

## INTERPLANETARY BLUES

7. #1 Greatest 100 Guitar Tracks of All Time on Rolling Stone

### JBG Structure

1. Form is I, IV, V as a 12 bar blues
2. Written in key of Bb, not a natural guitar key. More typical of horns and piano, ie Big Band
3. Shuffle rhythm with syncopation. Not 4/4
4. Call and verse style with a guitar solo
5. Double stops on the guitar parts@@
6. Guitar intro is a direct copy of Louis Jordan's "Ain't That Just Like a Woman" guitar solo by Carl Hogan (1946) but done with double stops^
7. Combines R&B, White Country and Big Band influences

### JBG Lyrical Content

1. Partly autobiographical
  - a. Deep down in Louisiana code for southern or slave roots?
  - b. Country boy/colored boy
  - c. CB born at 2520 Goode Ave. in St. Louis
  - d. Story line is that the singers' musical skill will elevate him from poverty to riches and fame.
  - e. Expresses a version of the American Dream-Universal success story, not just an African American one
  - f. Berry wants everyone to be his fanbase. It is a smart business move
2. Vocal style
  - a. Black but not too Black. Different and more accessible to white audiences than other R&B singers
  - b. Smooth, fast, well enunciated. Nat King Cole was a big influence. Avoids melisma.
  - c. Accessible to white and black audiences: "I think it had a lot to do with my diction. The pop fan could understand what I was saying"
3. Delivery
  - a. Pure Chuck Berry. Other musicians are purely supportive and interchangeable. No other singers.
  - b. CB was handsome, well dressed, athletic
  - c. Animated, sly, funny, sexual, cool
  - d. A guitar and vocal virtuoso
  - e. Unique moves: duck walk, etc.

### Chuck Berry Bio

#### Early

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1. Born 10/18/1926 in St Louis. Parents Henry and Martha Berry. Direct descendants of slaves only two gen before. Great-grandfather lived in a log cabin on the Ohio river. Family migrated to region for employment during WW1.
2. Father-carpenter, Deacon of Antioch Baptist Church. Mother-college educated school principal and teacher. Three brothers and two sisters.
3. Grew up in a segregated black comfortable neighborhood "the Ville" at 2520 Goode Ave. Moderately prosperous. First met a white person at 6yo, a firefighter.
4. Earliest memories were of a radio, mother was able to change stations and cities!
5. Sang in church choir by 6yo. Learned sax, bass,piano, drums and guitar. Cool approach not passionate. CB later said: "That's all there was in our house: poetry and choir rehearsal and duets and so forth; I listened to Dad and Mother discuss things about poetry and delivery and voice and diction-I don't think anyone could know how much it really means"
6. Heard C&W "hillbilly" R&B on radio. Both became part of his sound
7. Sumner High School. Tina Turner, Arthur Ashe, Robt. Guillame, Bobby McFerrin, Dick Gregory. Poor student, "anti-decorous". All Mens' Review show of 1941 "Confessin' the Blues" School hated it, kids loved it. He later said: "It amazes me when I hear people say, I want to go out and find out who I am. I always knew who I was. I was going to be famous if it killed me."
8. Guitar lessons w Ira Harris, local jazz legend. Influences were: blues T- Bone Walker, jazz Charlie Christian, Louis Jordan for humor. "Charlie Christian played amplified guitar with Benny Goodman's quartet. He was the greatest guitar player that ever was. But he never looked up from the guitar. But I put a little dance to it. They appreciate seein' something along with hearin' something."
9. Dropped out of Sumner 1944 headed for California or "The Promised Land" w 2 Found pistol and stole a car. Robbed a few local business of petty cash to finance his trip. Caught almost immediately Given 10 yrs. Spent 3 yrs at Intermediate Reformatory for Young Men in Jefferson, Mo. Joined Gospel group, boxing. Released in 1947 for good behavior at 21yo. Had 2 more jail sentences as adult. Marked contrast between his impetuous criminal behavior and the cool, calculating business man. Root motivation for this crime was money and the dream of California's pleasures, not violence.
10. Worked for father in construction, janitor at Fisher Body plant, part time photographer for uncle while playing local St. Louis clubs. CB had a strong work ethic: " I used to work at Kroger's. When the store opened, you were there. When I worked in an automobile plant, you punched in. So it showed if you were a minute late. If you have a paid job, you show up."
11. Married Themetta "Toddy" Suggs October 1948. Met at a local fair and had 4 children. Later enrolled in cosmetology school . Always had jobs while establishing his music career. Had a lifelong marriage but not a choir boy.

