

Reaction Paper: Bo Diddley

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Bo Diddley rose to fame in the 1950s, but his influence on the music industry is still felt to this day. His namesake beat changed music and continues to pop up in modern hits. The R&B star spent the last 13 years of his life in a small farming town outside of Gainesville and influenced the downtown landmarks I have spent many hours frequenting. Before Monday I had only heard of Diddley, but never realized the influence he had on music and the city I go to school in as well.

I think it is very fitting that the man whose beat has been used in multiple popular songs over the past 60+ years is nicknamed "The Originator". I was pleasantly surprised that many classic songs I enjoyed listening to growing up contained Diddley's catchy beat in the background.

My favorite has to be George Michael's 1987 rockabilly style hit "Faith." Others make fun of me for listening to Michael's music but the aforementioned song is a perfect example of why I love him. He paired meaningful lyrics with Diddley's fun and catchy beat to create a now classic hit that climbed to number one on the charts and became the best selling single of the year. The song opens with a church organ and then 36 seconds in Diddley's beat replaces it and catapults the song into a classic rockabilly tune, complete with the

tambourine, guitar, handclapping and finger snapping.

A close second favorite of mine that contains the same background beat is "Desire" by U2. I never noticed the familiar beat when listening to the song before this week. I don't think it's quite as obvious as "Faith", but the beat is definitely and obviously there when you know what you are looking for. Unlike Michael's song, the beat begins within the first five seconds of the start of "Desire" and the tune doesn't strike me as reminiscent to the classic Diddley rockabilly sound.

Everyone thinks of Gainesville as the location of The University of Florida, rather than an old city in Florida rich in history. Part of that history is Bo Diddley. I've spent hours walking around downtown and watched multiple concerts at Bo Diddley Community Plaza; but I never knew its history or anything about the man behind the name. I find it interesting that the plaza hosts tribute bands every week in a place named after a guy who created a beat other artists use in their own music as a sort of living tribute to him. Also, I think it's cool that this plaza is named after a guy who had such a huge influence on rock 'n' roll because, as a part of a college town, I'm sure the plaza has had an influence on students over the years as well. The plaza thus allows Diddley to be a sort of rock 'n' roll mentor to future generations even after his death.

I also thought it was funny when we learned Diddley was a consistent patron of the Waffle House on Archer, just east of I-75. During my freshman

year of college that old little diner became the home to long late night discussions between myself and three of my closest friends; two of which are budding musicians. They both thought it was really cool that the legend Bo Diddley used to sit and eat in the same spot they do now.

It still surprises me that Diddley's career wasn't bigger or that he isn't a common household name despite the fact that his beat is in several hits that made other artists household names—and that his songs have helped bolster other artists' careers. I never knew that a 1950s beat could have that much of an impact on rock 'n' roll; but I'm glad that going forward when I listen to music I will be able to pick out his legendary beat and appreciate the history behind a modern song. After all, informed listening is always way more fun than blind (or deaf?) listening.