

## What Makes Jim Tick? Let's Find Out.

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*Jim was kind enough to give me an exclusive interview.*

**Adrian:** What made you start playing guitar?

**Jim Bruce:** When I was 14 I heard Dylan singing *Times They Are a-Changin'* on the radio. I bought the LP and heard *Don't Think Twice* fingerpicked. I was hooked – that was what I wanted to do. *Don't Think Twice* was the first song I ever learned. I never strummed at all, and I'm not very good at it!

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## How To Play Acoustic Blues Guitar - Interview With Jim Bruce ( Complete Course Of Ragtime And Blues Guitar Lessons )

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**Jim Bruce, Travelling Bluesman**



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## Jim Plays Dylan (courtesy Ken Mayall Productions)

## From Folk To Ragtime

**Adrian: Fingerstyle blues is not everyone's cup of tea. What attracted you to the style?**

**Jim Bruce:** After playing folk until about 1973, I heard a guy in a club in the North of England play *Kat's Rag*. It was simple compared to some of the stuff I was playing, but there was this superb syncopation about it. Shortly after moving down to London, I found some old Biograph Blake albums and locked myself away for 5 hours a day, for about a year, until I could play it! I suppose it's always been the challenge that attracts me.

**Adrian: What's the worst gig you ever played?**

**Jim Bruce:** That's a tough one – there's so many! I can remember playing on the London Underground for hours making nothing. I still play on the street, because I like the feel of it, but back then I wanted to be noticed, not ignored. It was also nice to eat, now and again!

Bad gigs were normally in noisy bars, when no-one listens at all. Thankfully, I don't have to do this anymore – I can choose where I play.

Funnily, when I was a kid, the worst gig was also the best. I played one song and the club owner didn't like it – he wanted Country. It was the tradition in UK at that time to pay artists if your rejected them, so I got paid and had a nice night somewhere else!

**Adrian: Your style is straight ahead with a Blind Lemon feel. Who else influenced you?**

**Jim Bruce:** I played only complicated ragtime for several years – Blake stuff and Scott Joplin rags. I never bothered with blues in E or A, as I thought they were too simple. Of course, later on I realized my error. I saw a film with Lightnin' Hopkins who didn't play anything very complicated, but the technique and the power was completely awesome. Maybe we need time to mature. As a youngster, I just wanted to show how good I was.

No matter how well we play, none of us will ever match up to the old guys. However, we can incorporate their techniques into our music and pay homage. Thanks to Blake, Blind Boy Fuller, Lightnin' Hopkins, Mance Liscomb, Floyd Council, Scrapper Blackwell, Reverend Gary Davis and many, many more . Guitarists need to watch as many old [blues guitar videos](#) as they can to try and understand the attitude of these guys.

# Guitars

**Adrian: How many guitars do you own? What are they?**

**Jim Bruce:** They come and go. I play hard, and don't really think that an incredibly expensive guitar will make you play better. Often, when I play somewhere, people say 'Great sound – what's that guitar?' It doesn't really matter – a good guitar just makes it a little easier for you, that's all. At the moment I have a Vintage VE300, with Shadow electronics and tuner (for the street), an Aria, which I've had for 35 years, and a Martin 000×1

**Adrian: Do you have any tips for beginning players?**

**Jim Bruce:** Obviously, take it slow. Look at the basics, such as the alternating thumb patterns and practice them until you can play them in your sleep! Build on the strong basics and gradually increase the complexity of the songs you tackle. A couple of years ago, I started to produce acoustic blues guitar lessons, which made me re-examine all the old classics. Incredibly, I learned a lot, even after playing for 40 years or so.

Guitar players progress in levels, sometimes sticking at a level of expertise for some time before breaking through to the next. Practice an hour in the morning, no matter what, and then in the evening. Don't fit it in, but fit everything else around it. If you have to get up earlier, or go to bed later, then do it.

**Adrian: Thank you, Jim**

**Jim Bruce:** A pleasure.