



The Guitar Players: One Instrument and Its Masters in American Music (Bison Book)

James Sallis

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"The guitar and American music are inexorably intertwined," writes James Sallis in *The Guitar Players*. He notes that "American music was built on the backs of black slaves." The great classical blues period of the 1920s had rich antecedents going back further than plantation orchestras featuring fiddles and bajos. The introduction of the guitar, at first not a solo instrument, really demonstrated rhythmic ingenuity.

Sallis shows how folk music and a cross-fertilization of traditions and techniques resulted in blues, ragtime, jazz, rock 'n' roll, and country-western. He writes eloquently about fourteen transitional or pivotal performers: the Mississippi Sheiks; Lonnie Johnson, the first virtuoso blues guitarist; Eddie Lang, the first great jazz guitarist; Roy Smeck, the foremost popularizer of guitar playing; Charlie Christian, the founder of modern jazz guitar; Riley Puckett, the first great country-music guitarist; T-Bone Walker, "daddy of the blues"; George Barnes; Hank Garland; Wes Montgomery, the jazz innovator; Mike Bloomfield, the heavy-rock guitarist; Ry Cooder; Ralph Towner; and Lenny Breau.

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