RAGTIME THEN AND NOW: Composers and Audiences from the Ragtime Era to the Ragtime Revival

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RAGTIME THEN AND NOW:
COMPOSERS AND AUDIENCES FROM THE RAGTIME ERA
TO THE RAGTIME REVIVAL

by

WILLIAM M. MCNALLY

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Music in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts,
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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
Abstract

RAGTIME THEN AND NOW: COMPOSERS AND AUDIENCES FROM THE RAGTIME ERA TO THE RAGTIME REVIVAL

by

WILLIAM M. MCNALLY

The works from ragtime’s revival era, including those by William Albright, William Bolcom, Eugene Kurtz, George Rochberg, and more recently Carter Pann, stand as some of the finest examples of ragtime composition. Yet these works were not generative of the ragtime age, but followed a lengthy drought of compositional interest in the ragtime style. Instead, they were the result of the amalgamation of formal and idiomatic gestures common to the ragtime style and of serious and extensive training in classical styles. In an effort to determine what distinguishes these works by the classical composers of the ragtime revival from the works of ragtime’s Big Three (Scott Joplin, Joseph Lamb and James Scott), this document explores seven representative pieces by the aforementioned composers in both analytical and historical contexts.

Over the past forty years, articles devoted to ragtime, written by serious scholars with formal training in music theory or music history, demonstrate serious, albeit narrowly focused, efforts to study ragtime (primarily classic ragtime) in an intensive manner. This contrasts with enthusiastic ragtime aficionados, whose articles tend toward biography and superficial description of the music. Their work is as invaluable as it is staggeringly voluminous, but avoids the deeper problems of contextualizing ragtime against then-contemporary genres, understanding compositional shifts in possible correlation to its discrete (and continually evolving) audiences, and exploring the trajectory of the prioritizing of the elements of ragtime by active composers.
By exploring audience taste, compositional elements, and historical context of the ragtime style over the past twelve decades, this study offers insight on what motivates composers to make the minute compositional decisions which, in accumulation, speak both to the genre in which they are writing and to their sovereignty as original thinkers in music.
PREFACE

It has been forty-two years since the release of *The Sting*, forty-five since Joshua Rifkin’s recordings of Joplin rags swept sensationally over the American musical landscape, and just short of fifty years since William Bolcom and William Albright wrote their first works in the ragtime idiom. The first stirrings of the revival of the ragtime style began as early as the 1940s. Mileposts such as Rudi Blesh and Harriet Janis’s 1950 book *They All Played Ragtime* and Max Morath’s television series *The Ragtime Era* – first broadcast in 1959 – brought ragtime into the ears and imaginations of thousands of readers and watchers. Yet it was the involvement of the classical community, that selfsame citadel of implicit rules and standards of which ragtime (when it was first composed) was pointedly not inclusive or welcome (at least to most), which led directly to a resurrection which has been called, “a phenomenon unprecedented in America’s musical history; never before [had] a long-buried style been so widely and eagerly embraced by a mass public.”¹

Though the Rifkin recording from 1970 is the most easily cited catalyst of the ragtime revival, it was the enthusiastic work of a handful of classical musicians in the years immediately preceding (from which the aforementioned recording was a singularly important product) which formed a core strong enough to demonstrate that the Rifkin recording would not simply be a one-off, novelty project. At first, writing new rags seemed like a fun thing to do, though not a primary focus of their careers as composers. Yet the immense public interest in their music as well as their own performances of the works of Scott Joplin, Joseph Lamb, James Scott, Eubie

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Blake, and James P. Johnson contextualized their careers long after they had stopped composing rags.

There is now considerable distance between the initial excitement over the rediscovery of ragtime and its current place as a generally familiar musical style sourced in various ways for various means by Madison Avenue, Disney, and classical musicians seeking to broaden their repertoire beyond the traditional classical canon. Though the “hard-line” ragtimers – those who remain dedicated to attending ragtime festivals and performances solely dedicated to the ragtime style – are now fewer in number (and greater in years), performances of ragtime music have settled into a much more generally accepted place in classical music’s secondary repertoire. Further, a classical performance of *Maple Leaf Rag* is no longer programmatically original, but more a nod to the genre’s indefatigable gem. More innovative performers now seek to perform the less familiar works of ragtime’s Big Three, as well as the post-ragtime works of musicians such as Fats Waller and (for the bravest pianists) Art Tatum.

It appears that the classical music community now willingly embraces the ragtime style as its own. What had begun as music with rather tawdry connotations written primarily by African-American composers with limited classical educations two generations later found itself being wrought by highly trained classical musicians for well-heeled audiences with a wealth of musical experience. Now two generations further, the classical audience now recognizes the similarities between the two incarnations of ragtime more acutely than the differences. It is not uncommon to see the works of Joplin and Bolcom programmed side-by-side in a concert also including Mozart and Chopin, and the inclusion of ragtime is perhaps of less interest than the clever pairing of the old and the new(ish).
Many of the compositions of the ragtime revival, mostly written in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but employing techniques still being utilized in contemporary composition, happen to be works of high compositional quality – the result of ragtime being explored by the right people at the right time. They also are fascinating examples of how composers can explore an earlier compositional style with its own distinct ideals, and transform it into a style uniquely engaging to a new audience at a different time. A passive listener might reasonably be able to distinguish a work written in the classic ragtime style from a work written by a classical composer more than a half-century later, but not necessarily be able to cite what makes the flavor of the newer work distinct. Here, a thorough exploration of these differences yields not only explanations for the differences in flavor, but serious insight on the compositional process by which composers interpolate their ideas into an extant and proven approach to writing engaging music.

This dissertation is about the relationship of audience members to composers, how musical communication is built, and how composers learn to speak compellingly to an audience. Ragtime was home-grown for American audiences from American musical sources by the time the genre was well established in the beginning years of the twentieth century. Its revival in the 1960s and 70s was similarly American, yet all attributes of the audience’s demographic had shifted. That experience, at any time, is the lens by which any listener may discern the language of music. Here is examined the components of two distinct eras of ragtime composition, and an exploration of the composers who studied this lens-crafting to make their music as relevant to listeners as possible.

Other topics secondarily discussed here include explorations of the intended tempi of ragtime works as well as a more precise definition and timeline for the term “swing.” These two
topics have been discussed openly by performers since the early days of the ragtime revival, yet
have not yet been seriously addressed with more than a one-sided answer, and have been an
ongoing argument of the ragtime conversation since Joshua Rifkin released his pivotal 1970
recording of Joplin’s music. Herein it is more democratically assessed. It is hoped that this
document may open the door to further exploration of multi-generational compositional
exploration within a single style.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not possibly have come to fruition without the help of a (not-so) small army of ragtime enthusiasts, classical musicologists, research librarians, performers and composers.

Foremost thanks go to Philip Lambert, my miraculous advisor, whose eagle eyes caught far more than mistakes. Phil was not only able to guide me to the words and perspectives I often struggled to find, but did so, some chapters several times, with unbelievably efficient turn-around time. I couldn’t possibly have done this without you, and your formidable efforts and wealth of knowledge were delivered to me with rare grace and ease. Thank you, Phil!

John Graziano, the dissertation committee chair, has offered guidance and pointed the way to so many sources in areas I hadn’t even considered. His dedication to research in American music is most formidable indeed, and his line-by-line editing of this work was utterly thorough and immediately elevating. John, thank you so much.

The Executive Officer of the D.M.A. program, Norman Carey, was with his warmth and eagerness a primary reason I chose to do my doctoral work at the CUNY Graduate Center. I thank you for your years of guidance, during which you followed my every step and assisted me regularly. The wonderful work you did on my dissertation and the fresh questions you raised were a culmination to my very precious time in this program.

The debt the ragtime community owes to Edward Berlin is great. I could not be more grateful to have him as my first reader—since his 1976 dissertation on piano ragtime he is still unquestionably the foremost authority in the ragtime field, and one of its truly devoted champions. Ed was invariably quick to point out that my writing had missed an earlier work, a later bit of research, or a recently discovered document. Above all, he kept me objective and honest towards all of the information I handled. This project would be poorer without you, Ed.

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Warmest thanks go to Bryan S. Wright and his extraordinary wife Yuko Eguchi Wright. Concurrent with this dissertation, Bryan is also at work on a ragtime-related dissertation. While our work headed in substantially different directions, information often overlapped. Bryan, also a fine pianist, was always readily willing and able to share his findings (which are voluminous indeed), and though Yuko’s own dissertation, “The Arts of the Geisha,” is at best a distant topic to ragtime, her ebullient interest in early twentieth century syncopated music (not to mention performances with Bryan) remind me quickly and often that ragtime, in its many forms, is fun!

An enormous debt of gratitude goes to pianist and ragtime historian (and friend) Bill Edwards. Bill, the thousands of pages of research you have freely posted on your colossal website is a special gift to the ragtime and musical world indeed. Rarely did a day spent working on this project pass without a visit to your site. Thanks also to Alex Hassan, Warren Trachtman, and Ted Tjaden, who shared their vast knowledge and repositories of ragtime scores and rolls.

