

MUSICAL PICTURE BOOK

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# Sunny Days in a Memphis Studio!

We're a Possum Family Band

Story and songs **Bia, Erik West-Millette and Olaf Gundel**

Illustrations **Fanny Berthiaume** Performers **Alex Devine,  
Olaf Gundel and Annick Brémault**

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the secret  
mountain



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Mama Poss! Papa Poss!  
Tell us what it was like when  
you were growing up!

Yeah! In your time,  
were there princesses  
and dragons?



Get a life featherbrain,  
dragons don't even exist!



That's not the same thing!  
They can't fly!

You're the featherbrain!  
Haven't you ever heard of  
Komodo dragons?



They don't have to fly  
because they can run really  
fast! You didn't know that,  
did you, dingbat?





Papa Poss! He just called me a dingbat!

Now, now, kids, that's enough. Let's calm down. We'll tell you a story about a king.



And a dragon?

It's a story that takes us back to the days when we were famous musicians! Mama Poss played the harmonica and Papa Poss played the dobro. As a duo, we were red hot!

Like fire coming out of a dragon's mouth!

Quiet, let them tell the story!



Tell us the story!

Tell us a story, please, please, please!





It all started one warm evening. It was quiet, and peaceful and the air smelled sweet. We were listening to the crickets sing as we sat in front of the house under the stars.



Suddenly, out of nowhere, a package fell from the sky. We opened it right away to find a little parrot who started squawking.



Squawk! Listen, possums! I'm here on behalf of Sir Joe Snake, your devoted manager. Pay attention, I have a message for you. I'll only say it once! And I'll do my best to imitate his voice:



Buongiorno! Buongiorno! My dear possum friends. My burning enthusiasm for your talent has given me a high-grade fever. A true poet might say that your wild success has made you king of the mountain, queen of the forest.

That's right, it's me, Joe Snake, your dedicated agent. I come bearing a gift. You must meet me in Memphis at Sun Studio, where Elvis is recording. He's looking for a new song, and you, my dear friends, will be the ones who compose a masterpiece for him.







Now kids, you have to understand that this invitation was a dream come true. We would be writing a song for His Majesty Elvis Harepiece, the most respected recording artist of the time. He was a huge star, our idol! The coolest of the cool, the King of Rock 'n' Roll! If Elvis agreed to record our song, we would become millionaires! We'd shoot to the top of the charts! We'd be stars! So, I said...



Mama Poss, we're going to Tennessee!

To tennis? You were going to play tennis?

No, badger nose! He said Tennessee. It's the name of a state!



I don't have a badger nose! Papa Poss, he said I have a badger nose.



Quiet, listen to the story!





So, we got on the famous Delta Queen Steamboat and made our way up the Mississippi.

LAKE ITASCA

M-I-S-S-I-S-S-I-P-P-I.  
There you go, that's how you spell it!

The Mississippi is a powerful river, one of the Americas' longest. It starts at Lake Itasca in the state of Minnesota and goes all the way down to Louisiana and the Gulf of Mexico.

from north to south,  
just like a snake.

M-I-S-S-I-S-S-I-P-P-I.  
There you go, that's how you spell it!



MEMPHIS

GULF OF MEXICO

There you go, that's how you spell it!



There you go, that's how you spell it! M-I-S-S-I-S-S-I-P-P-I!



HA HA

Me too, me too!  
I need to pee!

