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The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum along with Case Western Reserve University presented the 17th annual American Music Masters’ Award to its’ first inductee Chuck Berry (1986). This tribute celebrates the lives and contributions of an artist who shaped the sound and culture of American music. This week-long event included exhibits, lectures, films, artist interviews and programs for students and teachers, concluding with a tribute concert that drew together artists, experts, fans and friends who paid homage to one of the most influential musicians of the past century.

Chuck Berry is best known for his creative style of rhythm and blues with a taste of country and western that established a new form and identity to not only a new generation, but also a new genre of music. This new thing later to be defined as Rock and Roll was developed from the numerous artists and legendary crafts mastered in one unique chord of riffs and lyrics. Often referred to as “the poet laureate of rock ‘n’ roll” his significant contributions remain the staple of harmonies that dominates music today. A true lyricist, he told stories of his everyday life and

made them so popular that many became cliché's of pop culture.

Breaking the barriers of rock 'n' roll was a challenge for Berry whose choice of instrument was unusual at the time. The electric guitar took a back seat to the piano as rock emerged into the lime light. It took Berry to bring the electric guitar center stage using song and stagecraft to entertain his audience. The Gibson ES-350 became a part of his show as a dance partner and side kick. He is most noted for the "duck walk" that earned cheers from his fans who often mimicked, but only a few could mastered his dance abilities. His solo electric guitar's introduction to a song grabbed the attention of his fans and captivated them with pulsating excitement and energy.

Chuck Berry is a man of many firsts. He wrote songs that challenged the consciousness of humanity and demanded changes to what was thought to be normal. He used his music as a tool to question the conditions in the South such as segregation and discrimination. Songs like "Brown Eyed Handsome Man" revealed his love of self and was known as the first racially conscious song of its time. Although they were secular in nature, most of his song lyrics expressed fun and out going themes, but he considered himself a serious messenger for the fight for what was right. The crossover appeal awarded Berry the opportunity to engage his audiences in a manner that was unheralded and was attacked by the forces of White supremacy. Confident, sexy and talented, he threatened the hierarchy of racism by attracting Blacks and Whites to his performances.

Now, at the age of 86, Berry is alive and well and this past week was spent honoring his accomplishments and contributions to the music industry. Many fans and fellow musicians played a tribute to his success in what is rock 'n' roll. Taking the stage were guitarist Rick Derringer of the McCoys and Joe Bonamassa. Merle Haggarg, Ray Sharpe, Earl Slick, J.D. McPherson, Chuck Prophet and Vernon Reid provided vocal renditions of Berry's most famous songs. Also on stage was inductee Ernie Isley of the Isley Brothers, whose guitar skills resemble many of Berry's techniques. There were also females, such as Rosie Flores, whose careers were shaped by the electric guitar. They thanked Berry for the early influence. The show stoppers included critically acclaimed London-born Malina Moye, who proved to the audience that playing a traditionally male instrument can be sexy. Inductee Darryl DMC McDaniels reminded the audience that Berry's lyrics were sampled by many of the pioneer rap groups of the '80s and he recounted how school was cool back then and reinforced the importance of music programs in all schools across America.