

## Ma Rainey



**1886- 1939**

Ma Rainey (Gertrude Pridgett) was an American singer who was known as the “mother of the blues.” Her parents Ella Pridgett and Thomas Pridgett were both minstrel troupe performers which was one of the few professional opportunities available at the time for black entertainers in America. Gertrude Pridgett was first recognized when she was 14 performing in a talent show called “Bunch of Blueberries ”in the Springer Opera House. In 1902 she became familiar with the music that has now become known as the blues .In February 1904 she married William Rainey whom for years they toured with African American Minstrel groups as a team. In the travels she was known to appear with jazz and jug bands throughout the south. Rainey separated from her husband in 1916. She began touring with her own show Madam Gertrude “Ma” Rainey and her Georgia Smart Sets. Her popularity grew and she was responsible for the popular jazz and blues she immersed together in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1923 after 25 years of successful performances she made her first recording with Paramount in the age of 37 years. Rainey wrote 38 out of the 92 songs she recorded. Sound quality for most of Rainey's recordings suffered at Paramount which the company got bankrupt in the 1930's it wasn't until the late 1960's when most of her recordings were properly re issued. She even had a backup band that took her to big city's like Petersburg, Detroit, and Chicago. During the great depression the market for jazz and blues declined and was dropped by Paramount in the early 1930's. She did continue to perform for a few years but then retired to Columbus when her mother and sister died in 1935.

She ran three theaters called The Lyric, The Airdrome, and the Lady Theatre until her death. She died of a heart attack on December 22, 1939.