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To the staff of the Music Division of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, and especially Emma Hawker, Margaret Leary, Karen Wight, Karen Jania, and Malgosia Myc at the Bentley Historical Library of the University of Michigan, I truly appreciate your patience for retrieving box after box of manuscripts and archival materials for this project; you allowed me to pursue lines of inquiry far beyond where I expected the road would end.

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Lastly, Dasha, my partner in all endeavors, you were constantly willing to allow me to bounce ideas off of you, and out of your own curiosity routinely asked questions which made me rethink my positions and perspectives. Most of all, you told me what I needed to hear, even when I stubbornly did not wish to hear it. I love you so much, and I could not possibly have done this without you. Thank you.
DEDICATION

This dissertation would have never existed were it not for three remarkable friendships.

Jim Forbes, you’ve been there to satisfy my musically curious mind since I was born, and your Ph.D. tome on Kapsberger has been for decades the work which has motivated me to exactly this point. Though you read and counseled every word of this dissertation, this doesn’t even begin to cover all that you and Juli have contributed to my life. Words cannot express.

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And to my dear son, your imminent birth in July pressed me to complete this work—thank you for being! Dasha, my beloved wife, you have carried us both so far!

4/28/15
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CHAPTER ONE
The Ragtime Era

Origins

The notion that ragtime was a black musical invention is supported by nearly all the documented evidence.¹ There is varied, not fully substantiated evidence that the music grew out of plantation songs or “patting Juba.”² Many forms of syncopated music deriving from African rhythms became popular in countries of North and South America concurrent with the fall of slavery. Among the syncopated music that became popular during the second half of the nineteenth century across the combined Americas, including the Argentine and Brazilian tango and the Cuban danzón and son, ragtime stood out as the only style whose primary and greatest musical innovators were direct descendants of black slaves.

The Columbian World’s Exposition of 1893, often referred to as the Chicago World’s Fair, is generally cited as the first real stirrings of ragtime activity. Among the many musicians said to have been in Chicago that year was Scott Joplin, reportedly in attendance with a friend, and possibly Ben Harnye, the talented pianist about to make a name for himself in New York venues.³

¹ While there are a number of important texts on the history of ragtime, several ground-breaking works provided the ground-breaking research that is both the core of ragtime research and the backbone of this chapter. They are Rudi Blesh and Harriet Janis, They All Played Ragtime (New York: Oak Publications, 1950; rev. ed., 1971); David A. Jasen and Trebor Jay Tichenor. Rags and Ragtime: A Musical History (New York: Seabury, 1978); Edward A. Berlin, Ragtime: A Musical and Cultural History (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); and Edward A. Berlin, King of Ragtime: Scott Joplin and His Era (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).
² Patting juba was “an elaborate form of handclapping and body slapping practiced by African Americans as the rhythmic accompaniment to improvised dance, usually creating complex cross-rhythms with the fall of the feet.” W. K. McNeil, “Juba,” Grove Music Online.
³ Edward A. Berlin, King of Ragtime: Scott Joplin and His Era (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 11–12. Since the official Fairgrounds had very few, highly controlled exhibitions presented by Americans of color, and
The Fair was not the first place the music had been heard, nor was it necessarily the place where ragtime gained its name. Earlier the sounds of ragtime had been heard in the south, and even as far north as Danbury, Connecticut, where Charles Ives reported having heard the music as early as 1892 performed by traveling minstrel ensembles. However, Chicago and the Fair seem to be commonalities from which notable early ragtime composers sourced a common style.

From 1893 through the close of the nineteenth century, ragtime seems to have developed via two slightly different schools of approach. In Missouri, especially St. Louis and Sedalia, composers such as Tom Turpin, Scott Joplin, Arthur Marshall, Louis Chauvin, Scott Hayden, and James Scott developed a highly regulated and conservatively homogenized sense of form and style. Joplin was likely the most influential in this regard, probably because of his serious demeanor and his belief in the serious qualities of his music. (He also was the least active as a performer, especially following the publication of *Maple Leaf Rag*.) By 1901, the success of Joplin’s *Maple Leaf Rag* brought about a standard formal template for nearly all ragtime pieces generated from the Missouri/Kansas area from 1901 onward.

In the East, composers who were more oriented towards a performing career than a publishing career wrote music that was, if compositionally less precise than that of the Midwestern school of ragtime, more driving and virtuosic. These musicians included James Hubert “Eubie” Blake and Charles Luckyeth “Luckey” Roberts, who followed (both

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5 This list is abbreviated from a much longer one. The composers were chosen based on their birth towns, proximity to Missouri towns in the 1890s, and by the quality and quantity of their works. A primary reference for this list may be found in the catalogues of William Edwards <http://professorbill.com/index.html>.
6 Joe Jordan also furthered his musical development in St. Louis around this time, apparently under the influence of Turpin and Chauvin. His published works, however, fit better with the next category mentioned below, and his impressive career trajectory, borne out in Chicago and later in New York, was something the other musicians mentioned here were less able to realize. See <http://professorbill.com/ragtime4.shtml>.
chronologically and stylistically) the aforementioned Ben Harney and others. Among Harney’s equals, including such forgotten names as Louis Gast and “One-leg” Willie Joseph, was the extremely popular Mike Bernard, who was apparently the first person to record ragtime piano.7 These musicians may be seen as precursors to the Harlem Stride style. Among the most famous of these later stride musicians were James Price Johnson (considered the “father” of Harlem stride), William Henry Joseph Bonaparte Bertholf Smith (Willie “The Lion” Smith), Thomas “Fats” Waller, and ultimately Edward Kennedy “Duke” Ellington and Arthur “Art” Tatum. They all projected strong personal interpretation onto the ragtime style at a time when interest in carefully written ragtime sheet music was beginning to wane, and their impressions carried through into the ragtime revival.8

Ragtime thrived in New York at the turn of the twentieth century. Rather than the tightly conceived works that were being generated in Missouri, the fashion in New York consisted of a wide variety of the popular music of the day performed in a ragtime style. Contests were held frequently, and various venues around town each had an audience who would stalwartly defend their pianist-hero. A common request of these contest judges was for all of the contestants to play a popular song in a ragtime style, which demonstrates the need for these players to be competent improvisers in the ragtime style as well as solid pianists. By contrast, there was relatively less emphasis on the art of composition in a ragtime style.

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8 Gunther Schuller, “Rags, the Classics, and Jazz,” in John Edward Hasse, Ragtime: Its History, Composers, and Music, (New York: Schirmer Books, 1985), 79-89. Schuller writes compellingly on the subject of ragtime being incorporated into the jazz style, suggesting instead that, “All the early jazz players thought of themselves as converted ragtime players.” Also, “ragtime survived in the form of jazz.”
The Ragtime Style: Traits and Form

The defining feature of music considered to be “ragtime” was syncopation; this had to be the music’s primary rhythmic impetus. Of course, syncopation existed in earlier music, but not until ragtime was it the dominant trait of a style. Furthermore, the style’s name “ragtime” is a broad label: the meaning of “ragtime” was both vague and broadly inclusive, and the roots of the term are elusive. Regardless of its genesis, “ragtime” or [a] “rag” could refer to one of several things: piano music, instrumental music or vocal music written in the ragtime style, a dance style, or the playing of classics and other preexisting pieces in a syncopated manner.

9 Earlier examples of syncopation can be found in William Francis Allen, Charles Pickford Ware, Lucy McKin Garrison, eds., Slave Songs of the United States (New York: A. Simpson, 1867). See also Rudi Blesh and Harriet Janis, They All Played Ragtime (New York: Oak Publications, 1950; rev. ed., 1971), 7. “Syncopation in its simple form – that is, uncombined with regular rhythm – is a familiar device used a few measures at a time with fair frequency in European music. It is disturbing in a context of regular meter; its upsetting of the normal pace led to the Italian term for syncopation, alla zoppa, meaning lame or limping. Continued syncopation, however, far from limping, builds up greater and greater momentum, hence the old English term for syncopated notes: ‘driving notes.’ Continued syncopation is deeply stimulating and exciting, and European masters seem always to have been wary of it…” While this perspective may be that of a biased ragtime enthusiast, and the “wariness” of earlier European composers is a subjective description, it is nonetheless accurate to state that the sustained usage of regularly occurring syncopation was not to be found in their works.