HA HA

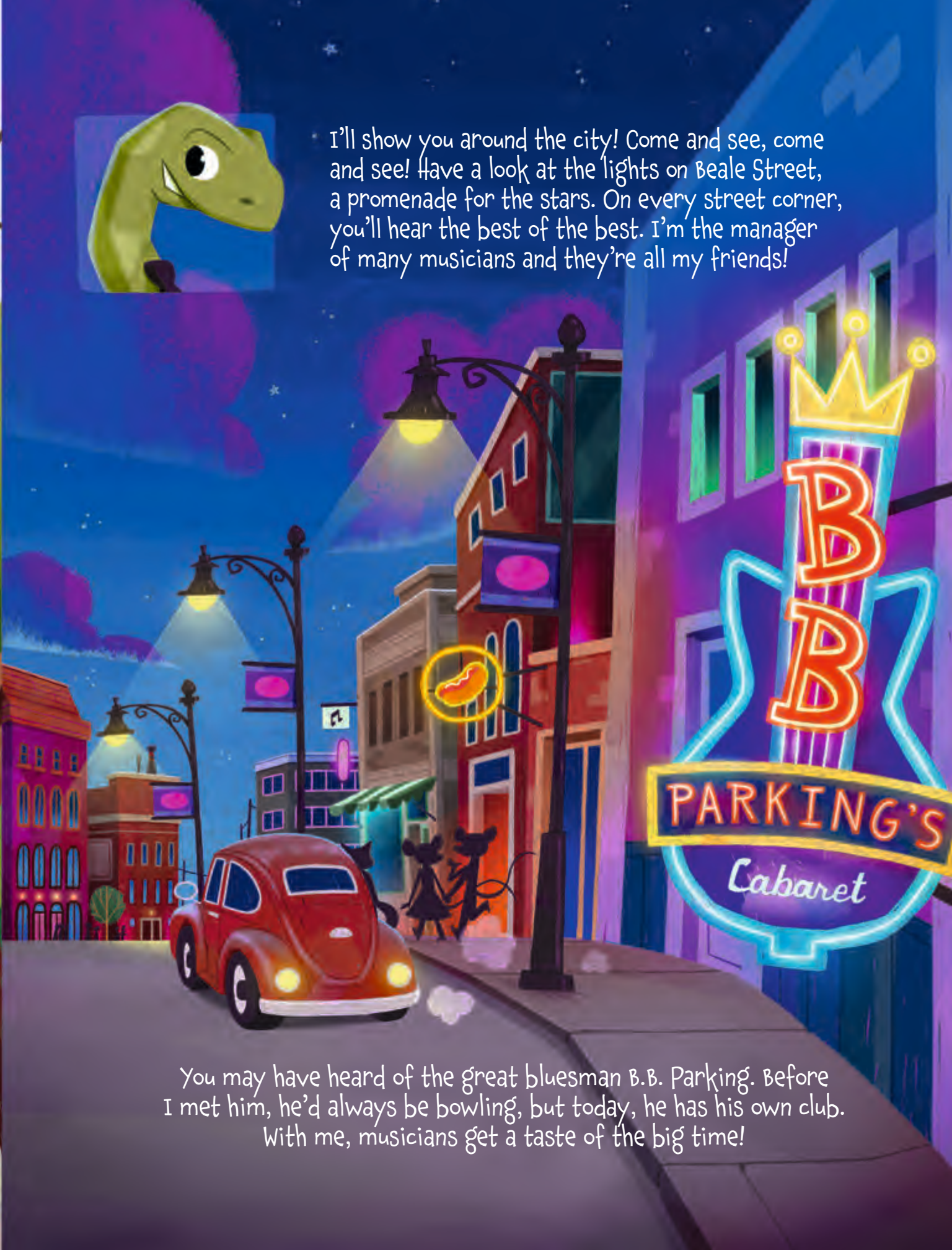




We got off the boat under the Memphis Bridge and met up with Joe Snake, who was waiting for us.



I'll show you around the city! Come and see, come and see! Have a look at the lights on Beale Street, a promenade for the stars. On every street corner, you'll hear the best of the best. I'm the manager of many musicians and they're all my friends!



You may have heard of the great bluesman B.B. Parking. Before I met him, he'd always be bowling, but today, he has his own club. With me, musicians get a taste of the big time!



Here's the amazing Orpheum Theatre. Soon, my dear possum band, you'll be headlining this venue. I can see it already, your name in flashing lights, up on the billboard.



With Elvis Harepiece singing your song, you'll make it to the Rodent Hall of Fame. But now, we must go to Graceland. The King and his band are waiting for you.





We were so impressed when we arrived at Graceland.  
It was bigger than the president's house.

Elvis Harepiece lived there with all his friends:



Ferrets, groundhogs and even a bat. There was a squirrel on guitar. At the bar, a beaver was serving cocktails. And Elvis was dancing like a crazy hyena with his best friend, Arlo the Armadillo.









