Chuck Berry’s Johnny B. Goode

No one predicted that “Back to the Future” would top the U.S. box office for 11 weeks, would go on to make more money than any other film in 1985, and would 30 years later be a major pop culture touchstone beloved by generations.

And Marty’s rendition of **“Johnny B. Goode”** at the Enchantment Under the Sea dance was perhaps the critical moment that cemented the movie’s place in film history. The 17-year-old hero, by this point, has won over the audience by being both totally cool and adorably dorky — and both sides of him are on display as he gets carried away playing the Chuck Berry’s rock and roll hit. It’s a scene packed with 1950s nostalgia, wink jokes, memorable one-liners, and a crowd-pleasing musical performance, and it supplied the feel good moment that solidified the film’s emotional hold over its audience, transcending it from mere time travel genre adventure to a beloved instant classic.

Johnny B. Goode

Once upon a time, rock'n'roll was an idiom that enabled young people from humble circumstances to escape poverty and make a name for themselves. This was before scions of the landed gentry, masquerading as outcasts, began forming bands like the Wallflowers and the Strokes, producing a brand of music best described as plutocrap: cute, but extraneous.



Michael Fox as Marty McFly

In the official version of events, supplied to Rolling Stone magazine by Berry himself, the song is autobiographical: A poor boy from a rustic corner of the Deep South with little education and few prospects masters the electric guitar and becomes the leader of a famous band. In fact, Berry was not from the Deep South; he grew up on Goode Avenue in Saint Louis, an unusually cosmopolitan Midwestern city with a rich musical tradition.



St. Louis, Goode Avenue

"The song had its birth when a [1955] tour first brought me to New Orleans, a place I'd longed to visit ever since hearing Muddy Waters' lyrics, 'Going down to Louisiana way behind the sun,' " writes Berry in his autobiography.
"That inspiration, combined with little bits of dad's stories and the thrill of seeing my black name posted all over town in one of the cities they brought the slaves through, turned into 'Johnny B. Goode.' "



Chuck Berry

After naming the song's protagonist Johnny after his keyboardist Johnnie Johnson, Berry wrote the lyrics in two weeks of *"periodic application."* The repeated chorus calls of *"Go Johnny Go"* are a tribute to Berry's mother's constant encouragement, while other imagery was also inspired by his family.
"I'd been told my great grandfather lived 'way back up among the evergreens' in a log cabin,' " Berry writes.
"I revived that era with a story about a 'colored boy name Johnny B. Goode'…but I thought that would seem biased to white fans...and changed it to 'country boy.' "



Chuck Berry

"Johnny B Goode" was produced by Leonard and Phil Chess, founders of Chicago's celebrated Chess Records. Berry was introduced to the Chess brothers by blues legend Muddy Waters, who, according to one apocryphal tale, was busy painting the walls of the recording studio when a very young Mick Jagger popped by for a visit.













Chuck Berry