10 For an early discussion of the origins of the term, and a precise definition, see Edward A. Berlin, Ragtime: A Musical and Cultural History (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 26-29. However, Fred Hoeptner uncovers even earlier material. “No, (‘Crittenden’s Rag’) is not an obscure piece of early ragtime music. It’s the headline of a newspaper article from the 4 February 1881 edition of the Kansas City Star reporting a reception and social event given by newly elected Missouri Governor Thomas T. Crittenden at his Jefferson City mansion the previous Wednesday evening. ‘Crittenden’s Rag’ reveals that ‘rag,’ denoting a social function, was applied in high society as well as in black vernacular culture and thus may not have been of black origin. It further suggests that this use was common by 1881 since the reporter does not elucidate the terminology. ‘Crittenden’s Rag,’ therefore, precedes Abbott and Seroff’s finding concerning use of ‘rag’ to signify a social function featuring music and dancing. It broadens the word’s connotation from black vernacular culture to mainstream culture. It also implies that the music at a ‘rag’ need not have been syncopated, although it may well have been when black musicians performed it. Unanswered questions remain, however; how and when the word ‘rag’ originally became associated with social dance affairs, and how and when it came to denote the incipient form of the style of music later named ‘ragtime.’” Fred Hoeptner, “Crittenden’s Rag,” American Music Review 40/1 (Fall 2010): 11-15.

Piano ragtime form, concurrent with the cakewalk, derived primarily from march form, and is constructed of sixteen-measure strains. Each strain can then be broken down into four four-measure phrases. In ragtime vernacular, strains are referred to by letter (A-strain, B-strain, and so forth), and the most basic form would be laid out as follows:

\[||A:||B:||A:||C\ (Trio):||\]

The Trio would usually finish the piece in the subdominant. The form was flexible, and the three composers that would in ragtime’s revival become most closely associated with the concept of “classic ragtime,” namely, Scott Joplin, Joseph Lamb, and James Scott, often added a D-strain following (or inclusive with) the Trio, usually either remaining in the subdominant or returning to the tonic.

At this time, ragtime most often is associated with the piano, and indeed the pianist’s left hand, which establishes a duple meter alternating bass octave-midrange chord pattern (often called, and in this document henceforth referred to as, “oom-pah”), is one of ragtime’s most recognizable traits. Set against the march-like steadiness of the left hand is a syncopated right. As stated by Roland Nadeau, “Ragtime syncopation is distinguished by the consistent use of a variety of accents on the weak part of the divided quarter-note unit. In practice, accents appear either on the second eighth, or on the second, third, or fourth sixteenth.”\(^{12}\) While ragtime is not by any means the only syncopated musical style, the percentage of syncopated measures in a typical rag could range from 60 percent to 80 percent or more.

A frequently discussed topic is the tempo at which ragtime should be played. Nadeau (and many others) cites Joplin, who in his *School of Ragtime* states, “never play ragtime fast at any time.” Joshua Rifkin, whose 1970 recording of eight Joplin rags sparked the release of

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hundreds of ragtime albums over the next few years, set the revival-era metronome at moderato, and there is a good argument to be made in favor of Joplin’s statement. Nadeau points out that one of Joplin’s recurring tempo markings was, “Slow March Tempo,” and that one ought not to play a march at a run.

However, this was Joplin’s personal statement, and since there is good evidence that Joplin was no virtuoso, the tempo statement requires further qualification. First, if ragtime is a derivative of a march, and Joplin wrote some of the finest rags with the intent that they be treated with the seriousness of a well-composed march, then playing Joplin’s rags at a march tempo, as he requests specifically in a number of pieces, is reasonable. It fails, however, to persuade that all rags should be played slowly. By way of example, Chopin’s Mazurkas span a wide variety of moods and tempos; though a mazurka was a dance with a specific form, Chopin wrote beautiful and varied music while using the mazurka (itself derivative of folk dances with diverse tempos) as a meaningful yet flexible form. Joplin did the same. Playing the brisk *Stoptime Rag* (marked “Fast or Slow”) at a tempo even close to that of the habanera *Solace* (marked “Very slow march time”) would be unthinkable. More likely, Joplin was becoming increasingly aware of the muddling of his music from incompetent players attempting to imitate better-known virtuosos,

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13 Berlin (*King of Ragtime*, 103) writes that Joplin’s long-time friend and student Arthur Marshall was about the only person to speak well of Joplin’s playing, whereas, “Charlie Thompson spoke of Joplin only reluctantly and expressed total disdain for his piano playing, saying he never played anything except the *Maple Leaf Rag*. Joe Jordan agreed that he never played anything other than his own pieces, but that he did play these well, more or less as written. In another interview, Jordan was more critical, describing Joplin’s playing like that of a ‘stationary Indian.’” [Sam] Patterson said Joplin ‘never played well,’ and Artie Matthews reported that the St. Louis pianists delighted in outplaying Joplin with his own music.” Berlin goes on to cite several other key witnesses of Joplin’s pianistic deficiencies. “Charlie Thompson [said]…he never played anything except the *Maple Leaf Rag*. Joe Jordan agreed that he never played anything other than his own pieces…more or less as written.” Also, “Mr. W.P. Stark…remembers that Scott…was a rather mediocre pianist and that he composed ‘on paper’ rather than ‘at the piano’ as all the real ragtime virtuosos did. This became a real problem when Scott had to play one of his own compositions and found that he had to rehearse it carefully before he could play it convincingly.” Berlin corroborates this hypothesis with extensively documented and deduced further evidence, on pgs. 9-10, 12, 24-26, 38-39, 76, 103-4, 118, 124-26, 140, 142, 213-15, 232, 236.
and sought to remind the practitioners of his works that they needed to consider the pieces as beautiful and serious music rather than bits of fluff.

Lastly, tempo moderation was representative of Joplin and other midwestern composers of classic rags more than it is of the ragtimers to the east. Listening to an early recording of Mike Bernard or Luckey Roberts or Eubie Blake is sufficient to suggest that ragtime could be, and was, played at a wide variety of tempos, from slow and lyrical to downright blistering. Though Nadeau advocates “a moderato to an easy allegro,” a rather confined sensibility, he goes on to state that, “whether a rag is graceful or raucous, the player discovers its tempo by a combination of musical intuition and an analysis of its structure. In general, the more subtle and sophisticated the interaction of rhythmic, melodic, textural and harmonic factors is, the more conservative the tempo must be.”\(^\text{14}\) This last statement may certainly hold true without being bound by the tempo suggestions Nadeau makes a few sentences earlier.

Another issue concerns the perception of ragtime as piano music. The opening of Edward Berlin’s book essentially carries a disclaimer that ragtime form at the turn of the century would have been more often a song form than a piano form, contradicting other claims that “ragtime is essentially music for the piano.”\(^\text{15}\) Berlin’s claim is well substantiated, but there must have been a contemporary sense that ragtime was a piano form upon which other arrangements could be made and lyrics applied. Berlin cites that, “In a sampling of 230 ragtime-related articles and books from that period, only twenty-one refer to piano music, with a mere sixteen citing specific piano rags. The number of items referring to ragtime played by bands or instrumental ensembles is smaller—fifteen—but ragtime songs have a higher representation—forty.” However, if the


piano was the likely accompanying instrument for these songs, it becomes more difficult to separate the importance of the piano from ragtime composition. The vocal setting of Maple Leaf Rag is clearly awkward: tracing the outline of a chord, as this melody does, is much better suited to the pianist’s hands than a human voice. In the first four measures of example 1.1, the vocal line is jaunty but manageable; in the following four measures, the vocal line (and its accompaniment) necessarily departs from the melody in the piano solo. Other ragtime melodies are based more on stepwise motion with fewer leaps (e.g. the song versions of The Ragtime Dance and Pine Apple Rag, both by Joplin), and are therefore more transferrable to vocal technique—and when the vocal writing becomes too difficult, the singing is replaced by rhythmically spoken text.

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16 David A. Jasen and Trebor Jay Tichenor argue staunchly for the notion that ragtime “was, and is composed for the piano. Despite the fact that ragtime proved to be a popular recording vehicle for both brass bands and banjos during the first decade of the century, it was seldom conceived for non-piano presentations and was generally ill-suited for it. By virtue of the fact that ragtime melodies are too abstract and pianistic to be vocalized or even hummed, and its syncopations too elaborate to lend themselves to dancing, ragtime renounces these two basic components of American pop music and black folk music.” See David A. Jasen and Trebor Jay Tichenor. Rags and Ragtime: A Musical History (New York: Seabury, 1978), 3–4. While this is a compelling argument, it is unfortunately not substantiated by documented record. It is reasonable to extrapolate from this theory, however, that many works of vocal ragtime music consisted of vocal lines generated from solo piano melodies. Furthermore, a keyboard instrument does remain the only practical instrumental vehicle in which the steady bass element and syncopated melodic element could be combined efficiently under the hands of a single player.

17 Observe the contrast between this melodic setting and the piano solo version, Appendix A, 162.

18 The Ragtime Dance was actually published over John Stark’s objections in 1902 as a song, long before Stark finally had the piece republished as a solo piano work in 1906.

Additionally, most of the classical composers writing in ragtime-inspired veins in the early twentieth century either wrote their music for piano (Charles Ives’s First Piano Sonata and *Central Park in the Dark*, Claude Debussy’s *Golliwog’s Cakewalk*, Igor Stravinsky’s *Piano-Rag-Music*, Darius Milhaud’s *3 Rag-Caprices*, for example) or arranged the ensemble to emulate a pianistic style, with different low instruments alternating to create the familiar duple meter textures employed in classic rag style (e.g., Erik Satie’s *Parade*, Stravinsky’s *L’Histoire du*...
Soldat and Ragtime, Bohuslav Martinu’s La Revue du Cuisine).\textsuperscript{19} In Parade, Satie imitates the duple-meter ragtime piano left hand in the lower strings, placing the syncopated right hand part in the mid- to high-register instruments (Example 1.2).

