



GETTING INDUCTED INTO THE ROCK AND ROLL Hall of Fame is nothing new for Eric Clapton. One of the greatest guitarists of our time, a musician whose achingly honest, often brilliant blues-laden solos continue to explore the eternal conflict between passion and pain, Clapton has been honored previously for his work with seminal blues-rock band the Yardbirds (inducted in 1992) and psychedelic-tinted supergroup Cream (inducted in 1993). We focus our attention this time on Clapton's sterling solo career, one that spans three decades and is still

# ERIC CLAPTON

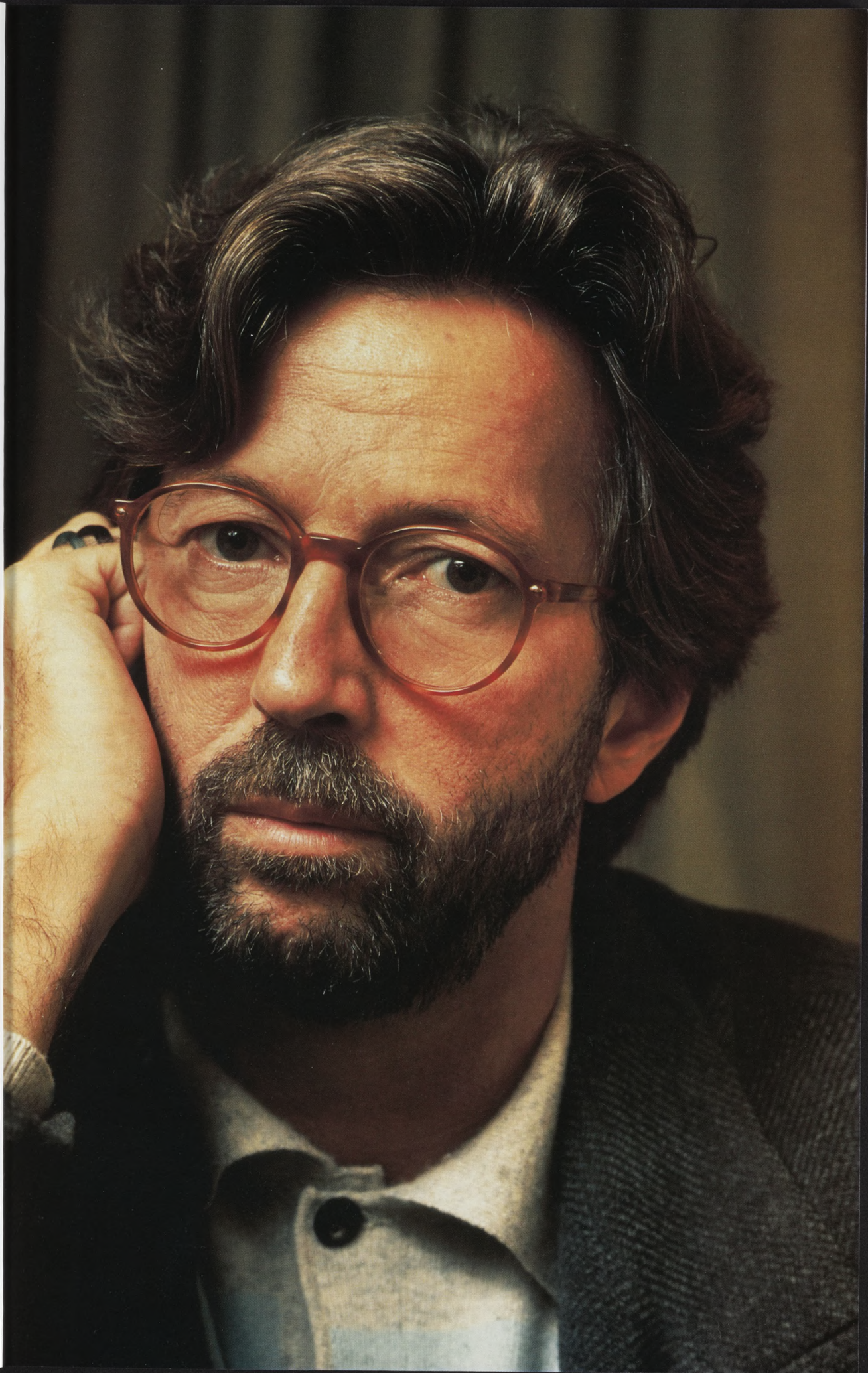
BY ROBERT SANTELLI

going strong. Remarkably, his induction tonight makes Clapton the only artist to be inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame three times.