Armadillos, my dear children, are small animals. The name comes from Spanish and was chosen because they have armour covering their backs. In fact, some people use the shell to make a charango!



Cha-what?  
Cha-ringo?



It's a go-go dance with a touch of cha-cha-cha!

That's ridiculous!  
Tell me the truth,  
what's a charango?

OK, a charango is like a guitar. I'll explain everything later. Right now, let's hear more about the armadillos!



Armadillos can sometimes be quite big and some of them can curl up into a ball. Many have a shell with scales. I must say, they're very impressive. And they can jump really high. Armadillos are laid back, smooth operators.

"Now, that's a good idea," I blurted out, all of a sudden. "Why not come up with a song about Arlo the Armadillo? After all, he's the King of Rock 'n' Roll's best friend." Elvis agreed with me.



Right on!



That's exactly what I need. Animal songs are always a hit! Do you remember "See you later, Wally Gator?" Oh, and there's the song "Hound Hog," too. I'd love to add a bit of critter rock to my repertoire. Mr. and Mrs. Possum, I'm feeling the heat. We're going to make it to the top of the charts together. Have faith in Elvis Harepiece!



We were all inspired and began writing the song. That same day we went into the studio to record it.





And the next morning, our tribute to Arlo rocketed to number one on the radio charts! Fans went nuts, running after us for our autographs. Everybody wanted a piece of us: reporters, photographers...



On every street corner, people were calling us rock 'n' roll's Mamadillo and Papadillo! That song would pave our way to the Rodent Hall of Fame. We'd have our place in the sun. We were well on our way to glory!



Back to Glory again?  
Weren't you in Glory  
the last time?



I liked the idea that there  
was a parrot at the beginning  
of the story.



Yes, it's a colour in my imagination.  
You can bet your boots it exists!  
Anyways, possums exist, that's for sure.  
And who are the possums?

I like the colour parrot! That's my  
favourite colour, the colour parrot.



That's not even a colour! Besides,  
parrots have many colours.

That's us!



Ok, should we sing our song now?

OUI!  
OUI!

OUI!



# Possum Anthem

Lyrics Bia and Annick Brémault

Music Olaf Gundel, Erik West-Millette and Bia

Singer Annick Brémault

Possoms are smart and bright  
We love to come out at night  
When we play dead  
We stand out in a crowd  
Fainting really makes us proud  
It's so very awesome  
Just to be a possum  
We'll eat anything in sight  
We love to come out at night  
Possoms are smart and bright





# Armadillo on the Rocks

Lyrics Bia and Annick Brémault

Music Olaf Gundel, Erik West-Millette and Bia

Singer Annick Brémault

You came all the way from Brazil  
Cause travelling is such a thrill  
You're tender and you're yummy  
You could end up on a grill

You gotta rock  
You gotta talk  
You gotta walk  
You walk the walk, you talk the talk  
The armadillo on the rocks

You gotta watch your back, Jo  
Cause everyone's a wacko  
Don't end up a charango  
So rockin' armadillo, baby, go man, go

You gotta rock  
You gotta talk  
You gotta walk  
You walk the walk, you talk the talk  
The armadillo on the rocks

Don't you dilly-dally you might fall  
So rock and roll into a ball  
If wackos want to mess with you  
Then holy guacamole, show them what you do



# Shake That Thing

Traditionnel, arrangements Olaf Gundel and Erik West-Millette

Singer Olaf Gundel

Listen up

Way down South, they got a dance that's new  
There ain't nothing to it, it's easy to do  
You gotta shake that thing, shake that thing  
I'm getting sick and tired of telling you to shake that thing

Now the old folks like it, the young folks too  
The old folks showing the young ones how to do  
They call it "Shake that thing," shake that thing  
I'm getting sick and tired of telling you to shake that thing

Shake

Now it ain't no Charleston, no Chicken Wing  
All you got to do is shake that thing  
They call it "Shake that thing," shake that thing  
I'm getting sick and tired of telling you to shake that thing

Well, I was walking downtown, stumbled and fell  
My mouth jumped open like a country well  
Watching them shake that thing, shake that thing  
Watching them shake that thing, shake that thing  
I'm getting sick and tired of telling you to shake that thing