![Example 2.2 E. Satie, Parade. mm. 93-97.](image)

\textsuperscript{19} Note that throughout this dissertation, the two similar-sounding terms “classic” and “classical” have different meanings. Here, the term “classic” pertains to classic rags or ragtime, the body of outstanding ragtime works written mostly in the early twentieth century, and “classical” refers either to classical composers in general or more specifically to the ragtime composers of the revival era who have also been active within the classical community.
The Musical Educations of Several Notable Composers

The musical backgrounds of ragtime composers was usually fundamentally different from the musical education of their classical peers. First, the field of classical music in the United States from 1870 to 1900 (when most of the important ragtime composers were coming of age) was just burgeoning, and the general attitude towards the musical profession lacked the seriousness to generate more than a handful of first-rate musicians. Second, the serious classical activity that existed was mostly cloistered within the developed urban cultural centers of the eastern seaboard. ²⁰ Third, the black population of the Midwest generally could not economically support a class of dedicated, highly-trained music teachers. It is worth examining the educations of the most important ragtime composers in an attempt to determine the roots of both the presence and absence of some of their compositional elements.

Scott Joplin’s parents worked as a “common laborer” and a laundress, respectively, but they were a musical family. Scott and his siblings received musical instruction from their parents and from several local musicians in Texarkana, Texas. Scott’s most influential teacher was Julius Weiss, a German immigrant who locally taught astronomy, math, violin, and a serious appreciation for music as art, not just entertainment. It was most likely Weiss’s influence that caused Joplin to constantly strive for a high artistic standard that could be appreciated and lauded as serious, classical music. ²¹

²⁰ Although the St. Louis Choral Society was founded in 1880 (and incorporated as the St. Louis Choral-Symphony in 1893), and there were a handful of meaningful classical music institutions west of the Mississippi River, this activity was insufficient to provide serious classical training to the population at large. For more on the development of classical music in the United States, see H. Wiley Hitchcock, *Music in the United States* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1988), 140-60.

Joplin later reportedly attended the George R. Smith College (for African-Americans) in Sedalia, Missouri, probably either in 1896 or 1897, in order to “learn musical arrangement and take a course in harmony.”\(^{22}\) The quality of the instruction he received is questionable, however. Joplin had already received some guidance from one Marie Walker, the wife of a music store owner in Hannibal, Missouri, but his notation skills were still insufficient to prepare a composition for publication.\(^{23}\) At such a small college, it would seem unlikely that he could have received substantive instruction in the development of his craft. A fire destroyed the college in 1925, and no specific record of who taught music there remains.\(^{24}\) At any rate, Joplin was a fine composer either as a result of his training or despite it, and he managed to incorporate a number of fairly sophisticated ideas into his works which will be explored further in chapter 3.

Unlike Joplin, both James S. Scott and Joseph F. Lamb, who were later in the revival years to become known as the other two of the “Big Three” of Classic Ragtime, had the clear advantage of having been born later.\(^{25}\) They did not have to struggle to define a style of composition; instead, they came of age with the style. In 1886, James Sylvester Scott was born in Neosho, Missouri to a musically appreciative family.\(^{26}\) Scott’s father worked as a manual laborer, and Neosho was in the 1890 census marked with a population of 2,198 (compared with nearby Joplin’s population of 9,943 or Sedalia’s 14,068), small enough that it could not seriously contend as a cultural center, but large enough that finding work as a musical entertainer could be competitive.

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\(^{22}\) Ibid., 33. From an interview with Joplin’s student, Brunson Campbell, 1949.

\(^{23}\) Ibid., 26.

\(^{24}\) “George R. Smith College,” in the Encyclopedia of the History of Missouri. “The building is three stories, with dormitories for seventy-five pupils, and an auditorium seating 300 persons. In 1898, there were seven teachers and 200 pupils. The property was valued at $50,000, and the library contained 2,500 volumes.”

\(^{25}\) Blesh and Janis, They All Played Ragtime, xix. Here was coined the term “big three.”

\(^{26}\) For biographical information on Scott, see William H. Kenney, “James Scott and the Culture of Classic Ragtime,” American Music 9/2 (Summer 1991): 149-82.
The young James Scott took his first piano lessons from a local saloon and hotel pianist, John Coleman, who augmented his meager income by teaching children in the vicinity. Though Scott had no piano of his own, he managed to find time to practice on the instruments of relatives, friends and neighbors. It has been reported that Scott had perfect pitch, and would play not only note-identification games, but apparently preferred to name entire chords. Coleman, in addition to developing this talent, also was likely the person who taught Scott to read music.

When Scott turned ten, the entire family moved for two years to Ottawa, Kansas, before returning to Neosho, during which time Scott had access to his cousin’s harmonium—the first time he had continuous access to an instrument. Shortly after their return to Neosho in 1901, Scott’s father finally managed to purchase a used upright piano, and the young James made rapid progress. As a ragtime pianist, Scott benefited greatly from Missouri’s rapidly developing railroad lines, and the saloon-heavy towns of Joplin and Sedalia along with the larger urban settings of Kansas City and St. Louis would have allowed the youthful Scott plenty of opportunities to hear the rapidly developing ragtime sound via both his own excursions and, more often, the frequent travels of performing musicians passing through.

In 1903, James struck out on his own to Carthage, Missouri, a town of 9,416 priding itself on its high cultural values. There he worked teaching music, playing in orchestras and directing church choirs within the black community, and possibly also working occasionally as a saloon pianist. Also while living there, his first composition (A Summer Breeze) was published in 1903.

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27 Blesh and Janis, They All Played Ragtime, 112. From an interview with friends and relatives of James Scott. This citation lacks written evidence.

28 Kenney, “James Scott and the Culture of Classic Ragtime,” 150. “With typical booster pride, Carthage thought of itself as ‘the seat of culture, education, and refinement for Jasper County and the southwest,’ finding satisfaction in its brand new Carnegie Library, summer Chautauqua, Calhoun Music College, Carthage Chorus, Jasper County Chorus, Light Guard Band, many churches, and relative lack of saloons. (There were only three saloons in 1903, compared with ‘wicked Joplin’s’ fifty-five, one of which was run by a woman known as ‘Big Jim’ Quinlan).”
Though a meeting between Scott Joplin and James Scott has not been recorded, it is clear that James Scott had a strong sense of familiarity with the works of Joplin. In 1906, though he had never personally met the publisher, Scott succeeded in getting a piece published with John Stark (who first became involved in ragtime publication with Scott Joplin’s Maple Leaf Rag), the first of twenty-nine scores (out of a career output of thirty-eight). In an interview with James Scott, the Carthage Evening Press revealed: “Scott, moreover, mailed his manuscripts to Stark Music Company, taking pride in the fact that his scores were selected from ‘a flood of’ unsolicited manuscripts.”

The musical education of Joseph Lamb was rather different, which is reasonably well documented through numerous letters passed amongst his family and their friends. His childhood in Montclair, New Jersey was economically comfortable, and his free time was spent pursuing woodcraft, sport and target shooting in addition to musical interests. His earliest instruction came from his two older sisters, who both had access to fairly serious classical training.

In 1900, shortly before his thirteenth birthday, Lamb’s father died, and in the fall of 1901, Joseph was sent to Canada for a boarding school education (St. Jerome’s College) in the predominantly Germanic town of Berlin (now Kitchener), Ontario. Lamb had already composed several piano pieces and songs, but remained without a formal education in music. While at St. Jerome’s, Lamb apparently took a couple of piano lessons from the school music professor, but claimed that he, “asked me what I was doing with it [the Maple Leaf Forever, a Canadian

29 Ibid., 158.
30 For biographical information on Joseph Lamb, see Carol J. Binkowski, Joseph F. Lamb: a Passion for Ragtime (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2012), 22–25. Kate, the older sister, received an award from the Church of the Immaculate Conception for her organ playing, and she and Anastasia took lessons with one Professor Hatterslee and a Mrs. Marrin.
march]. I told him I was playing it. He told me that if I wanted to take lessons from him I couldn’t play anything like that. Well, that was that! So I didn’t start.”

All evidence does point to the notion that Lamb never in fact had formal musical training, though he did have a great deal of access to a piano and musical performances. Though he studied engineering for a time at Stevens Institute of Technology, he would ultimately have a career as a customs house clerk. Still, like his father (also an engineer), it seems that his curiosity and talent for generally understanding how things went together was something which he could directly apply to musical composition. While still a teenager attending school in Ontario, he did successfully submit some of his early works to Harry H. Sparks for publication, and though it would be a number of years later that they first went into print, Lamb retained a close friendship with Sparks for the remainder of the latter’s life.

