

# “Call It Stormy Monday But Tuesday is Just as Bad”—T-Bone Walker (1947)

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Essay by Brian Bader



*T-Bone Walker*



*Original label*



*Walker in performance*

It is not at all a stretch to assert that if one is listening to rock guitar and other forms of popular music in the second decade of the 21st century, one can sometimes hear elements of guitarist T-Bone Walker’s playing from way back in the 1940s. Walker, one of the first blues musicians to amplify the guitar, inspired and influenced many blues guitarists, including B.B. King, arguably the greatest blues guitar legend of all time. King, among others, inspired and influenced English guitarist Eric Clapton, who in turn did the same for Eddie van Halen, whose innovative guitar playing broke new ground in the rock music world in the 1970s and 1980s. Van Halen, guitarist and hard rock band, very likely brought distant echoes of T-Bone Walker’s electrically amplified guitar and single string guitar solos (subliminally, if not intentionally) to the ears of listeners and fans, among whom were many aspiring guitarists who assimilated and passed those reverberations on to the next generation. Indeed, the legacy of the blues in rock and roll music is well known, and bluesman T-Bone Walker helped lead the blues charge in the vanguard of the electric guitar era and played a not insignificant role in shaping the sound of modern pop music.

Not necessarily a household name today (if one asked the average man on the street what name first comes to mind when one mentions “blues music,” the answer would likely be B.B. King), T-Bone Walker is still recognized by blues aficionados and musicians as one of the best. Known for his jazz-tinged shuffles and swing blues with a style more akin to his disciple B.B. King’s music than the rawer Chicago blues sound of Muddy Waters and Elmore James, Walker played a sophisticated West Coast blues style. Urbane vocals--not like the impassioned singing of Elmore James--backed by horn arrangements and piano, are as much a part of his sound as Walker’s single string solos and frequent employment of jazzy-sounding ninth chords on guitar.

A prolific recorder and performer for almost a half century, Walker left behind for blues fans, and all connoisseurs of fine music, a considerable body of recorded music. They are all solid blues recordings and it would be hard to choose the top five, let alone the single most representative T-Bone Walker song. But insightful deliberation leads to favored consideration of an example of the slow blues genre that has all the salient characteristics of his singing and guitar playing coupled with timeless, topical blues lyrics. The song is “Call It Stormy Monday But

Tuesday is Just as Bad.” A slow tempo blues song, “Stormy Monday” traces the week-long, universal experiences of a person who could be living in any place or time where people have the blues.

Originally recorded in the 1940s, the song was covered by two big name acts in the 1960s and 70s. More familiar to contemporary ears than T-Bone Walker’s original is the cover version by the Allman Brothers Band; it gave “Stormy Monday,” and blues music in general, a boost and brought the music to the attention of fans of rock and roll.

Aaron Thibeaux Walker (“T-Bone” is a corruption of his middle name) was born in Linden, Texas, on May 28, 1910. When he was young, his mother moved to Dallas and remarried; both mother and stepfather were musicians. As a youth, he accompanied and guided blues guitarist Blind Lemon Jefferson around Dallas. While not even out of his teens, Walker became a working showman. He danced, played music on various instruments and was also a stage comedian. His first recordings, for Columbia Records, was a 78 rpm disc of the country-ish blues tunes “Wichita Falls Blues” and “Trinity River Blues.” On it, he was billed as Oak Cliff T-Bone, after the neighborhood in Dallas in which he lived.

In the late 1920s and into the 1930s, the considerable list of musicians with whom Walker played reads like a “Who’s Who” of pre-war American music greats: Ida Cox, Cab Calloway, Charlie Christian, and Ma Rainey are some of the better-known names. His association with jazz guitarist Charlie Christian is notable because, in the jazz realm, Christian revolutionized the guitar with his single-string solos played on an electric guitar much as Walker had done with the blues.

In the mid-1930s, Walker moved to Los Angeles where he played regularly and began amplifying his guitar. His eccentric stage act included playing the guitar behind his head and doing the splits, tricks which thrilled crowds and were later emulated with similar effect by rock musicians Chuck Berry and Jimi Hendrix. An old black and white photograph of Walker shows him on stage doing both simultaneously while wearing a white suit, a tie, and a big grin on his face.

The large hollow body electric guitars usually associated with jazz were Walker’s instruments of choice and he wore them in an unconventional manner with the guitar strap resting on his right shoulder. When he soloed on guitar, he would sometimes shift the guitar to an almost horizontal position with the side of the guitar resting against his chest and the top of the instrument nearly parallel with the floor of the stage. His playing may have lacked the speed and sustain often later associated with blues guitar music but he was a trailblazer and his fluid guitar lines and basic rhythmic chording sounded at once eloquent and captivating. One of Walker’s best known and most copied guitar “licks” involved picking and bending the guitar’s G string (fretted with the third finger) from the fourth up to the fifth note of the associated major scale and alternately picking the fifth note of the scale on the B string (fretted with the second finger). This can be heard throughout his music and is universal in the blues guitarist’s vocabulary. Walker likely did not invent it, but many have copied it, including Chuck Berry who adapted it into his classic rock guitar solos by speeding up the lick and adding his own syncopations.

