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Bo Diddley, John Lee Hooker, Jerry Lee Lewis, Margaret Walker and Tammy Wynette Join The MAX Hall of Fame

MERIDIAN, Miss. — Five Mississippians who have made an indelible impact on the world of entertainment were honored on Thursday with Mississippi's highest honor in the arts. Bo Diddley, John Lee Hooker, Jerry Lee Lewis, Margaret Walker and Tammy Wynette were inducted into The MAX Hall of Fame.

Those legends will join 23 earlier honorees saluted in the two-story Hall of Fame rotunda at The Mississippi Arts + Entertainment Experience, better known as The MAX, in the heart of downtown Meridian.

Because of COVID-19 guidelines, the induction took place at a private ceremony on the stage of the MSU Riley Center's historic theater. A small invited audience — primarily artists and their families, plus a few friends and staff members of The MAX — will join the master of ceremonies, country music star Marty Stuart. The MAX plans to record the event for later public viewing.

After the inductions, the festivities moved outside and down the street for a public unveiling of the inductees' five new stars on The MAX Walk of Fame.

Walk of Fame stars extend along the two blocks of sidewalks between the Riley Center and The MAX. The 2020 stars were unveiled directly in front of The MAX itself on Front Street bringing the total of Walk of Fame stars to 32.

After the Walk of Fame unveiling, a private reception was held at The MAX for those who attended the induction ceremony.

At the induction, Linda Gail Lewis accepted the honor on behalf of her older brother Jerry Lee, the only living inductee. A pianist and singer with a rocking style similar to her brother's, she performed along with blues singer Zakiya Hooker, daughter of John Lee Hooker, musical members of Diddley's family, and Georgette Jones, daughter of inductee Tammy Wynette and George Jones.

Here's a closer look at The MAX 2020 Hall of Fame class:

As a guitarist, singer and songwriter, **Bo Diddley** had a huge influence on popular music, including rap, hip-hop and R&B. His 1955 recordings of “I’m a Man” and “Bo Diddley” laid the foundation for the development of nearly all subsequent rock ‘n’ roll styles. The famous “Bo Diddley beat” served artists ranging from Carlos Santana and Jimi Hendrix to the Rolling Stones and Led Zeppelin.

John Lee Hooker was a blues singer, songwriter, and guitarist from Clarksdale, MS. The son of a Delta sharecropper, Hooker developed a unique style of guitar playing prominently featured in some of his best-known songs such as “One Bourbon, One Scotch, One Beer” and “Boom Boom.” Hooker is a five-time Grammy Award winner and an inductee in both the Blues Hall of Fame and the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. He has a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. He was awarded the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 2000.

Rock’s first great wild man, **Jerry Lee Lewis** is now the last surviving member of the celebrated musicians who founded rock ‘n’ roll in the 1950s. His 1957 breakthrough hit, “Whole Lotta Shakin’ Goin’ On,” elevated the piano to equal standing with the guitar as a lead rock instrument and vaulted him to fame. His long career has also taken him to stardom as a country and a gospel artist. Through it all, he has remained a primal force in music and one of the most exuberant, influential pianists ever.

Novelist and poet **Margaret Walker** was a trailblazing woman among a group of talented African American artists in the 1940s that included Langston Hughes and Richard Wright. As a leading voice for the liberation of black women, she offered a message of resilience and triumph over adversity. Through her first collection of poetry, “For My People,” in 1942 and first novel, “Jubilee,” in 1966, and through her more than four decades as a professor at Jackson State University, she mentored and encouraged generations of writers, historians and activists.

As one of the three great pioneering women in country music (along with Patsy Cline and Loretta Lynn), singer-songwriter **Tammy Wynette** conveyed the full emotional dimensions of heartbreak better than anyone else. She was the first female country vocalist to have a million-selling album and put 20 No. 1 singles on the Billboard magazine country chart. Her soulful voice and rags-to-riches personal story gave hope and inspiration to women everywhere.

For more about all of the Hall of Fame members, see <http://www.msarts.org/explore/hall-of-fame/>.

About The MAX

The MAX showcases Mississippi Arts + Entertainment history in one immersive destination. Here, visitors of all ages explore the global impact of Mississippians on music, literature, art, entertainment and cuisine. The MAX honors our state’s creative legacy and inspires the next generation of creators through a unique experience of interactive exhibits. Come discover the Mississippi roots of some of the world’s greatest arts and entertainment icons – like Elvis Presley, Oprah Winfrey, B.B. King, Faith Hill, Sela Ward and Kermit the Frog, just to name a few.

The MAX is dedicated to keeping its facility and exhibits clean and safe. Visit our website for MAX@Home, an online series of lectures, classes, musical performances, and celebrity commentaries.

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