

HUDDIE WILLIAM LEDBETTER



Ledbetter, better known as Lead Belly, was an American folk and blues singer notable for his strong vocals, virtuosity on the twelve-string guitar, and the folk standards he introduced, including his renditions of "In the Pines", "Goodnight, Irene", "Midnight Special", "Cotton Fields", and "Boll Weevil".

Lead Belly usually played a twelve-string guitar, but he also played the piano, mandolin, harmonica, violin, and windjammer. In some of his recordings, he sang while clapping his hands or stomping his foot.

Lead Belly's songs covered a wide range of genres, including gospel music, blues, and folk music, as well as a number of topics, including women, liquor, prison life, racism, cowboys, work, sailors, cattle herding, and dancing. He also wrote songs about people in the news, such as Franklin D. Roosevelt, Adolf Hitler, Jean Harlow, Jack Johnson, the Scottsboro Boys and Howard Hughes. Lead Belly was posthumously inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1988.

Though many releases credit him as "Leadbelly," he wrote his name as "Lead Belly." This is the spelling on his tombstone and is used by the Lead Belly Foundation.

Lead Belly's style of guitar was so influential that John Lennon is quoted as having said, "If there had been no Lead Belly there would have been no Beatles." Although he performed in Harlem, he was better received by the folk music community than by the traditional fans of Blues or Jazz musicians. He worked extensively with the Lomax family who discovered him while he was in Louisiana's Angola Penitentiary. The Lomax's were under contract to the Smithsonian to study and record the roots of American folk music.