Walker’s recording career started in earnest in the 1940s. In Los Angeles during the second half of the decade, he recorded a number of sides for Black and White Records. One of these was

likely “Call It Stormy Monday But Tuesday is Just as Bad.” “Likely” is the operative word for the recording date because there is uncertainty about just when it was recorded. Some sources claim that it was as early as 1940 or 1941 and then not released until 1947 due to a number of alleged inhibiting factors. Further confusing matters is another, different blues recording from 1942 on the Bluebird label, this one by Earl Hines and Billy Eckstine and called “Stormy Monday Blues.” Composing credits for later releases of both Walker’s and the other version are sometimes attributed to the writers of the other song.

A more definitive recording date of September 13, 1947, has been given for Walker’s “Stormy Monday” with a release date in November of that same year. “Call It Stormy Monday But Tuesday is Just as Bad,” also known popularly as “Stormy Monday” or “Stormy Monday Blues,” came out as the B side on Black and White 162 with the catchy and humorous “I Know Your Wig is Gone” as the A side. Walker sang and played guitar with accompaniment from Lloyd Glenn on piano, “Bumps” Myers on tenor saxophone, Teddy Buckner on trumpet, Arthur Edwards on bass, and Oscar Lee Bradley on drums. It follows the standard I-IV-V blues progression in the key of G-major at a slow tempo (many other slow blues rely on a minor key to help get across the sadness of a song’s message) and includes a 12-bar guitar break by Walker.

The song’s lyrics, in three verses, describe simply the woeful experiences of the vocalist. Trouble starts in the first verse: “They call it stormy Monday but Tuesday is just as bad....” The weekend grants reprieve in the second: “The eagle flies on Friday and Saturday I go out to play....” Dire straits, however, return in the final verse: “...my heart’s in misery, crazy about my baby, yeah, send her back to me.” Accompaniment from piano and horns is prominent throughout, and Walker’s solo, as well as his chording and fills, neither understated nor blistering, encapsulate his polished sound.

Although “Call It” did well on the charts originally, its long-term endurance and widespread appeal has proven to be the song’s legacy. Walker re-recorded it several times and often played it live in concert. In the early 1960s, blues and R&B singer Bobby “Blue” Bland had a hit with it. Bland’s version added minor 7<sup>th</sup> chords in the seventh through tenth bars of the song. In Bland’s rendition, unsung guitar hero Wayne Bennett paid fine solo and back-up guitar tribute to the original. The Allman Brothers Band live release from their 1971 record, “At Fillmore East,” also included an extended rendition with chord changes similar to Bland’s with a gritty Duane Allman guitar solo, another guitar break by Dickey Betts, a tempo-changing organ solo by Gregg Allman, and even a harmonica break (edited out of some recordings) by Thom Doucette. The Allmans acknowledge both Bobby Bland and T-Bone Walker when introducing their Fillmore East version, which may be the one most familiar to less-than-hardcore blues fans. The well-deserved appeal of the song helped earn T-Bone Walker’s original version’s induction into both the Blues Hall of Fame and the Grammy Hall of Fame.

Many artists have covered “Call It Stormy Monday,” both on record and in performance. They include such bluesmen as the three Kings (B.B., Albert, and Freddy), Muddy Waters, Elmore James, and Buddy Guy and Junior Wells. But non-blues artists—like Lou Rawls, Van Morrison, and Latimore, to name a very few--have also sung it.

The song’s popularity and the blues revivals beginning in the 1960s helped Walker’s career. Walker toured extensively in the ‘60s and into the next decade in the US and in Europe. He played and sang at a memorable show in 1966 in London as part of the Jazz at the Philharmonic

series where he shared the bill with the jazz luminaries Dizzy Gillespie, Coleman Hawkins, and Teddy Wilson. Never a stranger to jazz, T-Bone Walker was already playing and singing back in the 1930s with Les Hite and his band, and his musical style always allowed him to readily bridge the gap between jazz and the blues. The 1970s saw more new recordings for Walker but his health had begun to deteriorate; he died of a stroke on March 16, 1975, in Los Angeles, the city where he had recorded his best known sides. In the 1980s, Walker was inducted posthumously into both the Blues Hall of Fame and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

The state of Texas has given blues music some of the most exciting guitarists ever to pick or play slide on a guitar. The region around Dallas has been particularly fertile for producing them. Blind Lemon Jefferson, T-Bone Walker, and Freddy King were all born not too far from Dallas and their early careers were closely associated with the city. Also hailing from Texas were Sam "Lightnin'" Hopkins, Albert Collins, Johnny Winter, and, of course, Stevie Ray Vaughan, himself a native of Dallas. These are just some of the greats. Walker may not have been the earliest Texas bluesman and certainly not the last, but the effect of his amplified guitar and playing style is immeasurable. B.B. King himself paid the highest tribute to T-Bone Walker and his soulful "Stormy Monday" blues when he remembered the influences on his own legendary guitar style: "Finally I heard 'Stormy Monday' by my guy T-Bone Walker and I went crazy for the guitar...I've never heard anything sound like that guitar to me."

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