

Double Trouble (Otis Rush)

Written by bluesever

Thursday, 12 February 2015 15:09 -

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Arriving in Chicago in the late 1940's Otis Rush has become a prime Chicago blues innovator on Chicago's West and South sides with his guitar vibrato and soul stirring intense vocal delivery. Rush was the first of the new wave of young West side blues artists to record, hitting the national R & B charts with his first single "I Can't Quit You Baby" in 1956. Stevie Ray Vaughan named his band Double Trouble after Otis Rush's song, attesting to his influence. The left handed guitarist remained relatively obscure until the 1990's when he won the 1994 W.C. Handy Award as the Male Blues Artist of the Year.

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Otis Rush was born in 1935 in Philadelphia, Mississippi, one of the most racially mixed towns in the Delta. Like many black youths in the Delta, Otis sat near the radio every day at 12:15, tuning in to KFFA, broadcast out of Helena, Arkansas, for the King Biscuit Time show, hosted by Sonny Boy Williamson and Robert Lockwood, Jr. For half an hour Williamson and Lockwood played live in the studio, often featuring other rising stars of the blues, such as B.B. King, James Cotton and Pinetop Perkins (who was an original member of the studio band, called the King Biscuit Entertainers.) Otis decided he wanted to be a blues player. He began playing the blues harp at the age of six and later his father rigged him a makeshift one-string guitar out of a broom handle and baling wire.



King Biscuit Time

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In 1948, Rush's father moved the family to Chicago. At the age of 14, Otis began working 12-hour days in the stockyards. At night he played the blues with two other young stockyard workers. One night when Rush was 18, Willie Dixon walked into the Alibi club on the West Side of town. Dixon, one of the true geniuses of American music, had just left Chess Records in a bitter dispute over royalties. The great bassist and arranger had taken a job with the new Cobra Records, a small Chicago label run by a TV repairman. Dixon was enthralled by Rush's uniquely expressive, almost tortured guitar-style and signed him on the spot.



Otis Rush

The first song Rush recorded was Dixon's "I Can't Quit You, Baby." Dixon said he wrote the song about an obsessive relationship Rush was having with a woman at the time. Dixon wanted to provoke an emotional response from the singer and he got one. The song hit number 6 on the Billboard R&B charts. Over the next two years Rush and Dixon would release eight more records, each of them dazzlingly original.



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“I Can’t Quit You, Baby” 1956

Despite hit singles from Rush, Magic Sam, Ike Turner and the Rhythm Kings and the young Buddy Guy (who Rush discovered at “Battle of the Blues” show at the famous Blue Flame Club), Cobra Records went bankrupt in 1958. Rush followed Willie Dixon back to Chess Records.



Cobra Records Story (Greatest Hits)

This was the beginning of Rush’s seemingly endless professional odyssey, from label to label. Even with Dixon back in his slot as artistic director at Chess, Rush’s relationship with the label proved a disappointment. In two years, Rush recorded eight songs for Chess, but management only released one single, the brilliant “So Many Roads, So Many Trains,” featuring one of Rush’s most vicious guitar solos.



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In those days Rush tended to close with one of his fiercest compositions, “**Double Trouble**”, a tormented minor key blues about a man who has lost his job and his lover. Since its release as a single in 1958, the song has been recorded by several blues and other artists.



“Double Trouble” 1958

"Double Trouble" is a slow tempo twelve-bar blues notated in 4/4 time in the key of D minor. *"The song's underlying air of quiet desperation stretched to the breaking point is enhanced by brilliant use of dynamics and some truly mind-boggling, strangled guitar fills near the end."* According to Otis Rush, the song's title was inspired by a comment by a woman upon viewing her hand during a card game *"trouble, trouble, trouble, trouble, double troubles"*.