If ever an artist so deserved such unprecedented recognition, it is Eric Clapton. Throughout his career, occasionally amid wrenching personal problems, Clapton has defined class, both in the studio and on the stage. The guitar genius was always there, but over the years Clapton developed both his singing and songwriting skills to such a degree that they became perfect complements to his extraordinary musicianship. A bluesmaster, Clapton has never been bound by the genre. Instead, he has used the music's emotional intensity as a base while he delved into straight-ahead rock and even pop. What he discovered was that triumphant artistic expression could occur in any music form, providing the artist remained true to his muse and his heart.

He was born Eric Clapp on March 30, 1945, in Ripley, England, where he was raised by his grandparents. By age fifteen, he'd learned to

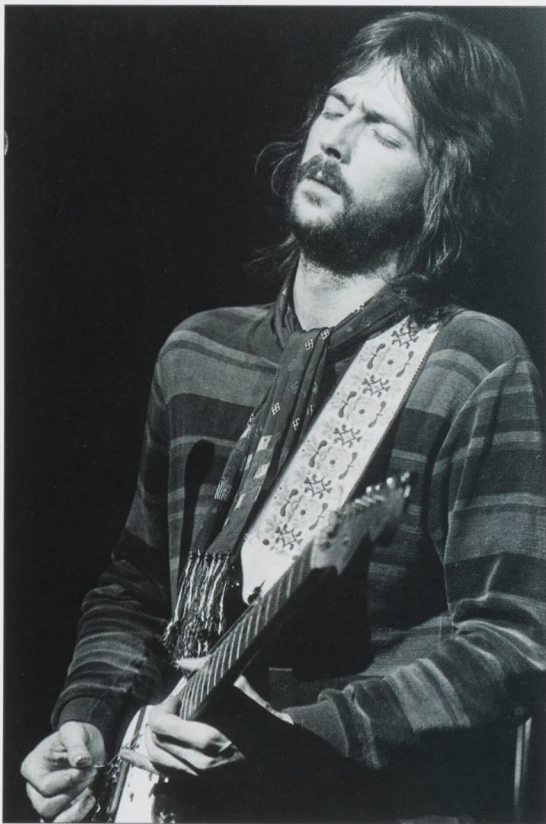








play guitar and in 1963 joined his first band, the Roosters, an R&B group. The Yardbirds formed that same year, and soon Clapton replaced the original lead guitarist. When the group veered from blues to psychedelia, Clapton departed, joining John Mayall's Bluesbreakers in 1965. With Jack Bruce and Ginger Baker, he started Cream the following year.



Upon the demise of Cream in late 1968, the twenty-three-year-old Clapton tied himself to a string of short-lived but fruitful projects before earnestly embarking on his distinguished solo career. Blind Faith, another supergroup, featured Clapton's riveting guitar work and Steve Winwood's wailing vocals. The experiment yielded one eponymous album and one concert tour before the group called it quits. While on the road, Clapton began jamming with opening act Delaney and Bonnie, eventually joining the group as an unofficial member in 1969. That same year, Clapton teamed briefly with John Lennon in the soon-to-be-ex-Beatle's Plastic Ono Band, contributing to the album *Live Peace in Toronto 1969*. Shortly thereafter, in 1970, Clapton released his self-titled solo debut, which featured such Seventies staples as "After Midnight," "Blues Power" and "Let It Rain."

