

Exactly Where Did Ragtime Blues Guitar Originate?

Every one recognizes Scott Joplin's name, a Negro born in Texas, USA in eighteen sixty eight. For most people his name is synonymous with ragtime, as a musical style, and particularly ragtime piano. If he were around nowadays, he would be a very rich man indeed, now that his music is played extensively for film backing tracks and many other purposes (how can we forget the melody of 'The Entertainer' throughout the wonderful film 'The Sting' with Paul Newman and Robert Redford?)

Before looking at [ragtime blues guitar](#), we have to investigate the origins of ragtime piano.

Scott Joplin - Brothel Piano Player And Genius

Joplin learned piano when he was quite young and traveled to earn his living playing his beloved music. For a colored man, this inevitably meant he had to play in any establishments that would pay him. In his early years, this meant mostly houses of ill-repute and bars. Deep down inside, due to his classical musical education, he longed to compose and then his compositions would be recognized as serious work.

Integrating his education in European classical piano with his own instincts, and proud African background, he created a style of music that was intricate, but very rhythmic with an unusual tempo. This new rhythm was named 'syncopation' and known as ragtime, possibly have been named after a particular way of dancing amongst the African-American community in those times, called the 'rag'. This is how ragtime piano was born from two styles of music.

Ragtime Guitar

At that time, groups of wandering performers moved rural areas to play for the people in small communities, very often performing on banjo and guitar. Even though very different, the two opposites of blues music could be identified as the dark, emotionally intense guitar of the [delta blues](#), and the up tempo guitar sound of the Piedmont style.

Piedmont style of playing was ideal for dancing, had a generally faster rhythm, syncopated tempo and came from the style of playing piano called ragtime. Guitarists in those years attempted to mimic the complicated piano sounds, which was hard to do, as the guitar had a limited number of strings! (Later on, in the early electric era, the guitar tried to copy the sound of the saxophone.)

Certain guitar players realized that the thumb might move between 2 of the bass strings, while the fingers play a melody - ragtime blues, often called the 'happy blues' came into being.

Many guitarists developed this technique and became very successful, notably Blind Blake, Blind Boy Fuller, Blind Willie McTell and several more. Many guitarists included this style into their repertoire so that they might appeal to a broader audience. In general, none of them were as skilled as Blake, Reverend Gary Davis and Blind Willie Walker. Guitarists wishing to [play the blues](#) would be well advised to learn from the great examples left by these masters.