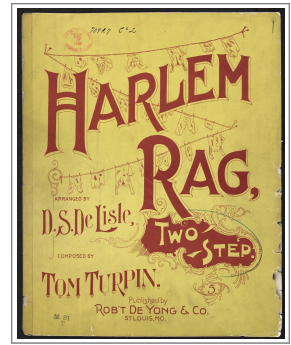


Ragtime & Contexts



Group #1:

- ragtime: maybe old word for “ragged time”
- Large numbers of Americans first exposed to ragtime at Chicago World’s Fair in 1893—maybe 23 million people went to the fair that year
- ragtime often featured a short-long-short syncopation
- this kind of syncopation often heard—prior to ragtime—in cakewalk and oral musical traditions from Caribbean and the South, but not much in published music before 1880s
- therefore the most important element of ragtime—rhythmic syncopation—heard as a trait of Black music at the time
- The idea that ragtime was associated with Black music generated a lot of the opposition/pushback against the music at the time
- Ragtime: exciting to America’s youth, often seemingly threatening to older “polite” society

Group #2:

- Missouri center of ragtime industry, which was dominated by Black entrepreneurs
- Tom Turpin: self-taught pianist based in St. Louis, published “Harlem Rag” in 1897—a model for later composers; Turpin later opened a saloon and brothel, The Rosebud, that was a center for ragtime (among many such establishments)
- Most influential published of ragtime: John Stark—opened a music store in Sedalia, Missouri. Met Scott Joplin in 1899, but was worried about selling “Maple Leaf Rag” because he thought it was too hard to play (though he eventually agrees)
- By 1914: “Maple Leaf Rag” had sold 1 million copies; Stark had over 50 different ragtime compositions in his catalogue
- Other published ragtime composers: James Scott, Joseph Lamb, Artie Mathews, J. Russell Robinson
- ragtime not just for piano—also for bands, orchestras....
- Arthur Pryor—Missouri composer and trombonist—wrote ragtime pieces but also taught the Sousa band musicians how to play ragtime music in 1900.

Group #3:

- ragtime—which was always in duple meter—built on the preexistent American fascination with the dance “March and two-step” from the 1890s
- Ragtime’s variety and complex syncopations encouraged a more aerobic style of dance, and smaller, gyrating dance steps.
- A series of popular “animal” dances took off—the grizzly bear, bunny hug, turkey trot, etc
- Compared the piano roll version of “Maple Leaf Rag” recorded by Scott Joplin in 1916 (steady, clear, not too fast, adds notes and flourishes here and there, especially to bass line) versus the version recorded in 1938 by jazz musician Jelly Roll Morton (16th notes are swung—notes on the beat elongated and offbeats shortened—freely changes musical material, adds an introduction, changes accompaniment patterns in LH, changes form to ABACDD)





Group #4:

- ragtime is **everywhere** in early 1900s—sheet music, piano rolls, phonograph records, music boxes, theaters, bordellos, arrangements for orchestras and bands
- ragtime not always met with enthusiasm: American Federation of Musicians in Denver described ragtime as “musical rot” in 1901
- 1902: deemed a “sacrilege” to try to make Civil War veterans march to ragtime music
- press/journalism often described ragtime as eroding morals, or even as a disease or poison

Group #5:

- cakewalks with ragtime style syncopations spread widely around 1897-1900—they appear in the repertory of John Philip Sousa, performed in both US and Europe (Debussy even copies one “Golliwogg’s Cakewalk—a tune with an extremely racist history)
- 1918: after touring the US with a Russian ballet company, the conductor Ernest Ansermet gives some printed ragtime music to Igor Stravinsky—Stravinsky copies out the parts and uses what he learns to make his own versions of ragtime (especially in *Histoire du soldat*)



Group #6:

- ragtime as a name popular throughout 1910s, popularity fades around 1917 (jazz becoming more popular at this point)
- Ragtime music of Joplin and other mostly forgotten by about 1920
- Ragtime sometimes parodied as a quaint old sound in the 1930s and 1940s, though there were a few knowledgeable enthusiasts who learned about the style
- A book by enthusiasts called *They All Played Ragtime* published in 1950
- 1950s: ragtime often a caricature, played on pianos intentionally rigged to sound out of tune or with thumbtacks in the hammers to make them sound like old-time saloon pianos
- 1959-1960: 12-part program on National Educational Television called “The Ragtime Years”
- 1970: huge renaissance. Nonesuch Records issues an album of ragtime performed by Joshua Rifkin (a classical pianist)
- 1974: motion picture *The Sting* introduces wide audience to music of Scott Joplin (“The Entertainer” goes to the top of the popular charts this year?!)
- Much interest and revival of ragtime since the 1970s