The high point of this period, though, was undoubtedly his monstrously emotional guitar work and vocals with Derek and the Dominos, another one-shot group that included Duane Allman sitting in on second guitar. "Layla," the title track of the 1970 double album

Clapton cut with the Dominos, has been called the greatest guitar-driven rock single ever, thanks to riffs and solos that gush with heartache and inner torment. Creatively restless, Clapton also continued to develop his sideman imprint, guesting on albums by Leon Russell, Stephen Stills, Dr. John and George Harrison. Clapton performed at Harrison's legendary benefit Concert for Bangladesh in 1971 and two years later teamed with Pete Townshend, Winwood and others for a Rainbow Theatre concert in London, resulting in a live album. Throughout it all, Clapton's guitar work remained a superlative example of what could happen when blues angst merged with the apoplectic intensity of rock & roll. No one, it seemed, bet-

WITH DELANEY  
AND BONNIE,  
1969; WITH  
DEREK AND THE  
DOMINOS, 1970





"Tears in Heaven" and gave new life to blues chestnuts "Before You Accuse Me," "Walkin' Blues" and "Rollin' & Tumblin'." Nominated for nine Grammy Awards, *Unplugged* yielded six, including Record of the Year, Song of the Year and Best Pop Male Vocal.

Hearing Clapton play the blues, if only acoustically, rekindled the demand from many longtime fans that he return to the form originally inspiring the CLAPTON IS GOD graffiti marking London subway walls in the Sixties. Clapton responded with *From the Cradle* (1994), a work of personal celebration and his first full blues album. On it, Clapton paid tribute to many of his heroes: Muddy Waters, Freddie King, Eddie Boyd and

IN LONDON, 1969;  
GUESTING WITH  
THE ROLLING  
STONES, ATLANTIC  
CITY, 1989

Lowell Fulson, among others. Demonstrating Clapton at his blues best, *From the Cradle* quickly became the best-selling traditional blues album of all time, also earning a Grammy for Best Traditional Blues Album.

And the honors kept coming. In 1995 Clapton was awarded the prestigious M.B.E. title (Member of the British Empire), and in 1996 Clapton's work with Babyface on the song "Change the World" would win two more Grammys - Record of the Year and Best Pop Male Vocal. More recently, 1998's *Pilgrim*, a dark, somber work in which Clapton documented his personal despair, drawn in part from the 1991 tragic death of his son, Conor, attracted new rounds of critical acclaim. Among its heartfelt tunes, *Pilgrim* featured "Circus" and "My Father's Eyes," the latter of which won Clapton yet another Grammy for Best Pop Male Vocal.

Committed to making music that probes the vulnerability and tenderness of the human spirit, Eric Clapton is one of rock's most unapologetically sincere artists. In a 1998 *USA Today* interview, he commented that "music gave focus to issues that I couldn't grasp or verbalize or intellectualize." That music continues to be Eric Clapton's ultimate means of articulation has made rock & roll and the blues all the richer.

ter demonstrated this hybrid's power.

In 1974 Clapton's version of Bob Marley's "I Shot the Sheriff" soared to the top of the singles charts, helping make *461 Ocean Boulevard*, the album from which it came, an instant classic. Each year thereafter through 1986, with the exception of 1979 and 1984, Clapton released a solo album. *Slowhand* (1977), a Clapton masterwork, included three monumental tracks: a wildly successful version of J.J. Cale's "Cocaine," the poignant pop ballad "Wonderful Tonight" and the romping "Lay Down Sally." On *Slowhand* and a slew of other solo efforts from this phase, Clapton kept one foot in the blues and the other in rock. Although his guitar playing remained stellar, Clapton reined it in some, thereby emphasizing his increasing vocal prowess.

In the mid- and late Eighties, Clapton's solo albums such as *Behind the Sun* (1985), *August* (1986) and *Journeyman* (1989) produced another string of hits. "She's Waiting," "Forever Man," "It's in the Way That You Use It" and "Pretending" examined the frailties of love, minus the blues undercurrent that marked his earlier solo work.

On *Unplugged*, his 1992 landmark acoustic album, Clapton reinvented "Layla," introduced the misty-eyed

