

# Eddie Bowles's Guitar Playing Style

Since guitar picks were not invented until 1922, Eddie learned how to play the guitar by finger picking. Finger picking is a method in which guitar players positions their hand perpendicular to the strings to strike the strings easily. There are usually six strings on a guitar, the sixth string being the top on the guitar and the first on the bottom. The player's thumb controls the 4th, 5th, and 6th bass strings, the index finger commands the 3rd string, the middle finger runs the 2nd string, and the ring finger manages the 1st string. The pinky finger is not used. The key to



finger picking is just that, picking and not pulling the strings away from the fretboard of the guitar so they pop (called slapping or popping), which would create a sound that is not

attributed to the blues. Slapping or popping can be heard in music genres such as western swing, rockabilly, funk, and disco, just to name a few.

Eddie played songs by ear that he learned throughout life, sometimes not even knowing the song title. Most of his ditties can be described as sentimental music. He finger picked his guitar in a deliberate manner with a distinct 12 bar blues style. The songs Eddie played were performed in a typical early blues fashion, which was slow paced with a melancholic and somber tone and were more melodic than contemporary blues. Eddie's slow paced style left gaps in

his playing, while more modern blues players have a steady bass or backbeat. Jimmy Price, a Cedar Falls native and protege of Eddie's, said in a July 15, 1981 interview that the gaps in Eddie's playing style "lets the body float along with the music" and "that the

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**"[It's a style that] lets the body float along with the music...the body fills the holes where the rhythm is left out."**

**—Jimmy Price**

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body fills the holes where the rhythm is left out." Although blues music mutated in the 1980s with rockers like Stevie Ray Vaughn and Robert Cray taking it to the masses, Eddie kept his old repertoire of guitar playing alive, the style he learned when the blues were born almost a hundred years before.

## *Contrasting Styles*

In 1981, Eddie Bowles appeared on Iowa Public Radio on the KUNI show "Folk Voices of Iowa" with Philip Nussbaum and Harry Oster. During a half-hour episode that reviewed Eddie's life and music, guitarist Jimmy Price sat in to play alongside Eddie for several of the numbers performed during the show. At one point, Price was asked by Philip Nussbaum to account for what was distinct about Eddie's playing. In the excerpt that can be scanned below, Jimmy Price describes Eddie's guitar playing style and plays two versions of "Memories," first the way Eddie would play it followed by a more contemporary version.



Eddie Bowles and Philip Nussbaum

Scan left to listen to Jimmy Price discuss Eddie Bowles's guitar playing style (3:47)