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A Chat With B.B. King



Music is very subjective. Ask a room full of people who the best rock or jazz musician is and you'll get as many different answers as there are stars in the sky. That's why it's an amazing task in any genre to find an artist that so envelops a style, that has so mastered it, that people unanimously refer to them as the bestever. So it is with B.B King.

Recently ranked as the #3 greatest guitarist of all time by Rolling Stone magazine, behind only Jimi Hendrix and Duane Allman, his sweet, jazzy, blues guitar style is legendary. Throw in a gospel-influenced singing style that can move an audience to tears and you have the undeniable King Of The Blues.

Born Riley B. King in Indianola, Miss. on September 16, 1925, B.B.'s first big break came in 1948 when he performed on Sonny Boy Williamson's radio program on KWEM out of West Memphis, Tennessee. Referred to as the "Beale Street Blues Boy," (later shortened to Blues Boy King, and eventually B.B. King.) by 1951, he'd earned his first R&B hit, "Three O' Clock Blues" and by 1956 was playing over 300 shows a year. In 1964 he released the monumental album, "Live At The Regal" and in 1970 scored a pop hit with "The Thrill Is

Gone," probably his most recognizable recording ever.

Since then, B.B. has made a host of solo albums and has recorded with everyone from Stevie Wonder, to Eric Clapton, to U2. He was inducted into the Blues Foundation Hall of Fame in 1984 and into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1987. He received the NARAS' Lifetime Achievement Grammy Award in 1987, and has received honorary doctorates from Tougaloo(MS) College in 1973; Yale University in 1977; Berklee College of Music in 1982; Rhodes College of Memphis in 1990 and Mississippi Valley State University in 2002. In 1992, he received the National Award of Distinction from the University of Mississippi.

Gibson and Epiphone are proud to have been associated with B.B. since the early days. In the mid-1950s, while B.B. was performing in Twist, Arkansas, two men got into a fight and knocked over a kerosene stove, setting fire to the hall. B.B. ran outside to safety with everyone else, but then realized that he had left his guitar inside. Rushing back inside the burning building to retrieve it, he narrowly escaped death. When he later found out that the fight had been over a woman named Lucille, he decided to give the name to his guitar as a reminder never to do crazy things like fight over a woman or run into burning buildings! Since then, each one of B.B.'s trademark Gibson and Epiphone guitars has been called Lucille.

On September 30, 2003, Epiphone representative Will Jones had the chance to chat with B.B. at the B.B King Blues Club in Nashville, Tennessee just before he took the stage at his 78th Birthday Bash.

Epiphone: Mr. King, what is your opinion of the Epiphone Lucille?

B.B King: "They are great! People tell me sometimes that they would love to have a Lucille of their own but that the Gibson costs too much for them. I say to them- Have you tried the Epiphone Lucille? There are no other guitars any better for the price. The Epiphones are terrific."

Epiphone: Your Lucille is famous and unique for its stereo outputs. Why stereo?

B.B King: Well, hey, if you're going to do something, why not go all the way? I like to get all the highs and lows and with stereo you can run one amp set for treble and one for bass and you can get the best of both!

Epiphone: Some folks out there I'm sure would love to know about the Varitone switch on your Lucille. Could you please explain?

B.B King: "It is good for getting different tones or if you prefer a particular

sound. I just leave my toggle switch in the middle position and the Varitone at twelve o'clock and then I can get as much bass or as much treble as I want. I can adjust my sound while I play and nobody knows I'm doing it."

Epiphone: Your Lucille is a semi-hollow of course, why no f-holes?

B.B King: "I don't want feedback when I'm playing unless I WANT feedback! Many times when your amp and guitar are too close you just can't control that. I know how to get feedback from Lucille when I want it, that's why she doesn't have them, much like a solid body Les Paul. I tell you that guy made the best guitar ever made; all we did is copy it a little. Of course, ours is bigger and prettier, but don't tell him that. You know my first guitar was a Stella and I played an Epiphone long before I became friends with Gibson"

Epiphone: Other than blues, what kinds of music do you enjoy? For example, being in Nashville, country?

B.B King: "I like some of all kinds of music. Country I've always felt is a cousin to the blues. Bob Wills, Ernest Tubb, Roy Acuff, crazy about Hank Williams. There was no finer guitar player than Chet Atkins. Like I've said I believe all music is good, some people present it better. I've recorded with everyone from Pavarotti to John Lee Hooker. I like some of all of it!

Epiphone: What superstars in music have you influenced?

B.B King: "Many of them don't tell me personally, and you may find that hard to believe, but I read an article one time about John Lennon where he said if he could play guitar like anyone he would want to play just like B.B King. That made me feel really good."

Epiphone: Finally, Mr. King, what is the best advice you can give up-and-coming and beginning guitarists?

B.B King: "Well, that reminds me of a story of these two kids walking around in New York City. They came upon this old guy eating a pastrami sandwich. They asked him, Sir, How do we get to Carnegie Hall? The old fellow replied, Practice, practice, practice! I never practice like I should and never have, really. I play a lot and make mistakes and then have to cover them up. I then go back and practice what I messed up or else I'll be expected to know how to do it again when it was a mistake to begin with. The band gets confused when I do something they are not expecting, so the best thing I can still do is practice. Tell them to practice!"

To find out more about the King of the Blues, visit www.bbking.com.

