

# VANITY FAIR

DECEMBER 1999

## ICONS OF ROCK

FIFTY YEARS OF ROCK 'N' ROLL

A PHOTO PORTFOLIO • TEXT BY LISA ROBINSON

# "THE BLUES HAD A BABY AND THEY NAMED IT ROCK AND ROLL." —MUDDY WATERS

"AWOP-BOP-A-LOO-MOP ALOP-BAM-BOOM." —LITTLE RICHARD, "TUTTI FRUTTI."



**J**erry Lee Lewis (photographed during his opening-night performance at Cafe de Paris in New York, June 10, 1958) was considered Elvis Presley's biggest rival in the rockabilly world, but the outrage that followed Lewis's marriage to his 13-year-old third cousin forced him out of the music business for a decade.

**Cover:**  
Jimi Hendrix in 1967,  
photographed by  
Gered Mankowitz.

**D**elta-blues great Muddy Waters, who (along with Robert Johnson, Elmore James, Howlin' Wolf, Sonny Boy Williamson, John Lee Hooker, and Willie Dixon) changed the face of American popular music. Photographed in a recording studio during the late 40s.

**S**ome thought it all started in 1943 when Muddy Waters (né McKinley Morganfield) left Clarksdale, Mississippi, for Chicago, where he electrified the Delta blues. Others would pinpoint it to the moment when Elvis Presley walked into Sun Studios in Memphis to make a record for his mother in 1953. And there were those who were certain that it was Bill Haley and His Comets' 1954 hit "Rock Around the Clock" that sent the signal—more like an H-bomb—to the youth of the world. The term "rock 'n' roll" wasn't coined until about 1954, but "rocking and rolling" was a familiar phrase to anyone who listened to rhythm-and-blues (previously called "race") records. Sun Records owner Sam Phillips said if he could find a white man who sounded black he could make a million dollars. He did. And if your parents didn't hate it, it wasn't rock 'n' roll. Elvis rotated his hips, Jerry Lee Lewis married his 13-year-old third cousin, Little Richard wore eyeliner and a lascivious grin, and the little girls understood. Cleveland disc jockey Alan Freed's black-and-white movies with juvenile delinquents dancing on the furniture, the hysteria of the live shows at the Brooklyn Paramount with the Platters and Ruth Brown and Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers, and the Brill Building hits that appropriated doo-wop from the streets all added to the frenzy. When Muddy Waters brought Chuck Berry to the attention of Chess Records, he almost put himself out of business. Rock 'n' roll was called the Devil's music, dragging moral standards down to a new low. And they said it would never last.



COVER PHOTOGRAPH FROM THE DIVINDA GALLERY. THIS SPREAD: PHOTOGRAPHS FROM CORBIS/BETTMANN (LEWIS), LIFE MAGAZINE (ELVIS), THE MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES (WATERS)