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# Special day for Chuck Berry at the Delmar Loop

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UNIVERSITY CITY • Chuck Berry, the man called the Father of Rock 'n' Roll, blew kisses at the crowd that joined him Friday morning for the dedication of a statue in his honor in the Delmar Loop.

"I don't know how to speak. ... I can sing a little a bit," Berry shyly told his audience. "I'm going to say thank you again, thank you, and I love you all."

Berry, 84, has been celebrated at the Kennedy Center by President Bill Clinton. His music was shot into space as representative of the best of our culture. But his son Charles Edward Berry Jr. said Friday's honor was the best ever because it's in St. Louis, where Berry Sr. grew up and still lives.

"My dad has received many awards over the years but to me the most special are the ones from his hometown," Berry Jr. said. "My mother and sisters are here today as are many of our cousins and extended family. This statue, as his music, will be here for generations to come. It's a very, very prideful moment for all of us."

The 8-foot statue by sculptor Harry Weber is at 6555 Delmar Boulevard, across Delmar from Blueberry Hill, where Berry still performs monthly to sold-out crowds.

At the ceremony, Berry thanked the crowd, estimated at 600, for enduring the heat to be with him.

"Believe me, it's an honor just to have you walk by in the hot sun ... more or less stand and honor (me)," he said.

After he spoke, the crowd broke into singing "Johnny B. Goode," a Berry signature song.

Blueberry Hill owner Joe Edwards, who with KMOX Radio's Charlie Brennan helped raise money for the statue, introduced the man of the hour.

Edwards said:

"Welcome to The Loop in St. Louis, Missouri, in the United States of America, in the Solar System in the Milky Way Galaxy.

"The reason I greet you that way is that the man I am about to introduce had his song 'Johnny B. Goode' chosen to be put on copper records aboard the Voyager space probes, launched into outer space in 1977 to reach out to the universe with the best of our culture."

Weber, the sculptor, said: "Chuck Berry is a legend that ... will last as long as human beings find music to be a necessary part of their existence. ... I am truly grateful to have had this chance. ... I hope I have done it justice."

Taped tributes of congratulations were played from Little Richard, Elvis Costello, Michael McDonald, Merle Haggard and Joe Perry of Aerosmith.

After the ceremony, more than 100 people went into Blueberry Hill for a reception. Berry signed autographs with customary modesty and with his wife, Themetta Berry, at his side.

The new Ackert Plaza where the statue is situated features illuminated stainless steel walls with laser-engraved musical notes. A blue-light LED system in the interior of the walls will illuminate the melody of "Johnny B. Goode."

As part of the ceremony, Great Rivers Greenway and University City dedicated a new one-mile segment of the Centennial Greenway, a hiking and biking pathway. The statue and plaza are along the path.