Rainey, Ma,

byname of GERTRUDE MALISSA NIX RAINNEY, née PRIDGETT (b. April 26, 1886, Columbus, Ga., U.S.--d. December 22, 1939, Rome, Ga.), "mother of the blues," the first great black professional blues vocalist.

From 1904, she toured southern American tent shows, levee camps, and cabarets in a song-and-dance team with her husband, William ("Pa") Rainey, a minstrel comic. She performed in the theatrical circuits of the South and Midwest through the 1920s, leading her own troupes, including at times Bessie Smith and Thomas A. ("Georgia Tom") Dorsey.

Rainey recorded more than 90 songs from 1923 through 1928 with country blues musicians and black jazz players. An outstanding, earthy stage presence, she retired in 1933, to own and operate two Georgia theatres and to join the Friendship Baptist Church.

BIBLIOGRAPHY.