

## **Down at the Crossroads: Art has great power in our lives and in our collective consciousness**

**Robert Johnson** stands at the crossroads of American music like the legend that he once stood at Mississippi crossroads and sold his soul to the devil in exchange for the ability to play guitar like no one else. Johnson was a songwriter of searing depth and a guitar player with a commanding ability that inspired generations of blues musicians and rock and rollers.

Born in Hazlehurst, Mississippi, in 1911, Johnson picked up the guitar in his teens and learned from Charley Patton and Son House. During the Depression years of the early 30s, Johnson lit out with his guitar and earned his keep not only as a master of the blues but of the popular tunes and styles of the day. His travels took him throughout the Mississippi and Arkansas Deltas, where he performed at jook joints, country suppers and levee camps. He also saw the big cities, traveling with fellow bluesman Johnny Shines to perform in St. Louis, Detroit, Chicago and elsewhere. Such Robert Johnson classics as "Cross Road Blues," "Love In Vain" and "Sweet Home Chicago" are the bedrock upon which modern blues and rock & roll were built.

In an eloquent testimonial included in the liner notes to the box set Robert Johnson: The Complete Recordings (Columbia Records, 1990), disciple Eric Clapton said, "I have never found anything more deeply soulful than Robert Johnson. His music remains the most powerful cry that I think you can find in the human voice." (Notes adapted from Rock and Roll Hall of Fame)

### **Cross Road Blues (Take 1)**

by Robert Johnson

*Recording of 3rd of 5 sessions, November 27 1936, San Antonio, Texas  
from The Complete Recordings (CBS 467246 2 & Columbia/Legacy C2K-46222 &  
Columbia 4622 & Sony 64916), copyright notice*

I went to the crossroad, fell down on my knees  
I went to the crossroad, fell down on my knees  
Asked the Lord above "Have mercy, now save poor Bob, if you please"

Yeoo, standin' at the crossroad, tried to flag a ride  
Ooo eeee, I tried to flag a ride  
Didn't nobody seem to know me, babe, everybody pass me by

Standin' at the crossroad, baby, risin' sun goin' down  
Standin' at the crossroad, baby, eee, eee, risin' sun goin' down  
I believe to my soul, now, poor Bob is sinkin' down

You can run, you can run, tell my friend Willie Brown  
You can run, you can run, tell my friend Willie Brown  
That I got the crossroad blues this mornin', Lord, babe, I'm sinkin' down

And I went to the crossroad, mama, I looked east and west  
I went to the crossroad, baby, I looked east and west  
Lord, I didn't have no sweet woman, ooh well, babe, in my distress

Adapted from Wikipedia February 2010