Lamb returned to New Jersey in 1904, whereupon he took a job that had him frequently commuting into New York City. He spent much of his free time and money in Tin Pan Alley, then burgeoning rapidly in its importance. Additionally, department stores were becoming increasingly involved in the sheet music sales business at the time, and would also offer concerts; these Lamb frequently attended as well. Following a year spent in California, Lamb again found employment in a New York trading syndicate that allowed him a good deal of access to Tin Pan Alley; this time he discovered the newly established John Stark firm, which had relocated from St. Louis to New York in 1905. He quickly became socially familiar with both Mr. Stark and his wife. There, he met Scott Joplin one day while seeking Joplin’s latest compositions. Several days later at Joplin’s home, Lamb’s new Sensation was proclaimed by another man present to be, “a real Colored rag,” high praise indeed. Upon learning that Stark had rejected Lamb’s Sensation

31 Ibid., 41.
32 Ibid., 52, 121.
for publication, Joplin contacted Stark personally, suggesting that the piece be published with his own name as arranger in order to promote sales. This Stark readily agreed to, and went on to publish twelve of Lamb’s best-known rags.33

The Ragtime Audience (and Its Critics)

From the time ragtime became popular, and even before that, there was considerable resistance to the music. Both Edward Berlin and Neil Leonard write on this subject, citing an extensive and compelling body of quotes and clippings from newspapers, journals, and personal correspondence.34 Leonard’s research uses Berlin’s as a platform, but both essentially take a stance that ragtime’s detractors were either “people with a financial or emotional investment in cultivated music—musicians, music teachers, critics and their followers; [or] guardians of public morality—clergymen, politicians, educators and their followers.”35

A primary basis for Leonard’s argument is that, “conservative Protestantism and like-minded faiths sought controlled development of art, which would direct its energies along emotional and intellectual lines and limit its growth to boundaries consistent with rational behavior.”36 This is well echoed by the musicians who have, since 1998, been inducted into the American Music Hall of Fame: from this prestigious, if highly subjective, register, Scott Joplin and William Grant Still stand utterly alone as the black composers who had been notably active

33 See Binkowski, Joseph Lamb, 77–81, and Blesh and Janis, They All Played Ragtime, 236–37. An interview conducted between Blesh and Lamb took place in 1959, and the transcript of where Lamb recounts the more complete story of the Joplin encounter is quoted here.
36 Ibid., 112.
during the first two decades of the twentieth century. However, much more notably, the list is full of musicians who had either studied (were born) in Europe or who wrote predominantly antiquated works or European origin. Amongst such renowned American musicians as Joplin, Still, Yo-Yo Ma, and Leonard Bernstein are musicians who, though they exerted great influence on American music, can hardly be said to have been born from an American musical training: Arturo Toscanini, Igor Stravinsky, Arnold Schoenberg, Gustav Mahler and Béla Bartók, for example. (George Whitefield Chadwick, one of the “Boston Six” composers—Edward MacDowell and Amy Beach are among them—is noted for his “recognizably American style.” What makes his style American is unclear; the formal structure, harmonic language and melodic ideas seem, like MacDowell, more akin to Grieg than to any previously existing American music. A plagal cadence wherein the melody ascends from the sixth scale degree to the tonic is a common gesture in Chadwick’s music, and one found in compositions by Aaron Copland much later, but is a singular enough gesture that it would be difficult using it to define a musical style as American.)

Leonard’s most challenging statement is this:

In an attempt to tap native roots, some of our composers—following Dvorak’s use of ‘plantation melodies’ in the “New World” Symphony—turned to American folk music. Despite the disdain of conservatives who found no inspiration in such sources—particularly black music—adventurous composers advocated the use of Indian music, cowboy songs, even popular music such as ragtime, as raw material for more refined works. This advocacy resulted in little music of

37 http://classicalwalkoffame.org/browse-inductees. Obviously, many other African American musicians would fit this list quite well, such as Harry Lawrence Freeman, James Bland, Florence Price, W.C. Handy, and so forth.

38 Steven Ledbetter and Victor Fell Yellin, “Chadwick, George Whitefield,” Grove Music Online.
lasting value and, as we have seen, contributed to an argument which was part of the broader ragtime controversy.\textsuperscript{39}

Based on the evidence in the aforementioned case of Chadwick, this may be a fair conclusion, and the disinterest which the current musical stewardship seems to view early American composers further echoes Leonard’s sentiment. A few pieces by “respectable” American musicians and performers should be noted in defense of this statement—early works by Charles Ives, a couple of Louis Moreau Gottschalk’s works and one early piece by Aaron Copland, “Jazzy” from 3 Moods (1920) might stand in defense of the failure of American folk music to incorporate or assimilate into classical music.

Two pieces by John William “Blind” Boone may be the key to this imbalance.\textsuperscript{40} The son of a slave of Daniel Boone’s descendants, Boone took quickly to the piano, and launched a performing career throughout the North American continent following a breakthrough performance alongside the famous pianist “Blind Tom.” Unlike Blind Tom, Boone was of sound mind, and performed both folk and classical music. His appeal was wide enough that his performances of ragtime and the publication of his two Southern Rag Medleys in 1908 and 1909 could hardly have gone unnoticed by a generally more musically sophisticated audience than most ragtime performers had access to.

Jasen and Tichenor corroborate this, and specifically cite Boone as the only pianist “who is known to have created such a composite, [composing via a] patchwork process of looping together and instrumentalizing various strains of black folk music.”\textsuperscript{42} However, the authors continue, “Whether Boone’s instrumental medleys represent the kind of potpourri approach that

\textsuperscript{39} Leonard, “Reactions to Ragtime,” 105.

\textsuperscript{40} Melissa Fuell-Guther, Blind Boone: His Early Life and His Achievements (Robbins, Tennessee: Evangel Publishing Society, 1918), 21. For further biographical information about “Blind” Boone, see http://shs.umsystem.edu/historicmissourians/name/b/blindboone/index.html.

\textsuperscript{42} Jasen and Tichenor, Rags and Ragtime, 9.
eventually blossomed into ragtime or are the products of an eccentric folk artist remains a moot point.”43 This is problematic on two fronts. First, categorizing Boone as a “folk artist” appears to be suspiciously inaccurate. More importantly, it is not a moot point, but a primary one: one goal of this dissertation is to explore whether classical music could in any way allow room for ragtime, as it did far more widely in the late 1960s and early ’70s than it allowed earlier in the century, when its primary relationship with syncopated music was adversarial.

Lastly, a careful examination of the notated history versus the performance history of ragtime may yield many important clues about not only ragtime’s relationship with classical music, but also the seemingly concurrent rise of improvisation in folk music with the decline of deviation from the written score in classical music. “While ragtime’s commercial history is inseparable from mainstream American popular music, where it played a prominent role between 1906 and the First World War, the composer who developed ragtime into a profitable commodity—Scott Joplin—seemed curiously innocent of crass commercial impulses, and remote from ragtime’s lively tradition as a performing art.”44 It is particularly interesting that Joplin, who sought the most fervently for his music to be accepted as high art, wasn’t a good performer; perhaps it is exactly for this reason that his compositional precision was honed beyond other composers of ragtime. 45

Paralleling the documented and recorded evidence that Joplin played his own works as written, nearly to the note, are countless recordings of his peers and contemporaries who would transform their own compositions and the works of others so much as to often be rendered unrecognizable; this approach to music-making would be greatly amplified in the 1920s. It is

43 Ibid., 10.
44 Ibid., 1.
worth considering that the notated precision of ragtime composers was both repellant to the developing jazz style and attractive to the classical establishment in the 1960s and ‘70s.
CHAPTER TWO
The Ragtime Revival

While a small handful of pieces such as Charles L. Johnson’s *Dill Pickles* and Scott Joplin’s *Maple Leaf Rag* were permanent repertoire for performers active during and beyond the first seventeen years of the twentieth century, the ragtime genre otherwise went into hibernation from about 1917 to 1940.¹ Following a shift in the sheet music industry which strongly impacted composers’ profit margins, the rise of jazz as a distinct musical idiom, and changes in popular taste at the onset of the First World War, ragtime suffered a “contemptuous rejection as old-hat by the selfsame public that had barely ceased embracing it.”² (However, music which followed still maintained many of ragtime’s rhythmic traits.) Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that the twenty-year period during which ragtime was the height of musical popularity in the United States is longer than most other popular musical styles originating in the United States have lasted, and is testament to the fascinating hold the music had on the American musical imagination.