Look out  
That's right  
Oh yeah  
Move over

Now, old uncle Jack, the jelly roll king  
He just got back from shaking that thing  
Now shake that thing, shake that thing  
Shake that thing, shake that thing  
I'm getting sick and tired of telling you to shake that thing

Now the folks in Memphis, they gone wild  
Over this brand new dancing style  
They call "Shake that thing," shake that thing  
I'm getting sick and tired of telling you to shake that thing

Come on now, shake





## Memphis

Memphis was founded in 1819 on the banks of the famous Mississippi River, north of New Orleans, in the state of Tennessee. The city was named in honour of the capital of ancient Egypt, also called Memphis, and located on the banks of another famous river, the Nile.

At the turn of the 20th century, Memphis was a prosperous city, thanks in part to the cotton trade. A large part of its population was made up of descendants of enslaved peoples deported from Africa in the 18th century to work in tobacco or cotton fields. The abolition of slavery in 1865 allowed African Americans to begin shaping their lives as free people. However, their rights were restricted in several southern states until the late 1960s. Segregationist laws forbade Black children from attending the same schools as white children, and African American adults were not allowed to vote or enter restaurants and theatres frequented by white patrons.

## Civil Rights

A tragedy shook the city of Memphis and the whole of America in 1968. Pastor and human rights activist Martin Luther King Jr., known for his adoption of nonviolent resistance to promote equal rights for African Americans, was assassinated while standing on the balcony of his motel room. He was in town to lead a protest march in solidarity with striking garbage workers.

The Lorraine Motel has since been converted into a museum that traces the history of civil rights in the United States. Today, Memphis reminds us of the important socio-cultural heritage bequeathed by African Americans and the major role they played in the creation of several musical styles, including blues and rock 'n' roll.

## Sun Studio

A disc jockey named Sam Phillips decided to open his own recording studio in 1950 in the heart of Memphis. Sun Studio initially became a staple for African American rhythm and blues musicians like B.B. King and Howlin' Wolf. Today, it is known worldwide as "the birthplace of rock 'n' roll," thanks to Elvis Presley, who made his first recordings there in 1953.



## The Origins of Rock 'n' Roll

In the aftermath of World War II a significant increase in births, known as the "baby boom," completely transformed society. For the first time, teenagers in the 1950s benefited from a thriving economy, accessible education and the opportunity to enjoy leisure activities tailored to them. These young adults distinguished themselves from their parents by wearing different clothes and sporting new hairstyles – and rock 'n' roll became their music! The genre would completely transform the landscape of American popular music, further cementing the popularity of musical styles derived from blues and country music.

## "Rocket 88"

TV host Alan Freed popularized the term "rock 'n' roll" in 1951 on his Cleveland radio show *The Moondog House*. That same year, in Memphis, Jackie Brenston and his Delta Cats recorded a song written by Ike Turner called "Rocket 88." When the song was released, the wildly popular album sold over a half million copies, leading it to be considered the first rock 'n' roll record. The distortion, fast tempo and the prominence of the guitar in the overall sound laid the foundation for this new musical style.

## The Musical Explosion

In 1955, "(We're Gonna) Rock Around the Clock" the opening song of the film *Blackboard Jungle*, performed by Bill Haley & His Comets, spread like wildfire across the United States. Some African American musicians like pianist Little Richard and guitarist Chuck Berry also became rock 'n' roll stars during this period with the hits "Tutti Frutti" or "Johnny B. Goode."



## Elvis Presley

On July 5, 1954, at Sam Phillips' Sun Studio in Memphis, a shy, young truck driver by the name of Elvis Aaron Presley was fooling around during a recording session when he began singing an old Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup blues song titled "That's All Right."

When Phillips heard this impromptu rendition, he instinctively knew he had found what he was looking for: a white kid who could convincingly sing the earthy Black music he'd been recording with local blues players. The day after the session, he gave the record to a local disc jockey who played it on repeat and invited the singer on his radio show. The recording would end up kick-starting Presley's career and an entire genre.

