-b2d1-2a12d93a38f3.html>) discography at MusicBrainz
 - 1980 Blues Foundation Hall of Fame induction (<http://www.blues.org/halloffame/inductees.php4?YearId=25>)
 - Live Photos 1 (http://www.volubilis.net/concerts/bb_king_2006/concert_bb_king_18092006_01.php) 2 (<http://www.type3media.com/livephotos/bbking11172007.html>)
 - B. B. King's oral history video excerpts (<http://www.visionaryproject.org/kingbb>) at The National Visionary Leadership Project
 - B. B. King biographer Charlie Sawyer writes about returning to the Delta and a "charette" on the B. B. King Museum and Delta Interpretive Center in Indianola, Mississippi (<http://courses.dce.harvard.edu/~musie139/DeltaDiary.html>)
 - Harvard University pays tribute to B.B. King with multiple web pages and a video of a 2-hour concert honoring B.B. King at Harvard University in 2007, featuring "Monster Mike" Welch and J. Geils performing with the blues band "2120 South Michigan Avenue" (<http://www.bluesisking.com/>)
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Article Sources and Contributors

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