



AMICA International

Automatic Musical Instrument Collectors' Association

Honor Roll

James Hubert "Eubie" Blake (1887-1983)

MYTH: Blake was born in 1883

According to the 1900 Census, the 1910 Census, his 1917 Draft card, the 1920 Census, the 1930 Census, two official Baltimore records, a marriage license, one Atlantic City record, and the Coroners report of February 1983, Eubie Blake was born in 1887, not 1883, and died at 96 years of age. Only his 1942 draft record makes him conveniently too old.

- Bill Edwards, <http://ragpiano.com>

Piano, Organ

Birthdate: 7th February 1887

Birthplace: Baltimore, USA

Death: 12th February 1983

Works: A Dollar for a Dime (with Andy Razaf; 1930); Ain't We Got Love (1937); Baltimore Blues (1919); Baltimore Buzz (with Noble Sissle; c1915); The Baltimore Todolo (c1910); Bandanna Days (1921); Black Keys on Parade (1935); Blue Rag in Twelve Keys (1969); Blue Thoughts (1936); Boogie Woogie Beguine (1945); Breakin' 'Em Down (1924); Brittwood Rag (c1910); Bugle Call Rag (1916); [Charleston Rag](#) (1899); The Chevy Chase (1914); Chocolate Dandies (1924); [Classic Rag](#) (1914); Dear Li'l Pal (1923); [Dictys on Seventh Avenue - A Modern Rag](#) (1949); Dixie Moon (1924); Don't Love Me Blues (1923); Dusting Around (1933); Eubie Dubie (1972); Eubie's Boogie (1969); Eubie's Classical Rag (1972); Everybody's Struttin' Now (1923); Fizz Water (1914); Florodora Girls (1920); Good Fellow Blues (1921); Gypsy Blues (1921); High Steppin' Days (1921); Hot Feet (1958); If You've Never Been Vamped By A Brownskin, You've Never Been Vamped At All (1921); I'll Find My Love in D-I-X-I-E (1924); I'm Just Simply Full of Jazz (1919); I'm Just Wild About Harry (with Noble Sissle; 1921); It's All Your Fault (with Eddie Nelson and Noble Sissle; 1915); Jazz Baby (1919); Kitchen Tom (c1907); Love Will Find A Way (with Noble Sissle; 1921); Lovin' Chile (1923); Low Down Blues (1921); Manda (1924); Melodic Rag (1972); Memories of You (with Andy Razaf; 1930); Messin' Around (1919); Moods of Harlem (1937); My Handy Man Ain't Handy No More (1930); My Loving Baby (1916); Novelty Rag (1972); Oriental Blues (1920); [Poor Jimmy Green](#) (c1910); Poor Katie Redd (also: *Eubie's Slow Drag*; c1910); Ragtime Rag (c1914); Rhapsody in Ragtime (1972); Roll, Jordan, Roll (1930); Serenade Blues (1922); Shuffle Along (1921); Sore Foot Blues (1933); Sounds of Africa; That Charleston Dance (1924); There's A Million Little Cupids in the Sky (1924); Thinking of Me (1924); To Hell With Germany (1918); Tricky Fingers (1959); Troublesome Ivories (1971); Trucking on Down (also: *Harlem's Latest Dance Craze*; 1935); Two Hearts in Tune (1923); We Are Americans Too (1940); Why Did You Make Me Care? (1925); You Ought to Know (1924); You Were Meant for Me (1922); You've Been a Good Little Mammy to Me (1919)



Eubie Blake was born in 1887 in Baltimore to former slaves, and the only child of 11 that would survive to adulthood. The young Eubie taught himself the organ after his parents put a \$75 organ in their home for 25 cents per week (which would

take them almost 6 years to pay off). By the age of 15 was playing piano in Baltimore's night clubs, holding a regular gig at Agnes Shelton's sporting house.

Blake was already an exceptional pianist by the early 1900's, and he had to simplify his music drastically to get it published. Blake was among the pioneers of ragtime, however he was often too far ahead of his time. He released two rags in the same year which [Scott Joplin](#) released his [Maple Leaf Rag](#). Unfortunately for Blake, the competition was too strong. Part of the reason for Blake's [Charleston Rag](#) and his *Baltimore Buzz* not making the big time may have been due to Blake the progressive nature of his sound. People found it hard to digest his music, especially the publishers. When he took his earliest piece, [Charleston Rag](#), to publisher Joseph Stern, the response was, "Sure it's good-it's wonderful-but who could play it but you and Luckey Roberts?" (Blesh and Janis, 1971) His compositions show evidence of 'jazz' harmony, although jazz hadn't evolved yet. For this reason, it is fair to say that Blake played an important role in the development of jazz.

1914 was the year that Blake was to release *Chevy Chase*. Although it was released in a simplified form, it was still a difficult piece for many pianists of the day. [James P. Johnson](#), Willie "The Lion" Smith, and [Fats Waller](#) made Blake's *Chevy Chase* a part of their standard repertoire.

In 1915, Blake formed a partnership with bandleader and songwriter Noble Sissle (1889-1975). Their show *Shuffle Along* was a hit musical on Broadway, lasting for 14 months, a very long run for 1921.

"In a *Contemporary Keyboard* magazine interview (August 1977), Blake described how their first sale was made. Sissle had suggested they go see the singer while she played a theatre in town. "You can't look at a white woman. We're colored," Blake reminded him. "Are you coming with me or not?" Sissle asked him. "Yes, I'll stand outside when they kick you out the door." But Sophie Tucker not only bought the song, she paid to have it orchestrated." (Lyons, 1980)

After World War II, where Blake toured for the USO, he returned to earn a degree in music from New York University, after which he gradually started to perform again. Apparently, earning his degree was a breeze, and he obtained the certificate in 2 years, whereas it was a four year degree. [Dictys on Seventh Avenue](#) (1949) was the result of his classes in contemporary composition.

On "*The 86 Years of Eubie Blake*," released in 1969, Blake recorded a marvelous boogie woogie piece titled *Eubie's Boogie*.

"*Eubie's Boogie* probably bears the stamp of William Turk, a ragtime pianist in Baltimore who died in 1911. Turk supposedly developed a boogie bass because he was too obese to stride his left hand from the bass to the middle register of the keyboard. Musically it did him no harm, for Blake said Turk "had a left hand like God.'" (Lyons, 1980)

Eubie Blake was the last surviving ragtimer from the golden age of ragtime. In 1972, he came out of retirement to make a welcome comeback, aged 89 at the time. Blake lived for a good one hundred years, and left a lasting mark on Jazz and Popular music, as well as their respective communities. Ticklers such as [James P. Johnson](#) admire Eubie as "one of the foremost pianists of all time."

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