Soon after, Presley began to develop a following across the southern states, with fans enthralled by his unusual musical style, provocative gyrating hips and good looks. In 1955, he signed with RCA Records, and scored his first No. 1 hit on Billboard with "Heartbreak Hotel" in 1956. The debut album topped the albums chart for 10 weeks, becoming the first rock 'n' roll album to reach that peak and sell a million copies. That same year, he signed a movie contract with Paramount Pictures and launched his career into superstardom with an appearance on The Ed Sullivan Show.

Presley starred in 33 successful films, made history with his television appearances and specials, and achieved great acclaim through his many, often record-breaking, live concert performances on tour and in Las Vegas. He has sold more than one billion records worldwide, more than any other artist. Presley died in 1977 at the age of 42 in his Memphis home, Graceland.





# Instruments



**Dobro** An amplified guitar with an aluminum resonator. Players usually hold the dobro flat on their knees and play it by fingerpicking its strings.



**Double bass** To maintain the rhythm in support of the drums, musicians of the rock 'n' roll period used the double bass. Elvis Presley's double bass player, Bill Black, began his career with the double bass and then switched to bass guitar in 1959 with Bill Black's Combo.



**Drums** The first basic rock 'n' roll drum kits used only one snare drum, one bass drum, one or more tom-toms, and any number of cymbals and hi-hats. The three rim shots that start "(We're Gonna) Rock Around the Clock" (and echo in the snare bombs that follow), performed by jazz drummer Billy Gussak, were instrumental in creating this new energetic sound.



**Electric bass (or bass)** is a stringed musical instrument similar in design to the electric guitar, invented by Leo Fender and marketed in the United States at the beginning of the 1950s. The bass rapidly gained popularity because of the need for a louder, more portable instrument with a lower pitch that could compete with the electric guitar. Elvis Presley's bassist, Bill Black, was one of the first to use it in popular music by adopting the Fender Precision Bass, most notably on the recording of "Jailhouse Rock."



**Electric guitar** The electric guitar was primarily invented in response to the desire to hear the instrument at a louder volume. It uses a pick-up to convert the metal strings' vibrations into electrical impulses that can then be amplified. In the 1950s, Leo Fender and Orville Gibson began mass-producing solid electric guitars, called the Fender Stratocaster and the Les Paul, respectively. While Elvis Presley remained faithful to the acoustic guitar in his early years, other performers such as Chuck Berry and Buddy Holly adopted the electric guitar, making it the most prominent rock 'n' roll instrument.



**Harmonica** An instrument in the woodwind family, the harmonica works much like an accordion. The player breathes in and out through the instrument to produce the notes.



**Piano** The piano is the signature instrument of singers Little Richard and Jerry Lee Lewis, who picked up musically where jazz, blues and rhythm forerunners left off. However, as the musical genre progressed, the piano was abandoned in favour of a second guitar.



**Saxophone** The saxophone was already widely used by jazz, blues and rhythm musicians before the arrival of rock 'n' roll. This brass instrument appears in the first rock 'n' roll songs in support of the rhythm section.



# Musicians

**Buddy Holly** (1936-1959) Buddy Holly is associated with the second wave of rock 'n' roll. In 1955, he opened for Elvis Presley and Bill Haley. With his band The Crickets, the singer-guitarist recorded the songs "That'll Be the Day" and "Peggy Sue," which became hits in 1957. Buddy Holly & The Crickets formed a quartet consisting of two guitarists, a bassist and a drummer, a formula that would be used by The Beatles and many bands that would emerge in the following years. His career would be short-lived, however. In 1959, at the age of 22, he passed away tragically in a plane crash. The popular song from the 1970s, "American Pie," by Don MacLean, commemorates Holly's passing as "the day music died."

**Bill Haley** (1925-1981) With his band the Comets, Bill Haley popularized rock 'n' roll music at the turn of the 1950s, before Elvis Presley took center stage. His songs "(We're Gonna) Rock Around the Clock" and "Shake, Rattle and Roll" made the whole world dance in 1954.

**Carl Perkins** (1932-1998) Discovered by Memphis studio owner Sam Phillips, Carl Perkins is considered one of the pioneers of rockabilly, a cross between country music and rhythm and blues. In 1955, he wrote and recorded the song "Blue Suede Shoes," which became a rock 'n' roll classic that was covered by Elvis Presley the following year.