### Early Career

1. 1952 met Johnnie Johnson. Local blues and jazz pianist. (Remember JBG is in piano key). Most important collaborator, under-credited/maybe underpaid by Berry.Later fought over copyright for JBG. JJ was a heavy drinker. He and Berry formed quartet w bassist and drummer. Berry took the lead musically and in business. Played local gigs. Ike and Tina were contemporaries in St Louis club scene. Created a sound that didn't fit anyone's mold. "The music played most around St Louis was country-western and swing. Curiosity provoked me to lay a lot of the country stuff

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on our predominantly black audience. After they laughed at me a few times, they began requesting the hillbilly stuff." Interesting to note Ray Charles did something similar.

2. 1955 went to Chicago to get a recording contract. Met Muddy Waters who introduced him to Leonard Chess-Jewish immigrant from Poland.. Chess records-famous for electric Chicago Blues sound. Included Howlin' Wolf^^, Bo Diddley^^
3. May 21,1955 recorded *Maybelline*^ and *Wee Wee Hours*, a conventional blues. M is arguably first Rock song. Song form is Ida Red by Roy Acuff and Bob Wills and Texas playboys with new lyrics about chasing his unfaithful lover in his V8 Ford while she is her Cadillac. Name came off a hair cream label or an old cow depending on who tells the story. Bob Wills says he remembered an old black sharecropper in Texas singing to chickens with this song. Pushed by Leonard Chess as a single over *Wee Wee Hours*. Became a massive hit.
4. *Maybelline* 24 bar guitar solo was a breakthrough^
5. Top of the charts with *Maybellene*, *You Can't Catch Me*, *School Days*, *Back in the USA* and *Little Queenie*. He was a 30yo black man singing to a predominately white teenage audience.
6. "*Back In The U.S.A.*"

Oh well, oh well, I feel so good today,  
We just touched ground on an international runway  
Jet propelled back home from overseas to the USA  
New York, Los Angeles, oh how I yearned for you  
Detroit, Chicago, Chattanooga, Baton Rouge  
Let alone just to be at my home back in ol' St-Lou  
Did I miss the skyscrapers? Did I miss the long freeway?  
From the coast of California to the shores of Delaware Bay  
You can bet your life I did, 'til I got back to the USA  
Looking hard for a drive-in, searching for a corner cafe?  
Where hamburgers sizzle on an open grill night and day  
Yeah, and a jukebox jumping with records like in the USA  
Well, I'm so glad I'm livin' in the USA  
Yes, I'm so glad I'm livin' in the USA  
Anything you want, they got it right here in the USA  
I'm so glad I'm livin' in the USA  
Yes, I'm so glad I'm livin' in the USA

Chorus: Un Huh. Oh Yeah!

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### Mid-Career (the 1950's)

1. Made lots of money. Bought a brand new Cadillac monthly for a few years.
2. DJ Alan Freed played his music on white radio stations non-stop. Freed was given 33% of sales for non-existent song-writing credits in return for free on-air promotion. Became known as Payola scandal. CB became much more careful with his money as time went on.
3. More hits: *Roll Over Beethoven*, *Too Much Monkey Business*. *Sweet Little 16*- later reworked into *Surfin' USA* by the Beach Boys and *Brown Eyed Handsome Man*-one of my favorites:

Arrested on charges of unemployment,  
He was sitting in the witness stand  
The judge's wife called up the district attorney  
Said you free that brown eyed man  
You want your job you better free that brown eyed man  
Flying across the desert in a TWA,  
I saw a woman walking across the sand  
She been a-walkin' thirty miles en route to Bombay.  
To get a brown eyed handsome man  
Her destination was a brown eyed handsome man  
Way back in history three thousand years  
Back every since the world began  
There's been a whole lot of good women shed a tear  
For a brown eyed handsome man  
That's what the trouble was brown eyed handsome man  
Beautiful daughter couldn't make up her mind  
Between a doctor and a lawyer man  
Her mother told her daughter go out and find yourself



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A brown eyed handsome man  
That's what your daddy is a brown eyed handsome man  
Milo Venus was a beautiful lass  
She had the world in the palm of her hand  
But she lost both her arms in a wrestling match  
To get brown eyed handsome man  
She fought and won herself a brown eyed handsome man  
Two, three count with nobody on  
He hit a high fly into the stand  
Rounding third he was headed for home  
It was a brown eyed handsome man  
That won the game; it was a brown eyed handsome man

A parable for African American male self respect?

