

Throwback: Sister Rosetta Tharpe: Up Above My Head



Sister Rosetta Tharpe recorded "Up Above My Head" with Marie Knight in 1947 for Decca Records. The traditional gospel song was first recorded by the Gospel Sons in 1941 but Tharpe and Knight's version is the most known. Their rendition reached

number 6 on the Billboard Race Records chart in 1948. Tharpe had already asserted herself as a pioneer of gospel turned into rock and rhythm and blues since her 1938 recording of "Rock Me." Her unique style included being one of the first to play the guitar using distortion with a technique that would lead the way for future rock icons like Little Richard, Chuck Berry, Jerry Lee Lewis, Eric Clapton, and many others. "Up Above My Head" became one of her signature songs and she gave a solo performance of the song sometimes in the '60s on the show *TV Gospel Time*. Tharpe's early contributions in the '30s and '40s as a gospel artist who was accepted by secular audiences had the music press calling her the Original Soul Sister and the Godmother of Rock and Roll. Conservative gospel organizations were critical of her, but she was invaluable to the development of American pop, rock, and English blues. Her 1945 single, "Strange Things Happening Every Day," was the first gospel record to cross over, with a number two position on the race records chart.

Okeh Records came up with the name race records in 1922 to describe music that was marketed to Black people. By 1942, Billboard created the Harlem Hit Parade to list songs popular with Black audiences. In June of 1949, the term race records was replaced with R&B. Tharpe's music survived all of the music industry politics and her music is still recognized in 2025. Tharpe passed away in 1973 and received several posthumous honors. The United States Postal Service issued a stamp in her honor in 1998. In 2007, she was inducted into the Blues Hall of Fame. The BBC aired the documentary *Sister Rosetta Tharpe: The Godmother of Rock & Roll* in 2011. The play *Marie & Rosetta*, based on Tharpe's relationship with Knight, was staged at New York's Atlantic Theater Company in 2016. Tharpe was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2017.

Godmother Of Rock And Roll Sister Rosetta Tharpe Is Celebrated With Accessory Line & New Video

Sister Rosetta Tharpe's legacy as the foremother of rock and roll music is being celebrated with a new accessory line and video about her life. Gibson guitar maker and Tharpe's estate have partnered to create the Sister Rosetta Tharpe Collection. Tharpe's gospel roots and electric guitar paved the way for Little Richard, Chuck Berry, Elvis Presley and the British blues movement of the '60s. The foundation Tharpe established is rarely attributed back to her and the new Gibson line introduces her to a new world. Before there was Black women guitarists like India.Arie, Tracy Chapman and Odetta, Tharpe was the lone pioneer. The new line has tour jackets, wall pendants, t-shirts and posters. The release of the merchandise coincides with the 61st anniversary of Tharpe's favorite instrument the 1961 Les Paul SG which has been reissued as a Gibson and an Epiphone.



Gibson artists Celisse and Amythyst Kiah have made a video recreating Tharpe's songs and they also talk about her influence on music. The collection can be viewed at the [Gibson](#) website.

SHOUT SISTER SHOUT! Musical About Sister Rosetta Tharpe In Development



SHOUT SISTER SHOUT! is a new musical about the life of rock and roll pioneer Sister Rosetta Tharpe. Today the creative team was announced in a press release and playwright Cheryl L. West, director Kenneth L. Roberson and arranger Joseph Joubert are currently developing the show. Tharpe's career started in the '30s and she was one of the first musicians to use distortion in her guitar playing which had a big influence on people like Chuck Berry, Elvis Presley and Jerry Lee Lewis. She discovered Little Richard and is commonly known as the Godmother of Rock and Roll.Â

The musical is inspired by Gayle L. Wald's 2007 biography *Shout! Sister, Shout: The Untold Story of Rock-and-Roll Trailblazer Sister Rosetta Tharpe*. In 2019, Lizzo and her guitarist paid tribute to Tharpe with a musical performance on *Saturday Night Live*. The show is West's second Broadway production.Â



Brittany Howard & Questlove Perform At RRHOF Tribute To Sister Rosetta Tharpe

[youtube id="MmcgemhZo7g"]Alabama Shakes vocalist Brittany Howard and Questlove took part in the tribute to Sister Rosetta Tharpe at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Tharpe was posthumously inducted with the Award for Early Influence because of her pioneering contributions to rock and roll. Howard performed "That's All" which Tharpe recorded twice and was a permanent song on her touring setlist. The induction is the first time Tharpe has received major recognition even though she is called the Godmother Of Rock and Roll because her work came before Elvis Presley, Chuck Berry, Johnny Cash and Little Richard who she actually put on stage for his first time.Â