

Rory Gallagher

William Rory Gallagher (2 March 1948 – 14 June 1995) was an Irish blues and rock guitarist, singer, songwriter, and producer. Born in Ballyshannon, County Donegal, and brought up in Cork, Gallagher formed the band Taste in the late 1960s and recorded solo albums throughout the 1970s and 1980s. His albums have sold over 30 million copies worldwide.

Gallagher received a liver transplant in 1995, but died of complications later that year in London at the age of 47.

Early life

Gallagher was born in Ballyshannon, County Donegal in 1948. His father Daniel was employed by the Irish Electricity Supply Board, who were constructing Cathaleen's Fall hydroelectric power station on the Erne River above the town. The family moved to Derry City, where his younger brother Dónal was born in 1949.

His mother, Monica, and the two boys later moved to Cork, where the brothers were raised. Rory attended North Monastery School. Daniel Gallagher had played the accordion and sang with the Tír Chonaill Céilí Band while in Donegal; their mother Monica was a singer and acted with the Abbey Players in Ballyshannon. The Theatre in Ballyshannon where Monica once acted is now called the Rory Gallagher Theatre.

Both sons were musically inclined and encouraged by their parents to pursue music. At age nine, Gallagher received his first guitar from them. He built on his burgeoning ability on ukulele in teaching himself to play the guitar and perform at minor functions. After winning a cash prize in a talent contest when he was twelve, he bought his first guitar. Gallagher began performing in his adolescence with both his acoustic guitar, and an electric guitar. However, it was a 1961 Fender Stratocaster, which he purchased three years later for £100 that became his primary instrument and was most associated with him during his career.

Gallagher was initially attracted to skiffle after hearing Lonnie Donegan on the radio. Donegan frequently covered blues and folk performers from the United States. He relied entirely on radio programs and television. Occasionally, the BBC would play some blues numbers, and he slowly found some song books for guitar, where he found the names of the actual composers of blues pieces.

While still in school, playing songs by Buddy Holly and Eddie Cochran, he discovered his greatest influence in Muddy Waters. He began experimenting with folk, blues, and rock music. Unable to find or afford record albums, Gallagher stayed up late to hear Radio Luxembourg and AFN where the radio brought him his only exposure to the actual songwriters and musicians whose music moved him most.

Influences he discovered, and cited as he progressed, included Woody Guthrie, Big Bill Broonzy, and Lead Belly. Singing and later using a brace for his harmonica, Gallagher taught himself to play slide guitar. Further, throughout the next few years of his musical development, Gallagher began learning to play alto saxophone, bass, mandolin, banjo, and the coral sitar with varying degrees of proficiency. By his mid-teens, he began experimenting heavily with different blues styles.

Gallagher began playing after school with Irish showbands, while still a young teenager. In 1963, he joined one named Fontana, a sextet playing the popular hit songs of the day. The band toured Ireland and the United Kingdom, earning the money for the payments that were due on his Stratocaster guitar. Gallagher began to influence the band's repertoire, beginning its transition from mainstream pop music, skirting along some of Chuck Berry's songs and by 1965, he had successfully moulded Fontana into "The Impact", with a change in their line-up into an R&B group that played gigs in Ireland and Spain until disbanding in London. Gallagher left with the bassist Oliver Tobin and drummer Johnny Campbell to perform as a trio in Hamburg, Germany. In 1966, Gallagher returned to Ireland and, experimenting with other musicians in Cork, decided to form his own band.

Taste

Having completed a musical apprenticeship in the showbands, and influenced by the increasing popularity of beat groups during the early 1960s, Gallagher formed "The Taste", which was later renamed simply, "Taste", a blues rock and R&B power trio, in 1966. Initially, the band was composed of Gallagher and two Cork musicians, Eric Kitteringham (died 2013) and Norman Damery. However, by 1968, they were replaced with two musicians from Belfast, featuring Gallagher on guitar and vocals, drummer John Wilson, and bassist Richard McCracken.

Performing extensively in the UK, the group played regularly at the Marquee Club, supporting both Cream at their Royal Albert Hall farewell concert, and the blues supergroup Blind Faith on a tour of North America. Managed by Eddie Kennedy, the trio released the albums *Taste* and *On The Boards*, and two live recordings, *Live Taste* and *Live at the Isle of Wight*.