**Chuck Berry** (1926-2017) Nicknamed the "Shakespeare of rock 'n' roll" and the "father of rock 'n' roll," Chuck Berry refined and developed rhythm and blues into the major elements that made rock 'n' roll distinctive, with popular songs like "Maybellene" (1955) and "Johnny B. Goode" (1958). With lyrics focused on teen life and a performance style characterized by guitar solos and showmanship, Berry became one of the most influential rock 'n' roll performers in music history.



**Jerry Lee Lewis** (1935-2022) A flamboyant pianist and singer, Jerry Lee Lewis crossed paths with Sam Phillips in the 1950s. His single "Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On" (1957), recorded at Sun Studio, became an instant radio hit, but it was the song "Great Balls of Fire," recorded the same year, that brought him fame after selling more than a million copies in 10 days.

**Little Richard** (1932-2020) Little Richard, whose real name was Richard Wayne Penniman, considered himself the true king of rock 'n' roll. Born in Macon, Georgia, in the southern United States, this singer-pianist's career spanned more than 70 years. His songs "Tutti Frutti" (1955) and "Long Tall Sally" (1956) were instant classics. He was known for his unique piano-playing style and electrifying stage presence.

**Rosetta Tharpe** (1915-1973) Guitar virtuoso and singer Rosetta Tharpe, also known as Sister Rosetta Tharpe, is considered the godmother of rock 'n' roll. She was the first great recording star of gospel music and was among the first to appeal to rhythm and blues and rock 'n' roll audiences. Her first major radio hit, "Rock Me," a remake of a gospel spiritual released in 1938, became a national hit. During that period, she transitioned from her finger-picked acoustic guitar to an electric guitar. Chuck Berry, Elvis Presley, Little Richard and many others have recognized Tharpe's significant influence on their music.





**Story** Bia **Songs** Bia, Annick Brémault, Erik West-Millette **and** Olaf Gundel

**Illustrations** Fanny Berthiaume **Story translation** Patrick Lacoursière **and** Katherine Sehl

**Voice actors** Alexa Devine (Mama Poss, Weeny Poss, Teeny Poss, Train Tracks Poss, Spitter Poss, Parrot, Joe Snake and Elvis Harepiece) **and** Olaf Gundel (Papa Poss) **Singers** Olaf Gundel **and** Annick Brémault

**Record producer** Olaf Gundel **Arrangements** Olaf Gundel **and** Erik West-Millette

**Artistic director** Roland Stringer **Graphic design** Stephan Lorti **for** Haus Design

**Copy editor** Katherine Sehl **Recorded and mixed by** Olaf Gundel **at** Studio Chez Frank

**Mastering** Ryan Morey **Musicians** Olaf Gundel (bass, acoustic and electric guitar, dobro, banjo, mandolin, piano, programming **and** percussion), Erik West-Millette (acoustic guitar) **and** Lévy Bourbonnais (harmonica).

**Back-up vocals** Annick Brémault **and** Olaf Gundel

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Additional teaching resources and activity sheets are available at [www.thesecondmountain.com](http://www.thesecondmountain.com).

### LISTEN ONLINE

Find the narrated story and songs on all major streaming platforms under the title **Sunny Days in a Memphis Studio!**

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On their next musical adventure, Mama and Papa Poss take a cruise up the Mississippi River aboard the Delta Queen to Memphis, the birthplace of rock 'n' roll. As it turns out, the king himself, Elvis Harepiece, has enlisted the talented marsupial musicians to compose his next hit. Follow the duo as they stroll down the legendary Beale Street and make their way to the Graceland for a memorable encounter that will pave their way to glory!



**Sunny Days in a Memphis Studio!** is the third story in the **We're a Possum Family Band** series, which follows Mama and Papa Poss on their travels across North America to the birthplaces of Cajun, jazz, country, rock 'n' roll, blues, and traditional Quebecois music. At the end of each story, explanatory notes delve into the key figures, instruments and customs behind each genre.

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Find the narrated story and the songs "Armadillo on the Rocks," "Shake That Thing" and "Possum Anthem" on all major streaming platforms.

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