Contributing Causes

There are several distinct events that heralded the return of ragtime style into the public consciousness. First was the recording of *Maple Leaf Rag* by Lu Watter’s Yerba Buena Jazz Band in 1941; here was a band of seven white men playing in “a basement dive called The Dawn

Club. The décor was funky, with lots of dark wood and dim light. But it was a magnet for celebrities, writers and artists."³ Watters and his band would later record more than two hundred tracks, mostly blues but with notably increasing inclusions of ragtime repertoire as the 1940s advanced. In their dingy digs they brought ragtime back into high society and to a new and younger audience that had not been exposed as much to the rise and fall of the ragtime and Tin Pan Alley spirit and sound.⁴

Another catalyst for the revival of ragtime was the writer-collector Rudi Blesh. Born in Guthrie, Oklahoma in 1899, Blesh cultivated interests in a variety of musical styles, but was not allowed to play ragtime at home. However, around 1935 he began avidly collecting jazz records, and gave lectures on jazz at the San Francisco Museum of Art in 1943. He met Harriet Janis, the wife of famed art dealer and former vaudevillian Sidney Janis, in 1945, and the two became fast friends. Following the publication of Blesh’s book on jazz,⁵ Janis challenged Blesh to write a book on ragtime, informing him to his surprise that such a book hadn’t yet been written. In the summer of 1949 he consented to co-write the book with her, and after a month of intense research at the Library of Congress followed by interviews with the surviving major figures of the ragtime era (mostly in and around Missouri, except for Joseph Lamb who lived in Brooklyn), they sent a manuscript to A. A. Knopf in early February, 1950. They All Played Ragtime was published that October, and went through three subsequent editions, published in 1959, 1966 and 1971.⁶ In most books on the topic of ragtime written since the initial publication of this book,

³ http://riverwalkjazz.stanford.edu/program/emperor-nortons-hunch-yebera-buena-stompers-play-lu-watters
⁴ Terry Waldo, This Is Ragtime, 3rd ed. (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1976; New York: Jazz at Lincoln Center Library Editions, 2009), 151–63. Citations refer to the Lincoln Center edition. Lu Watters and the Yerba Buena Jazz Band are mentioned in every primary text dealing with the subject of the genesis of the ragtime revival. Terry Waldo provides the clearest and most extensive description of the importance of Yerba Buena in This Is Ragtime.
especially those that are concerned with the topic of the ragtime revival, the work of Blesh and Janis is credited as a primary inspiration for the ragtime revival.

The 1950s saw a surge in popularity of “honky-tonk,” a sentimental style of playing, usually on out-of-tune pianos, sometimes enhanced with tacks implanted in the hammers. Popular honky-tonk performers in the early part of the decade included Joe “Fingers” Carr (Lou Busch), Johnny Maddox (also known as “Crazy Otto”), “Knuckles” O’Toole (a pseudonym used by both Billy Rowland and a young Richard Roven “Dick” Hyman), and the pianists on the Lawrence Welk Show, especially Jo Ann Castle and Dudley “Big Tiny” Little, Jr. Of particular interest was John “Knocky” Parker, who became the first person to record the “complete” works of Scott Joplin, and who did so in a style not nearly so tacky as most of his honky-tonk peers.7 The recording is not actually Joplin’s complete works for piano (missing is The Ragtime Dance), and the performance style is hardly true to the score (most of the repeats and many complete strains are omitted). However, it marked the first attempt to compile an anthology that would serve as a significant historical record of a notable composer.

Also in the 1950s pianist “Ragtime” Bob Darch, who was an active collector of ragtime sheet music (at a time when few others were), performed numerous concerts in small Midwestern towns, including Sedalia, Missouri, where he found Arthur Marshall and Tom Ireland (former colleagues of Joplin) still living there.8 Darch also worked with many individuals in these towns to bring an awareness of the importance of their local heritage back into public consciousness. Terry Waldo, a pianist specializing in early jazz and ragtime styles, and a friend of Darch, said this in his book This is Ragtime:

7 See Berlin, King of Ragtime: Scott Joplin and His Era, 244–45; and http://professorbill.com/ragtime11.shtml.
8 Berlin, King of Ragtime: Scott Joplin and His Era, 245.
Darch, I think, has been underrated in terms of his contribution to the preservation of this music. For in his missionary zeal he has reactivated the careers of many Ragtime pioneers like Eubie Blake and Joe Jordan, and to his credit he has also helped launch the careers of a group of younger players including . . . Trebor Tichenor, who have continued to spread the Ragtime message.9

As fellow ragtime pianist Richard Zimmerman said when introducing Darch at a 1987 concert in Toronto: “Without exaggerating, Mr. Darch is one of the people most responsible for the revival of ragtime.”10

An important figure beginning in the early 1960s was Trebor Jay Tichenor, a St. Louis native who would go on to found the St. Louis Ragtimers (a four-piece ragtime ensemble led by Tichenor at the piano) as well as a quarterly journal, *The Ragtime Review*.11 This publication, along with the later publications of the Toronto-based Ragtime Society’s *The Ragtimer* (1963) and Dick Zimmerman’s *The Rag Times* (1967), showed a growing interest in ragtime throughout the decade, at least amongst a group of dedicated enthusiasts.12

Of immense influence and reach was Max Morath, who wrote, performed and co-produced twelve episodes of *The Ragtime Era* for National Educational Television (later PBS) in 1959.13 “*The Ragtime Era* became the most watched noncommercial series up to that time, run and rerun constantly by all the educational (and many commercial) stations throughout the country. The series and its more expansive fifteen-part sequel, *The Turn of the Century* (1960),

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9 Terry Waldo, *This is Ragtime*, 184.
10 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WYEH3Nnz-Wg
11 http://www.stlragtimers.com/
established Max Morath as a leading authority on ragtime as well as a popular performer. Morath would go on to produce six highly successful shows with his Original Rag Quartet, both touring and off-Broadway, all dedicated to ragtime, and in 1963 he published *100 Ragtime Classics*, the first major anthology of piano-ragtime sheet music. Further work as a contributor to other National Public Radio, CBS Radio and PBS broadcasts as well as an appearance with the Boston Pops, cemented his permanent importance to ragtime. His work as both a performer and a historian was, along with *They All Played Ragtime*, the most widely disseminated activity in ragtime up until 1967, when a succession of catalytic events led ultimately to the production of *The Sting*.

Rudi Blesh, though, was ultimately the primary catalyst for ragtime becoming a serious interest of classical musicians. In an interview with this author, the composer/pianist William Bolcom said the following about his indoctrination into the world of ragtime:

I actually played things like *Twelfth St. Rag* when a boy. But I had the most serious encounter with it about 1967 when I was given the name of Scott Joplin by a friend who told me of his ragtime opera, which I pursued. I also befriended Rudi Blesh, whose landmark book *They All Played Ragtime* had an enormous effect on me; Rudi introduced me to Max Morath who got me copies of Joplin’s rags. I then suddenly decided to write a few rags of my own, inspired by Joplin.

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15 See Edward A. Berlin, *Ragtime: A Musical and Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 179; and Harold C. Schonberg, “Scholars, Get Busy on Scott Joplin!” (*New York Times*, 24 January 1971). It is important to note that the ragtime revival was not a smooth, upward trajectory from the publication of *They All Played Ragtime* to the release of Joshua Rifkin’s Joplin LP; Schonberg here cites Rifkin, saying, “nearly all ragtime music was [as of the time of this article’s publication] out of print, including the once-famous 100 Ragtime Classics selected by Max Morath” [my italics].

16 Bolcom, interview. See Appendix B, 212.

17 This “friend” was Norman Lloyd, a pianist and composer who at the time was director for the arts at the Rockefeller Foundation. Lloyd, together with Bolcom, persuaded Vera Brodsky Lawrence at the New York Public Library to edit and publish *The Collected Works of Scott Joplin*, which was first published in 1971.
In a different recounting of events, Bolcom recalls that he and Rudi Blesh shared an office at Queens College. (Blesh had parlayed the success of several books he had published into a professorial career at age fifty, speaking on the topic of jazz history.) In search of Joplin’s “lost” opera *Treemonisha*, Bolcom claimed, “no one even at the Library of Congress, Lincoln Center, or the Schomburg Collection in Harlem had it. That is, until I asked my colleague Rudi Blesh at Queens College; we had barely ever said hello before as we rushed in and out of the same office on the way to teaching, but one week I asked him if he knew where I could find a copy of the opera, as all the usual suspects had nothing. When he said, ‘I have a copy of the vocal score – shall I bring it next week?’ I nearly fell off my chair.” In pursuit of more ragtime music, Blesh put Bolcom in touch with Max Morath, who promptly provided Bolcom with a large quantity of photocopied rags.

In Terry Waldo’s interview with Bolcom for *This is Ragtime*, Bolcom offered the following about what ragtime meant to him:

> When I discovered Ragtime, I discovered a kind of music that I could relate to in every way. I got knocked out by Scott Joplin. I think he’s one of the great guys of all time. He interested me because he was the first American who was able to take all of these various sources of music and synthesize them. . . . That’s what I want to do in music, too; I want to put all my musical experiences into one personality. I’m not a Ragtimer; I’m not interested in spending the rest of my life going to Ragtime festivals and trading old sheet music; I’m not interested in antiques. I’m more interested in things that are new for me. I notice the tendency among a lot of Ragtime people to say it’s good because it’s old. I say if it’s old and beautiful, fine; if it’s *new* and beautiful, equally fine.19

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19 Terry Waldo, *This is Ragtime*, 196.
Bolcom then approached Vera Brodsky Lawrence, a music researcher and editor who was a former piano student of Josef and Rosina Lhevinne, to prepare and compile the complete works of Scott Joplin. Lawrence, working under the aid of a substantial grant from the New York Public Library to compile an Americana collection of sheet music (and having just completed a five-volume edition of the works of Louis Moreau Gottschalk), readily accepted. The two-volume Joplin collection was first published in 1971, and she credits directly most of the people named in this chapter for assisting her in this project, including T. J. Anderson, Eubie Blake, William Bolcom, David Jasen, John[ny] Maddox, Max Morath, Trebor Tichenor, and others.  