4. Movie appearances, intense touring with other stars such as Buddy Holly, The Drifters, Jerry Lee Lewis, Everly Brothers. Stuck to his hits on tour. "All business"

### Mid Career

1. 1958- released *JBG* and *Sweet Little Sixteen*-describes a star crazy teenage girl
2. Started to write more songs about teen age sex (indirect references done with humor), youth unemployment, parental distrust and lack of physical mobility. Offers generational defiance and consumerism as a solution to youth's problems. California idealized as "*The Promised Land*". Big cars are a symbol of success and happiness. His imagining of current American Society was the same for both black and white fans.
3. By late 50's American youth was moving away from the simplistic innocence of CB's songs and developed into the "Youth Culture" of the 60's for which CB was almost completely removed. CB became more and more irrelevant socially and lyrically, although his musical heritage continued on with the Beatle, Beach Boys and Rolling Stones all playing covers or directly stealing his musical styles^^^
4. As new music sales decreased, continued touring.
5. Opened Club Bandstand, a "mixed club" as well as an amusement park outside of St. Louis
6. Dec. 1959 arrested for Mann Act (1910 "White Slave Act" prevented the transporting of underage females across any state lines for "immoral purposes". Previously used against

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heavyweight Jack Johnson and classical singer Paul Robeson as a weapon of racial discrimination. Destroyed his businesses.

7. 20 mo in Leavenworth and Indiana Fed Penn, described by CB as a "period of self improvement" studying business law and management, world history and typing. Generally denied doing prison time to public. "That's the misconception(s) that people have, that Chuck Berry went to jail. They're just totally wrong. It might have said something in the large papers in the bigger city headlines and things. But, you take a look at any of the local papers, and you will see that I was acquitted. I never went to jail." CB was a pioneer in "fake news" theory!!
8. Released *You Never Can Tell*, *Promised Land* and others in the early '60s
9. 1966 left Chess records.
10. Rest of 60's played oldie shows. Began accepting cash only to play. IRS conviction resulted in 4 mo prison term. Slipped farther behind current musical scene.

### Late Career

1. 1972 *My Ding-a-Ling*: first and only #1 hit. File under Penile sing along tunes.
2. 1973 Johnnie Johnson left band.
3. Used pick up bands only henceforth. No rehearsal. Band expected to know music. Directed band by calling out key and then used body language. Bruce Springsteen and Steve Miller were alumni.
4. 1979 performed for Carter at WH but then jailed 4mos by IRS for tax evasion same year.
5. 1980s Lifetime Achievement Award at Grammys induction into Blues Hall of Fame and first class of Rock and Roll Hall of Fame
6. Continued performing live, often at his self owned restaurant "The Southern Air"
7. Age 62 sued for \$5 million by woman he punched in mouth for an insult. Fined \$250 and 6mo suspended sentence with local comm service.
8. 1990's sued by a group of women accused of videotaping women in the bathroom of his club and amusement park. Settled out of court. Later charged with selling cocaine. Later dropped.
9. Increasingly erratic performances, nasty to strangers.
10. Performed at Clintons' 1993 inauguration
11. Described by a music critic as...lean and handsome at 76 [but remained} as suspicious, defiant and guarded off stage as his is mesmerizing on. "The world has done nothing to me that I haven't done with the world."
12. Continued to tour world wide.
13. Died suddenly at his home near Wentzville Mo at aged 90 on March 18, 2017. Survived by wife Themetta and their 4 children

So, who was Chuck Berry? He was a pivotal figure in Rock and Roll, echoing and giving voice to the teenage America of the mid 50's to very early 60's. . He described himself as "the prime minister, not the king of Rock" which is insightful. He set his poems, and I think they are poems in a way, to a clever amalgam of freely pilfered musical ideas that range from blues, country, latin, big band and swing music and transferred them to the guitar with his own ingenious flair. He bitterly resented the use of his

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musical ideas by the next generation, but this was primarily due to lack of royalty payments and due less to pride of artistic ownership. This is consistent with his approach to the music business as business first.

