

Allowing the Passion



James Hubert Blake (1887 – 1983) was an American composer, lyricist, and pianist of ragtime, jazz, and popular music. Blake and longtime collaborator Noble Sissle wrote the Broadway musical *Shuffle Along*, one of the first Broadway musicals to be written and directed by African Americans.

Blake's compositions included such hits as *Bandana Days*, *Charleston Rag*, *Love Will Find a Way*, *Memories of You*, and *I'm Just Wild About Harry*. The musical *Eubie!* featured the works of Blake and opened on Broadway in 1978. Blake said he first composed the melody to the *Charleston Rag* in 1899, which would have made him 12 years old, but he did not commit it to paper until 1915, when he learned to write in musical notation.

After more than 20 years in retirement, he decided to record an album and hit the scene again. He would go on to perform for more than a decade and make his last musical appearance sometime before his 100th birthday.

As one might imagine, throughout Blake's career, many in the jazz world often sought him out for advice. "I want to write a musical score," an aspiring composer once said to him. "Can you tell me how to go about it?"

"You're very young," Blake responded. "You should wait a few years, when you're a little bit older."

"But you were composing when you were in your teens, much younger than I am now," observed the young man.

"This is true," Blake replied, "but I didn't have to ask anyone how to do it."

What Blake was saying to the young man is key to success: If you've got the passion, you don't need anyone's permission or guidance to bring your dreams to fruition. All you need to do is roll up your sleeves and get to work.

– Beecher Hunter