Howlin' Wolf (1910-1976) Encyclopedia Article

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Standing six-foot-three and weighing almost 300 pounds, Chester Burnett, popularly known as "Howlin' Wolf," was, in the words of Giles Oakley, "one of the most menacingly forceful singers of his time." A farmer until his eighteenth birthday, Wolf's life was dramatically altered by a chance meeting with Delta legend Charley Patton. The marriage of his half-sister Mary to harmonica player Sonny Boy Williamson further shaped Wolf's musical style.

Howlin' Wolf

Howlin' Wolf's 1950s sides for Chess Records stand as some of the finest blues records ever produced. Hits like "I Ain't Superstitious," "Little Red Rooster," and "Spoonful" became even more popular when covered by British rock bands. In 1970, Chess attempted to capitalize on Wolf's newfound popularity with a white audience by teaming him with a British "supergroup" including Eric Clapton and members of the Rolling Stones. Howlin' Wolf died of heart failure in 1976; 15 years later, he was inducted into the Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame.

Further Reading:

Oakley, Giles. *The Devil's Music: A History of the Blues.* New York, Da Capo Press, 1983.

Palmer, Robert. *Deep Blues.* New York, Viking, 1981.