



Group 1: Guitar Riffs and Solos

Source 1

Video: Opening Guitar Riffs of Four Chuck Berry Songs

Discuss:

- What words would you use to describe these passages? How do they make you feel? What tone do they set for the song?
- Are there similarities among the four different intros? Why might Chuck Berry have used this formula to begin so many different songs?
- What do these passages suggest about the importance of guitar as a Rock and Roll instrument?

Source 2

Excerpt of Lyrics from “Johnny B. Goode”

*Deep down in Louisiana close to New Orleans
Way back up in the woods among the evergreens
There stood a log cabin made of earth and wood
Where lived a country boy named Johnny B. Goode
Who never ever learned to read or write so well
But he could play a guitar just like ringing a bell....*

*People passing by they would stop and say
Oh my, but that little country boy can play*

Discuss:

- Who is Johnny B. Goode? What can he do, and what can't he do?
- What is the songwriter's attitude toward Johnny? Why is he writing a song about Johnny B. Goode?
- What does the song suggest about the importance of playing the guitar to Rock and Roll?

Source 3

Excerpt from *Rolling Stone* magazine, 2008

In 2008, Rolling Stone selected “Johnny B. Goode” as No. 1 on its list of “The 100 Greatest Guitar Songs of All Time.” Below is a short excerpt from the magazine.

“Johnny B. Goode’ was the first great record about the joys and rewards of playing rock & roll guitar. It also has the single greatest rock & roll intro: a thrilling blast of high twang driven by Berry’s spearing notes, followed by a rhythm part that translates a boogie-woogie piano riff for the guitar. ‘He could play the guitar just like a-ringing a bell,’ Berry sings in the first verse — a perfect description of his sound and the reverberations still running through every style of rock guitar, from the Beatles and the Stones on down.”

-- *Rolling Stone*, June 5, 2008

Discuss:

- Unlike Chuck Berry, several early Rock and Roll pioneers, including Little Richard and Jerry Lee Lewis, emphasized piano in their recordings. What does this article suggest about the impact of Chuck Berry and his emphasis on guitar playing on later generations of Rock and Roll musicians?
- How does the article describe the introduction to “Johnny B. Goode” and the style of guitar playing throughout the song?

Source 4
The Influence of Chuck Berry’s Guitar Style

“Historians tend to place Elvis Presley at the epicenter of rock and roll’s big bang, but we guitarists know better. For us, Chuck Berry had the whole package: great looks, songs, lyrics, voice, and stage presence, plus an innovative guitar style destined to become the most aped on the planet.”

-- Jesse Gress, “10 Things You Gotta Do to Play Like Chuck Berry,” *guitarplayer.com*, Feb. 9, 2012

Discuss:

- What does Gress suggest about how important guitar playing was to Chuck Berry’s legacy?
- What does he mean by calling Berry’s guitar style “the most aped on the planet”?

Summary Questions:

- What do these sources suggest about Chuck Berry’s influence on early Rock and Roll?
- What role did the electric guitar in general, and Berry’s style in particular, play in early Rock and Roll?