

MUDDY WATERS 1915-1983

Muddy Waters, a major influence in the development of electric blues and rock and roll, died in his sleep in the early morning hours of April 30, 1983. He was 68 years old. With the passing of Mr. Waters goes an important link with the rural blues tradition that he brought to Chicago in 1943.

Mr. Waters was born McKinley Morganfield, the son of a sharecropper, on April 4, 1915 in Sunflower, Mississippi. He began playing harmonica at an early age and by the time he was 12 or 13 was performing at country picnics and fish fries. His early personal contacts included the legendary Robert Johnson and Son House. These influences surfaced when he recorded for Alan Lomax and the Library of Congress in 1941. Playing very much in Johnson's style of "bottleneck" guitar, Waters recorded the now historic "Country Blues" and "I Be's Troubled." For a short period of time thereafter he played harmonica with a company of "Silas Green's from New Orleans" minstrel show. Upon returning to Clarksdale, Mississippi, he decided to join the flow of migrants and move to Chicago. Once there he came under the influence of Big Bill Broonzy who helped him change his style from imitating Johnson or House, to developing the sound that was to become known as the Chicago blues.

Mr. Waters' work was now more aggressive than any of the country blues styles, but his themes still reflected the south, making him a great favorite with the northern Black community. One of the most remarkable aspects of his career was his ability to surround himself with extraordinary sidemen. His bands have included a virtual who's who of blues greats; Sunnyland Slim, Johnny Jones, Otis Spann, Little Walter, "Big" Crawford, and Willie Dixon. His most amazing talent, though, was his creation of stars. Relatively unknown musicians would join his band, and through his influence and encouragement, leave as stars themselves. Just a few of the current luminaries that started with Waters are Junior Wells, James Cotton, and Buddy Guy.

His recordings were classics of the Chicago blues style. "Louisiana Blues" displayed his excellent work

as an accompanist while his recordings of "Hoochie Koochie Man," "I'm a Man," and "Rollin' and Tumblin'" became standards not only of that scene, but of rock and roll as well. Indeed, the Rolling Stones took their name from his "Rolling Stone Blues."

Mr. Waters was a consummate performer, even after age and a car accident in 1969 slowed him down. He once said: "When I sing the blues, when I'm singing the real blues, I'm singing what I feel. Some people maybe want to laugh; maybe I don't talk so good and they don't understand you know? But when we sing the blues--when I sing the blues it comes from the heart. From right here in your soul, an' if you' singing what you really feel it comes out all over. It ain't just what you saying, it pours out of you." Muddy Waters always poured out everything he had. He will be greatly missed.

Bruce Harrah-Conforth