He wrote his music about and for an audience a generation younger than himself, and did so as a detached observer. He described that world and also helped to shape it at the same time, by glorifying certain aspects of American culture and life. He created myths as well as celebrating them. He was a black man who wrote American music for anyone who would listen, but more importantly he wrote and played it for those would buy his product. He was adored by the Beatles, Stones, Beach Boys and countless other bands, who incorporated his sound into theirs. CB is part of the DNA of almost all Rock music. Ultimately those groups and others moved on to their own sounds and topics, but they always paid homage to Berry. He was publically indifferent to their adulation. I'm sure that they would have been beside themselves with joy to work with him as an acknowledged progenitor, and it would almost certainly been on his own terms. From a business and career perspective this would have made a lot of sense for a man whose celebrity was waning at the time. However, when the movie, *Hail, Hail Rock and Roll* was made in 1987 made by his acolytes to celebrate him and his music, he was nasty to everyone involved. This is easily seen in the film. He played the alpha male with every one of the musicians who had come there to pay homage to him. He was not a gracious man, to say the least. He was nicest to Linda Ronstadt, but she was a talent matched by an incredible natural physical beauty. Not hard to understand. ^

Unfortunately, like many African American men, he spent time in jail, but armed robbery and tax evasion would probably land anyone in jail. His first was an impulse crime committed by a teenage. The later convictions were for monetary crimes committed by a man who actually had money as well a moral/sex transgressions that offended the white establishment as well as the ethics of his own family and church upbringing. Only his Mann Act conviction may have been racially motivated. In contrast, his white musical contemporary, Jerry Lee Lewis married his 13 yo cousin in 1957. His career tanked for a long time, but he was not jailed.

Berry alluded to his African American heritage obliquely, but proudly, and he helped to pave the way for a more just society. I think that he was proud of who he was. However, this social contribution was a primarily a side effect of his musical business plan. He perceived the American way of life as a materialistic grab bag, and it may very well be. He just wanted his slice of it and ultimately, he got it. He didn't allow himself to be exploited economically. This might explain his bizarre and illogical defiance of the IRS. He took no crap, and I admire him for that. Racial and social equality were never the primary points in his music. They were a by-product. Economic equality, however, was the point, and he made sure that it started with Chuck Berry. "I made records for people who would buy them. No color, no ethnic, no political-I don't want that, never did."

He was clever, charming, bitter, funny, calculating, engaging, aloof, narcissistic, foolish and wise. He was a bit of a psychopath. He saw his shows as ritual. A Chuck Berry show in 2000 had basically the same playlist as 1960 with Chuck doing his thing with a rotating pick up crew of backup musicians, of often indifferent quality, doing theirs. They were kept very much out of the spotlight

Most importantly, his music did not evolve to any significant degree, at least the music he chose to share with the public. He wrote Chuck Berry songs, often by formula. His albums, which never became cohesive works in their own right, were a collection of Chuck Berry songs and not much more. He never

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made a Sgt Pepper, a Let It Bleed or a Pet Sounds for example. He showed no inclination whatever to explore or explain himself in his music. "Everything I wrote about wasn't about me, but about the people listening." and "Praise doesn't mean anything to me, I don't judge myself." He was humble about his contribution. "I just feel I got my inspiration, education and all from others that came before me. And I added my...I don't even know if I added anything. I Played what they played, an it sounded different, I guess."

Here is some more CB wisdom. "One of my realizations is that if you revel over joy, you're going to ache over pain and get killed over hurt. Your span of feelings are going to go just as far one way as the other."

"Rather than joy, I would rather be absent of pain."

"Of the 5 most important things, first is health, second is knowledge or wisdom, third is wealth and I can't remember the other two."

"If I wasn't a musician, I'd take up the law. They are the rottenest, wealthiest people in America."

"Don't let the same dog bite you twice."

So, who was Chuck Berry? He was a lot of things, but I can tell a Chuck Berry lick when I hear it and to quote another Rock legend: "I know, it's only rock and roll, but I like it."

Mitchell D. Kaye MD

February 7, 2019

Athenaeum Society at Hopkinsville, Ky

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The following music was included on the Voyager record.

