B.B. King’s Portrait On View at the National Portrait Gallery

The Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery recognizes the life and accomplishments of the “King of Blues” B.B. King. A photograph of King by Chuck Stewart is currently on view on the first floor of museum in the exhibition, “Recent Acquisitions.”

Guitarist King was a consummate musician whose “vocal-like string bends” and distinctive left-hand vibrato influenced generations of blues players, as well as rock guitarists such as Eric Clapton, Jimi Hendrix and Carlos Santana. Born Riley B. King, he acquired the moniker B.B.—short for Blues Boy—while performing on a West Memphis radio station in the late 1940s. After his rendition of “Three O’Clock Blues” claimed the No. 1 spot on the R&B charts in 1951, King and his band embarked on their first nationwide tour. Thereafter, he maintained an ambitious touring schedule, much to the delight of his legions of fans. In 1970, King scored a huge crossover hit with “The Thrill Is Gone,” which climbed the R&B and pop music charts to earn him the first of 15 Grammy Awards—more than any other blues artist.

The image is available for press on the museum’s FTP site; also it is available to be photographed or filmed in the museum. For access, contact Bethany Bentley at bentleyb@si.edu.

National Portrait Gallery

The Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery tells the multifaceted story of America through the individuals who have shaped its culture. Through the visual arts, performing arts and new media, the Portrait Gallery portrays poets and presidents, visionaries and villains, actors and activists whose lives tell the American story.

The National Portrait Gallery is part of the Donald W. Reynolds Center for American Art and Portraiture at Eighth and F streets N.W., Washington, D.C. Smithsonian Information: (202) 633-1000. Web site: npg.si.edu. Connect with us: @NPG on Twitter, @smithsoniannpg on Instagram, and at npg.smithsonian on Facebook.

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