Around the time Bolcom was discovering Joplin and the joys of ragtime composition, another classically-trained New York pianist was realizing an interest in Joplin – an interest that was certainly not considered classical at the time, but not entirely unusual for Rifkin. Joshua Rifkin, who had graduated from the Juilliard School in 1965 at the age of twenty-one, had already released an album of jug band music entitled The Even Dozen Jug Band in 1964 (playing piano, kazoo and singing). He had a staff job at the burgeoning record label Nonesuch, and in 1965 recorded The Baroque Beatles Book, featuring his own arrangements of Beatles songs for baroque chamber orchestra.

Terry Waldo presents an interview with Rifkin on how he first encountered the music of Scott Joplin, and ultimately came to produce the ragtime album which fully launched the revival of ragtime music:

I [Rifkin] was first aware of Joplin, actually, when I was about ten years old—I was very interested in New Orleans Jazz. My brother and I used to go downtown in New York where the

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21 The Even Dozen Jug Band, Joshua Rifkin (vocals, piano, kazoo), et al., released in 1964, Elektra EKS-7246, 33\(\frac{1}{3}\) rpm.
older Jazzmen from New York, Chicago, and New Orleans were still playing. And I met them, played with them, and talked with them a great deal. I got to know particularly Clarence Williams, the old songwriter and pianist. And so among my experiences I came across some of the Scott Joplin rags. I heard Bunk Johnson’s recording of *The Entertainer*, and I played the *Maple Leaf Rag*, as any Jazz pianist had to. Of course, I played it like a Jazz pianist – I played my “Maple Leaf Rag.” My whole view of Ragtime was the conventional one for the time. Ragtime was part of early Jazz. Then I drifted out of it for a long time.

Around 1968 or so Eric Salzman, a composer and critic who was a very good friend of mine, mentioned to me some rags that he had gotten from Bill Bolcom, who was a good friend of both of ours from other connections, and said he was tremendously taken with the stuff. My first response was that I thought I had known Ragtime from my Jazz days, but when I started looking at it I discovered that it was something completely different from what I had taken it to be. I began playing the stuff endlessly . . . but just for myself and friends. Then occasionally we would have a Ragtime-and-early-Jazz evening on WBAI radio. Bill and I and a couple other people would play. There was a kind of burgeoning interest in all of this music.

Now, at this time I had changed my style and developed, I suppose, the somewhat controversial approach to Ragtime I have now. In my view much of Ragtime—not all of it but certainly Joplin’s—was a very classical music. It was not meant to be played the way people conventionally played it—the way I myself had played it in my Jazz days. I came to see that it should be played *as written*, and that’s what I did.  

Rifkin spoke with the team at Nonesuch about the possibility of recording a serious CD of Joplin, and, with enthusiastic support, the recording was made in the spring of 1970 and released in November of the same year. (Rifkin said of the recording, “I started to record myself, since I

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22 Terry Waldo, *This is Ragtime*, 197-98.
basically liked my way of playing. Also, it was cheaper for me, as a producer, to hire me as a pianist than someone else.”)23

In January of 1971, very shortly following the release of Rifkin’s Joplin album, New York Times music critic Harold C. Schonberg heard Rifkin’s recording, and, interest piqued, attended a concert of ragtime music given by Rifkin along with Bolcom and several others. In his article, “Scholars, Get Busy on Scott Joplin!” Schonberg says this about Joplin’s works: “The music not only had an elegance of its own, in such a work as ‘Euphonic Sounds’ it had a good deal of delicate color and harmonic imagination. This was not just any man’s music. The syncopations . . . were as idiomatically applied as the rubatos in a Chopin mazurka. Joplin was a real composer.”24

Schonberg, a polarizing critic with little musical training whose opinions were (and continue to be) often reviled by musicians, was in any case the chief music critic of the Times and a talented and engaging writer, and thus widely read. The above-mentioned article has been cited as the catalyst for the enormous popularity of the Rifkin recording.25

Gunther Schuller, an American composer who played French horn for the Metropolitan Opera and with Miles Davis before becoming the president of the New England Conservatory of Music in 1967, was conversant in variety of jazz styles (particularly bebop).26 At first, ragtime was of peripheral interest; Schuller claimed that as a French horn player, there was little he could do with ragtime.27 An encounter with Vera Lawrence changed this: she provided Schuller with a

23 Ibid., 198.
25 Waldo, This is Ragtime, 200. “Max Morath observed that ‘once Harold Schoenberg said Joplin was all right, all these classical-music people, who had known about Joplin but disregarded him, decided he was a genius. These are the same people he was up against his whole life.’”
26 New England Conservatory—Faculty Biography: <http://necmusic.edu/archives/gunther-schuller>
27 Hasse, “Rudi Blesh and the Ragtime Revivalists,” 194
copy of a collection of ragtime orchestrations commonly known as *The Red Back Book* (its formal title is *Standard High-Class Rags*), which was published by John Stark and included a number of Joplin’s rags. Shortly thereafter, Schuller assembled an ensemble of twelve student musicians, and an early 1973 performance at the Smithsonian Institution led to an Angel Records recording that won the Grammy for Best Chamber Music Performance. Following Rifkin’s Joplin recording on the classically oriented Nonesuch label, this recording of the New England Conservatory Ragtime Ensemble was the second highly visible event that identified and now cemented ragtime as a classical genre, or at least worthy of consideration by classical musicians.

Eventually, movie director (and once-aspiring pianist) George Roy Hill acquired the New England Conservatory Ragtime Ensemble recording, and liked the music so much that he wanted to frame an entire movie around the nostalgic sounds of the genre. Hill approached Gunther Schuller to make another recording with his group, yet despite the enormous success of the recording, Schuller had conflicting obligations with the Berkshire Music Center (since renamed the Tanglewood Music Center), and declined Hill’s request. Hill then turned to his friend Marvin Hamlisch, who became the director of music for Hill’s new movie starring Paul Newman and Robert Redford, *The Sting*, which was released on December 25, 1973. Hamlisch used Schuller’s copyrighted editions of the orchestrations, which were arrangements from the Red Back Book that Schuller had orchestrated for the New England Conservatory Ragtime Ensemble from extant score parts. Hamlisch’s contributions as the preparer of the musical score include some modest re-instrumentation work to more heavily favor the winds, and the adding and subtracting of repeats to make the music fit the film. (No mention of any arrangers other than Hamlisch was mentioned in the movie credits, and Schuller is only credited as an arranger on a few specific tracks. Hamlisch himself apparently never publicly mentioned Schuller in connection with his
work on *The Sting*, and even suggested that he independently discovered Joplin and suggested his music for the film.)

Regardless of who was arranging or performing the music, the movie was a sensation, and the sound of Scott Joplin jumped from being popular among those aware of the happenings in classical music to a sound the entire country knew. Hundreds, perhaps thousands of ragtime recordings, primarily fixated on Scott Joplin and *The Entertainer*, flooded the market. It was a high water mark of the style, vastly outstripping the great popularity it had at the beginning of the twentieth century.

