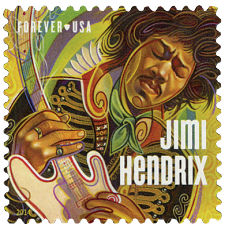
This Day in History… November 27, 1942

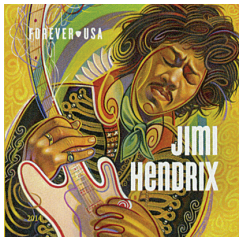
Birth of Jimi Hendrix



Hendrix was the fourth honoree in the Music Icons Series.

Jimi Hendrix was born on November 27, 1942, in Seattle, Washington. In a career that reached international audiences in only a few years, he moved from backing bands to landmark performances at Monterey and Woodstock.

Hendrix was born Johnny Allen Hendrix. His father later changed his name to James Marshall, and he became known as Jimi. As a child, he was drawn to music and practiced guitar by strumming broomsticks before he had an instrument of his own. His father bought him a secondhand acoustic guitar when he was about 15. Hendrix learned largely by ear, listening to blues and rock musicians and teaching himself to play.



Hendrix Imperforate Stamp

In 1961, Hendrix enlisted in the US Army. He trained as a paratrooper with the 101st Airborne Division and was discharged in 1962 after an injury during a parachute jump. He then worked as a guitarist, often backing other performers. His early jobs included touring and recording with the Isley Brothers, Ike and Tina Turner, and Little Richard. He also played with Sam Cooke and other rhythm and blues artists.

Hendrix began performing as a bandleader in New York's Greenwich Village. In 1966, bassist and producer Chas Chandler saw him play and invited him to London. There, Hendrix formed the Jimi Hendrix Experience with bassist Noel Redding and drummer Mitch Mitchell. The group's first single, "Hey Joe," reached No. 6 on the British charts in early 1967.

The Experience's first album, *Are You Experienced*, came out in Britain in May 1967. It reached No. 2 on the British album chart. The original UK release included songs such as "Purple Haze," "The Wind Cries Mary," and "Foxy Lady." "Hey Joe" was released as a single and was not part of that original UK album. The record helped establish Hendrix's reputation for combining blues and rock with studio effects such as feedback and distortion.

In June 1967, the group played the Monterey International Pop Festival in California, its first major American appearance. Hendrix ended "Wild Thing" by setting his guitar on fire and then breaking it onstage. The performance introduced him to a much larger US audience. The Experience went on to release *Axis: Bold as Love* and *Electric Ladyland*. Hendrix expanded his role in the recording process, shaping arrangements and using the studio to build layered guitar sounds.



Woodstock stamp from the Celebrate the Century Series

Released in 1968, *Electric Ladyland* was the Experience's only album to reach No. 1 on the US *Billboard* chart. It included Hendrix's versions of Bob Dylan's "All Along the Watchtower" and his own "Voodoo Child (Slight Return)" and "Crosstown Traffic." His playing combined blues phrasing with distortion, feedback, and effects such as the wah-wah pedal, which he used to change the guitar's tone while playing.

Hendrix performed at Woodstock in August 1969 with a larger group called Gypsy Sun and Rainbows. Because the festival ran behind schedule, his set began Monday morning, August 18. During it, he played an instrumental version of "The Star-Spangled Banner," using feedback and distortion as part of the arrangement. The performance became one of the best-known moments from Woodstock.



Woodstock Festival 50th Anniversary Stamp issued in 2019

By 1969, the original Jimi Hendrix Experience had disbanded. Hendrix formed the Band of Gypsys with bassist Billy Cox and drummer Buddy Miles. The trio recorded a live album during concerts at New York's Fillmore East on New Year's Eve 1969 and New Year's Day 1970. Hendrix also helped plan Electric Lady Studios in Manhattan. He held his first session there in June 1970, and the studio's opening party took place in August.

Hendrix continued touring and recording, working on songs for a new album when he died in London on September 18, 1970, at age 27. His unfinished tracks were later assembled and released in posthumous collections.

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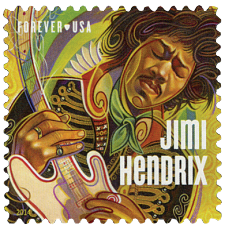

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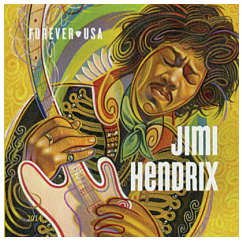

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