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## FEATURED



## BLUES LEGEND B.B. KING: DEAD AT 89

May 15, 2015 by [David Tillman](#)

The King of Blues is gone.

After an iconic career spanning nearly seven decades that influenced countless musicians after him, B.B. King passed away peacefully in his sleep on Thursday evening at his home in Las Vegas. He was 89 years old.

Raised in poverty in the Mississippi cotton fields, Riley B. King learned to sing in church, and reportedly learned to play guitar from a great uncle. His signature call-and-response style of singing and playing evolved for the simple reason that King didn't prefer to do both at the same time. However he learned the blues, his style carried him through a high-profile career that had him performing hundreds of shows per year well into his 80s—a career that never really experienced a lull.

King's wide appeal was as much for personality as performance, and he was as much character as he was artist, always performing with another character he created—a guitar he named Lucille, who picked up the "vocal" of the song whenever King stopped singing. The guitarist says Lucille was named after a woman two men had reportedly been fighting over during one of his shows. The men caused a fire that killed them both, and King endangered his own life by running back into the blaze to save his guitar. The name Lucille, he said, was a reminder never to fight over women, nor to run into burning buildings.

Throughout his stellar career, King won a total of 15 Grammy Awards. He was inducted into the Blues Hall of Fame in 1980, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1987, and became a Kennedy Center



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Having recently come out of retirement to lend his golden touch to records by Daft Punk, Coldplay and Haim, Italian dance

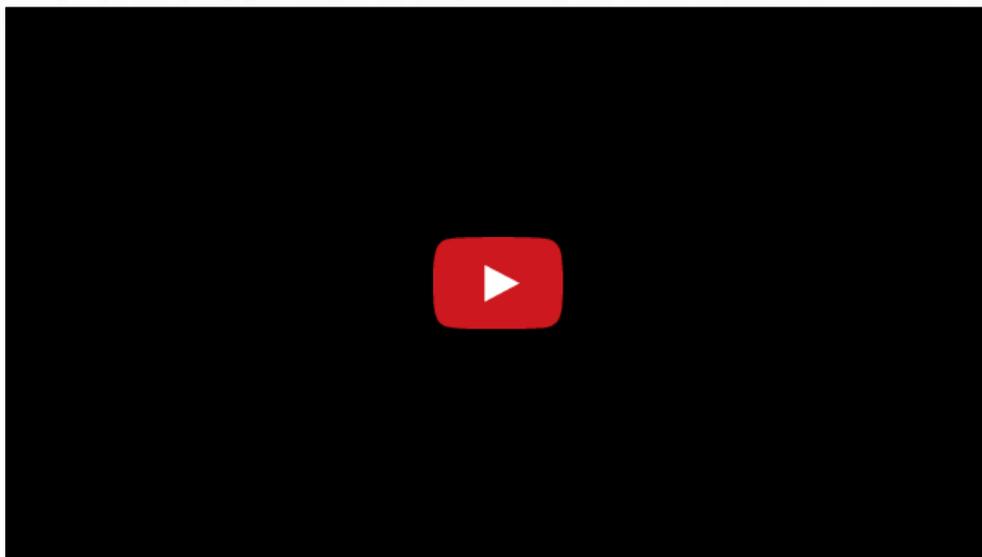
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Honoree in 1995. He also received two presidential medals, one from George H.W. Bush in 1990, and another from George W. Bush sixteen years later. He has been cited as an influence on a countless number of guitarists, the list including such names as Eric Clapton, Keith Richards and Jimi Hendrix, to name a few.

King, a diabetic, had been experiencing failing health over the past year, and cancelled 14 shows toward the end of 2014 as a result. On May 1, King posted a message on his Facebook page that he was under hospice care.

Rest in peace, Blues Boy King. You will be sorely missed.



(Photo: Tom Beetz/Creative Commons/Wikimedia)

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## About the Author

**David Tillman** on [MUSIC IS MY OXYGEN WEEKLY](#).



David Tillman is an independent composer/arranger whose primary work involves writing jingles for commercials for radio and television, with several film and television placements to his credit as well. David has a fascination for all things related to the music business and the music industry in general, an obsession which his wife finds to be mildly unhealthy at times. His personal tastes in music are in electronica and industrial rock, and include The Chemical Brothers, Daft Punk and Nine Inch Nails (he loves that Trent Reznor is writing soundtracks!). When not in his office or in his man-cave, David enjoys skiing, hiking, the occasional game of golf, and sometimes just lounging by the pool. David lives with his wife and three children in Los Angeles, CA.

**Tagged:** [B.B. King](#), [blues](#), [music industry](#)

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