The latter appeared long after the band's break-up shortly after their appearance at the 1970 Isle of Wight Festival.

Solo career

After the break-up of Taste, Gallagher toured under his own name, hiring former Deep Joy bass player Gerry McAvoy to play on Gallagher's self-titled debut album, *Rory Gallagher*.

It was the beginning of a twenty-year musical relationship between Gallagher and McAvoy; the other band member was drummer Wilgar Campbell. The 1970s were Gallagher's most prolific period. He produced ten albums in that decade, including two live albums, *Live in Europe* and *Irish Tour '74*. November 1971 saw the release of the album *Deuce*.

In the same year he was voted Melody Maker's International Top Guitarist of the Year, ahead of Eric Clapton. However, despite a number of his albums from this period reaching the UK Albums Chart, Gallagher did not attain major star status.

Gallagher played and recorded what he said was "in me all the time, and not just something I turn on ...". Though he sold over thirty million albums worldwide, it was his marathon live performances that won him greatest acclaim. He is documented in *Irish Tour '74*, a film directed by Tony Palmer.

During the heightened periods of political unrest in Northern Ireland, as other artists were warned not to tour, Gallagher was resolute about touring Ireland at least once a

year during his career, winning him the dedication of thousands of fans, and in the process, becoming a role model for other aspiring young Irish musicians.

Gallagher admitted in several interviews that there were not any international Irish acts until Van Morrison and he, and later Phil Lynott and Thin Lizzy. The line-up which included Rod de'Ath on drums and Lou Martin on keyboards, performed together between 1973–1976. However, he eventually dropped down to just bass, guitar and drums, and his act became a power trio. Other releases from that period include *Against the Grain*, *Calling Card*, *Photo-Finish*, and *Top Priority*.

In January 1975, when the Rolling Stones gathered in Rotterdam, Netherlands, to continue working towards their album *Black and Blue* they auditioned new guitarists, to replace Mick Taylor, as they recorded. Gallagher went over for a jam with the band "just to see what was going on," but did not join the group, happy with his solo career.

Gerry McAvoy has stated that the Gallagher band performed several TV and radio shows across Europe, including Beat-Club in Bremen, Germany and the Old Grey Whistle Test.] He recorded two "Peel Sessions" (both February 1973 and containing the same tracks), but only the first was broadcast. Along with Little Feat and Roger McGuinn, Gallagher performed the first Rockpalast live concert at the Grugahalle, Essen, Germany in 1977.

Gallagher collaborated with Jerry Lee Lewis and Muddy Waters on their respective London Sessions in the mid-1970s. He played on Lonnie Donegan's final album.

In the 1980s he continued recording, producing *Jinx*, *Defender*, and *Fresh Evidence*. After *Fresh Evidence*, he embarked on a tour of the United States. In addition he played with Box of Frogs, a band formed in 1983 by former members of The Yardbirds. Becoming obsessive over details and plagued by self-doubt, Gallagher nevertheless retained a loyal fanbase. During this period he stated "I agonize too much"

Death

In the later years of his life, Gallagher developed a phobia of flying. To overcome this, he was prescribed various drugs. By the time of his final performance on 10 January 1995 in the Netherlands, he was visibly ill with severe abdominal pain and the tour had to be cancelled. He was prescribed paracetamol for the pain, a drug that can be extremely harmful to the liver, especially for a heavy drinker such as Gallagher.

Gallagher was admitted to London's King's College Hospital in March 1995, and it was only then that the extent of his ill health became apparent; his liver was failing and the doctors determined that, in spite of his young age, a liver transplant was the only possible course of action. After thirteen weeks in intensive care, while waiting to be transferred to a convalescent home, his health suddenly worsened when he contracted a staphylococcal (MRSA) infection, and he died on 14 June 1995, at the age of 47. He was unmarried and had no children.

Gallagher's body was buried in St Oliver's Cemetery, on the Clash Road just outside Ballincollig near Cork City, Ireland. The grave's headstone is in the image of an award he received in 1972 for International Guitarist of the Year.