

## Gertrude "Ma" Rainey

Gertrude Pridgett was born in Columbus Georgia on April 26, 1886. Both of her parents were former minstrel show performers and Gertrude began performing while still quite young. Around 1900, when she was 14 years old, she began performing with the Black vaudeville troupes that traveled throughout the south.

Gertrude married another performer named William **Pa** Rainey in 1904 and she changed her name to **Ma Rainey**. They performed as **Rainey and Rainey, Assassigators of the Blues** and traveled throughout the south, performing with minstrel shows, circuses, and tent shows. According to local stories, Ma Rainey taught [Bessie Smith](#) how to sing the blues during this time.

Ma Rainey performed with such Bluesmen and Jazz Luminaries as Tampa Red, Blind Blake, Louis Armstrong, Kid Ory, and Fletcher Henderson. During the early twenties, Ma Rainey was one of the star performers on the Theater Owners' Booking Association circuit.

Ma had been singing for over 20 years before she made her first recording with Paramount in 1923. She was 37 years old. Ma Rainey's recording career only lasted six years, but during that short time she recorded over a hundred songs and became known as the Mother of the Blues.

Several of her songs have become blues classics such as See See Rider and Bo-Weavil Blues.

Ma Rainey reached the height of her popularity in the mid to late 1920s, but her career faltered during the 1930s as the blues became less popular with black audiences. She returned to Columbus, Georgia in 1935 and retired from her singing career.

Ma Rainey died of a heart attack on December 22, 1939. She was inducted into the **Blues Foundation Hall of Fame** in 1983 and the **Rock and Roll Hall of Fame** in 1990.

Sources:

[Encyclopedia Britannica](#)

[Encyclopedia Africana](#)