

Bo Diddley's influence will live on forever



By Anthony P. Bolante, Reuters

The beat, the wit, the swagger: Bo Diddley died of heart failure Monday in Archer, Fla., at age 79.

By Edna Gundersen and Steve Jones, USA TODAY

Friends and colleagues expressed admiration and sadness for rock 'n' roll architect Bo Diddley, who influenced generations of musicians with his signature primal beat.

"Bo Diddley was a monumental figure in early rock 'n' roll, a huge influence on everyone," Bonnie Raitt told USA TODAY. "He was a wonderful man, a true original musician and beloved the world over. He will be sorely missed."

Elvis Costello regarded his talent as deceptively simple. "Listening to Bo Diddley, you could convince yourself that the only thing you need to create great rock 'n' roll is a tremolo guitar, a killer beat and one and a half chords," he said. "Many tried and some have failed, but nobody did it like Diddley."

ZZ Top guitarist Billy Gibbons refused to succumb to grief when he heard at a tour stop in Knoxville, Tenn., that his rock 'n' roll hero had died Monday. "It's a good day because I've walked on the planet at the same time as Bo Diddley," Gibbons said. "The simplistic and humorous artistry that accompanied this creation we all know as the Bo Diddley beat is a resounding testament to someone who knew how to touch us in a rock 'n' roll way."

Gibbons spoke to Diddley on Friday to get his authorization for video game *Rock Band* to license the likeness of the Gretsch "Billy-Bo" guitar, which Diddley designed in 1959. "Bo said: 'Call me anytime. You know, I'll always be around.' I told him, 'I and the rest of the world know you will always be around.' Now he's sprinkling his holy water on *Rock Band*."

Former Free bassist/songwriter Andy Fraser recalled, "hearing *Bo Diddley* blaring out (from a nearby London dance hall). His music definitely was one of my earliest influences."

Diddley "invented the beat that the Rolling Stones used often," said Ritchie Blackmore, ex-Deep Purple/Rainbow guitarist.

Music historian Dave Marsh said Diddley belongs alongside Elvis Presley, Chuck Berry and Little Richard in the rock pantheon. "People will say when someone new comes along, that he's kind of like this guy or that guy. They will never, ever say, 'Oh, he's like Bo Diddley.' He was as one-of-a-kind as you could possibly imagine."

Garry Mitchell was proud to call him grandpa. "He's always been high-spirited, young at heart and full of laughter," said Mitchell, 38, one of Diddley's 15 grandchildren. "Up until about a week ago, when his illness took a turn for the worse, he was still playing his guitar." Mitchell and Diddley had been working on a gospel album

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