- Bach, Brandenburg Concerto No. 2 in F. First Movement, Munich Bach Orchestra, Karl Richter, conductor. 4:40
- Java, court gamelan, "Kinds of Flowers," recorded by Robert Brown. 4:43
- Senegal, percussion, recorded by Charles Duvelle. 2:08
- Zaire, Pygmy girls' initiation song, recorded by Colin Turnbull. 0:56
- Australia, Aborigine songs, "Morning Star" and "Devil Bird," recorded by Sandra LeBrun Holmes. 1:26
- Mexico, "El Cascabel," performed by Lorenzo Barcelata and the Mariachi México. 3:14
- "Johnny B. Goode," written and performed by Chuck Berry. 2:38
- New Guinea, men's house song, recorded by Robert MacLennan. 1:20
- Japan, shakuhachi, "Tsuru No Sugomori" ("Crane's Nest,") performed by Goro Yamaguchi. 4:51
- Bach, "Gavotte en rondeaux" from the Partita No. 3 in E major for Violin, performed by Arthur Grumiaux. 2:55

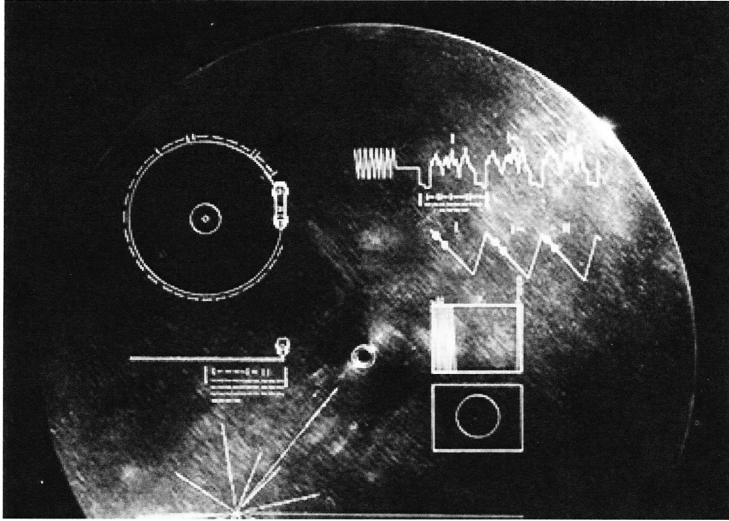
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- Mozart, The Magic Flute, Queen of the Night aria, no. 14. Edda Moser, soprano. Bavarian State Opera, Munich, Wolfgang Sawallisch, conductor. 2:55
- Georgian S.S.R., chorus, "Tchakrulo," collected by Radio Moscow. 2:18
- Peru, panpipes and drum, collected by Casa de la Cultura, Lima. 0:52
- "Melancholy Blues," performed by Louis Armstrong and his Hot Seven. 3:05
- Azerbaijan S.S.R., bagpipes, recorded by Radio Moscow. 2:30
- Stravinsky, Rite of Spring, Sacrificial Dance, Columbia Symphony Orchestra, Igor Stravinsky, conductor. 4:35
- Bach, The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book 2, Prelude and Fugue in C, No.1. Glenn Gould, piano. 4:48
- Beethoven, Fifth Symphony, First Movement, the Philharmonia Orchestra, Otto Klemperer, conductor. 7:20
- Bulgaria, "Izlel je Delyo Hagdutin," sung by Valya Balkanska. 4:59
- Navajo Indians, Night Chant, recorded by Willard Rhodes. 0:57
- Holborne, Paueans, Galliards, Almains and Other Short Aeirs, "The Fairie Round," performed by David Munrow and the Early Music Consort of London. 1:17
- Solomon Islands, panpipes, collected by the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Service. 1:12
- Peru, wedding song, recorded by John Cohen. 0:38
- China, ch'in, "Flowing Streams," performed by Kuan P'ing-hu. 7:37
- India, raga, "Jaat Kahan Ho," sung by Surshri Kesar Bai Kerkar. 3:30
- "Dark Was the Night," written and performed by Blind Willie Johnson. 3:15
- Beethoven, String Quartet No. 13 in B flat, Opus 130, Cavatina, performed by Budapest String Quartet. 6:37

# Related Links

The Golden Record Cover

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### History & Manufacturing



1. <https://youtu.be/fd3qXfF7hqE> Louis Jordan

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2. CB - Johnny Be Good <https://youtu.be/6ROwVrF0Ceg>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=youtu.be&v=6ROwVrF0Ceg&app=desktop>

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3. CB back in the USA <https://youtu.be/ERVLy-ltjHs>

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4. CB Maybelline

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v124f0i0Xh4>

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5. Rolling Stones

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CfV7eSoRpCk>

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6. Beach Boys - Fun Fun Fun

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7. Aaron Neville - C'est La Vie (1997)

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