A final area of contribution from the classical music community was performances of Scott Joplin’s opera *Treemonisha*, the opera that had featured prominently in *They All Played Ragtime*, and the work which had sparked William Bolcom’s interest in ragtime. T. J. Anderson, an African-American professor of composition at Tufts University since 1972, never wrote rags. However, after Bolcom provided Anderson with a vocal score, Anderson orchestrated and produced the first fully staged production of *Treemonisha* at the Atlanta Memorial Arts Center (now known as the Woodruff Arts Center) in January of 1972, thanks in part to Norman Lloyd’s continuing support of ragtime from the Rockefeller Foundation. That same summer, a second orchestration was prepared and edited, this time by Bolcom and Vera Lawrence, for a performance at the Wolf Trap Performing Arts Center near Washington, D. C. Three years later, Schuller presented a third arrangement of the opera; this scoring, first performed by the Houston

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28 David Reffkin, personal communication, September 15, 2014. The unscrupulousness of Hamlisch, how much of the arranging was his, and how he was credited in *The Sting* has been the subject of debates by many in the ragtime community through the time of this writing. It is unclear whether the excessive recognition he was given in the credits was his doing or a bit of carelessness on the part of the person who prepared those credits. In any case, it left a number of musicians offended, yet was but a singular example of the many people involved in ragtime’s revival who attempted to cash in on the works of others. Lawsuits and copyright infringement cases were common, and people who held rights to specific works often did not disclose this until after somebody else had published a recording and they could swoop in and demand large sums of money for infringement. This was one of the many reasons some of the most important composers involved in the ragtime revival ceased their activity.
Grand Opera, was recorded by Deutsche Grammophon, and was the production that eventually ran a total of nine weeks on Broadway.\textsuperscript{29}

It is important to recognize how ragtime came to be identified as a classical genre. Compositionally, fusion between jazz and classical music wasn’t a new idea; in the 1930s, recordings of Art Tatum (of works by Dvořák and Massenet), Artie Shaw (who composed for a jazz combo playing together with a string quartet) and Duke Ellington (who employed advanced classical harmonies, voice-leading, and forms) each contributed to an idea of classical/jazz fusion. Even earlier, George Gershwin’s \textit{Rhapsody in Blue} (1924) exemplified the syncopations of ragtime, the harmonies of the blues, and a serious understanding of classical form technique. This was in large part due to the exceptional orchestration efforts of Ferde Grofé, then a successful classical and jazz pianist in his early thirties. This all followed the tradition of “ragging” the classics, evident in compositions such as George Cobb’s \textit{Russian Rag} and its sequel, the \textit{New Russian Rag} (both based irreverently on Rachmaninoff’s Prelude in C-sharp Minor, op. 2, no. 3) and Felix Arndt’s \textit{Desecration Rag} (using popular themes by Dvořák, Liszt, Sinding, and two by Chopin). Closer to the time of the ragtime revival, Gunther Schuller coined the term “third stream” in a 1957 lecture, to reference a musical genre which genuinely incorporated elements of both classical and jazz music, and required of its creators a thorough understanding of both forms.\textsuperscript{30} While some appreciated the concept, many musicians, both classical and jazz, rejected the label as degrading to the unique traits of both styles.

Rifkin’s recording was unique in that it was the first time a notated, popular music form (or, as it was generally considered in the 1960s and ‘70s, “early” or “traditional” jazz) was

\textsuperscript{29} Berlin, \textit{King of Ragtime}, 252. Also, as a noteworthy aside, Bolcom expressed to this author that Anderson’s arrangement was the one that he felt held truest to the original style and sound.

\textsuperscript{30} Gary Giddins and Scott DeVeaux, \textit{Jazz} (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009), 352.
performed with a serious classical interpretation. The traits that Schonberg had lauded in his remarks about Joplin’s works were directly linked to Rifkin’s interpretive choices: to play the music as written, with (nearly) no further improvisatory gestures, and to treat the music with a classical sense of phrasing and lyricism. It was the convergence of two musical genres through performance rather than composition or inception.

Returning to the source where classical music appropriated ragtime, William Bolcom was hardly the first classical musician to be aware of ragtime; in fact, in a survey taken by this author, it was revealed that one of the most common ways in which people were introduced to ragtime was through music lessons in their childhoods. More importantly, these survey respondents were generally college-aged or older by the time the ragtime revival became a national phenomenon. Yet it was William Bolcom’s encounters with Lloyd and Blesh that seriously sparked his interest and composing in the ragtime style, and Rifkin’s, Albright’s, Anderson’s, Lawrence’s, and Schuller’s associations with Bolcom which ultimately paved the way for a national interest in the style.

The topic of revival-era compositions, however, was seemingly peripheral to the revival of classic ragtime and the lionizing of Joplin. Bolcom included two of his own rags and one collaborative composition effort with Albright in his 1971 recording for Nonesuch. However, this was the same classical company that had just had enormous success with Joplin specifically, and it was Joplin (and secondarily Lamb and Scott) who were the headlining composers of the album.

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31 Author’s survey. See Appendix C, 249.
32 Bolcom released two more recordings of his own solo piano playing with Nonesuch, a 1973 recording of the Gershwin Songbook and a 1975 recording of the piano music of Darius Milhaud, which included Milhaud’s *Three Rag Caprices*. However, through the time of this writing, Bolcom has not recorded any other of his own rags, except for an arrangement of *Graceful Ghost Rag* for violin and piano which Bolcom scored in 1988.

Following the new apex of ragtime’s popularity concurrent with the release of *The Sting*, the publication of E. L. Doctorow’s 1975 novel *Ragtime* (popular enough to generate an eponymous movie [1981] and Broadway musical [1998] adaptations), and culminating in 1976 with Scott Joplin’s being posthumously awarded a special Pulitzer Prize “for his contributions to American Music,” ragtime then settled from its mania to a vernacular musical form replete with visceral meaning, usually related to some form of nostalgia. In composition and application, ragtime has taken two divergent paths. The first is the incorporation of the classic ragtime sound into innumerable commercial applications. Syncopation in the ragtime style is a highly accessible means of explaining the relevance of a product: just a couple of seconds of music may substitute for a narrator’s more extensive description of a product symbolizing simpler, less hectic times.

The second path taken, both more complex and more rarefied, has been ragtime’s incorporation into formal concerts and recitals alongside traditional classical repertoire. Nowadays, ragtime, in both its classic and revival/post-revival era varieties, is commonly—and without hesitation—included on classical programs. Whereas in the 1970s, as the world of classical music was alerted to Harold Schonberg’s endorsement of ragtime, students would program *Maple Leaf Rag* as a featured novelty, the early twenty-first century has seen the regular inclusion in recitals of ragtime and syncopated works by Joplin, Lamb, May Aufderheide, Art Tatum (transcribed), Bolcom, Rochberg, Paul Schoenfield, and many others alongside the syncopated works by the composers now considered the masters of the early twentieth century, Ives, Debussy, Milhaud, Stravinsky, and others.

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[33 For further discussion on nostalgia, especially as it relates to a present-day audience that comes long after the period for which they are nostalgic, see chapter 4, “Reflections on the Ragtime Revival.”]
This inclusion of ragtime in classical programs is very much in keeping with the earlier incorporation of the songs composed by the great classicists. Beethoven’s *Scottish Folk Songs* or the hundreds of lieder composed by Schubert were in their time considered popular music, and of a different degree of seriousness than the symphonic and operatic works which they contemporaneously composed. Similarly, prior to the operas of Mozart, *opera seria* was a style of opera written about nobility and performed for nobility; *opera buffa* featured the common problems of the common people, and was usually performed for an audience of commoners. Today, both operatic styles may readily be seen in each season of operas presented at the Metropolitan Opera House, and there is much more in common between those two styles than there is between an opera of that age and an opera of Wagner little more than half a century later.

Ragtime’s role as a progenitor of jazz may cast it in a different light, but the progressing jazz style seems to have cast classic ragtime off as a composed and fully notated style—less befitting of improvisatory technique (dismissing the many performers of ragtime who did

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34 The publication history and works reception of Scott Joplin closely parallels that of Franz Schubert, especially concerning Joplin’s opera *Treemonisha*. “Between 1821 and Schubert's death in 1828 more than 100 opuses of his music had been published (or at least proofed by the composer), most by Viennese firms. This was a rate unequalled by any of Schubert's Viennese contemporaries. In terms of the sheer number of opuses, it almost doubles the total for Beethoven over the same period. The differences lay in the emphasis. In this period Beethoven saw seven symphonies and half a dozen overtures published; Schubert saw not one note of his orchestral music published. Schott published Beethoven's Missa solemnis shortly after its completion; Schubert could get only a handful of youthful sacred works into print. Almost two-thirds of Schubert's published opuses in his lifetime were devoted to lieder (more than 175 songs). The 50 Nachlass opuses published between 1830 and 1850 by Anton Diabelli were devoted entirely to 137 more lieder. More than 30 other Schubert opuses were divided equally between music for piano and piano duet. Of his greatest chamber works only the A Minor Quartet and the E-flat Piano Trio appeared in his lifetime. At the time of Beethoven's death, virtually all of the music on which his posthumous reputation would rest had been published. Less than a quarter of Schubert's music had appeared in print when he died, and publication was heavily skewed towards the least prestigious genres.” Robert Winter, “Franz Schubert,” *Oxford Music Online.*

35 An important difference here is that Beethoven and Schubert wrote both “serious” and “popular” music, and because they are perceived as great composers, an interest is taken in all of their works. Excepting Joplin’s one extant operatic composition, there is essentially only the “popular” side of the equation to consider ragtime in this manner. An analogous (and rhetorical) comparison might be made as to whether Chopin would still be considered one of the great composers if he had only written Mazurkas.
improvise extensively). It may well be that jazz closing the door on ragtime directly opened a window for classical music to include it, especially in the sense that it is music for the performer to interpret rather than to generate. This does raise the separate concern that much of the improvisatory nature of ragtime in its original trappings is a marginalized component of ragtime performance today.

Possibly the future of ragtime performance will be just the same: the works of Joplin and Ives and Debussy and Bolcom will be played precisely as written in a majority of performances, and a few performers, segregated as historical-performance-practice musicians, will perform ragtime with the improvisatory flair once a key part of the style. This question of improvisation dovetails directly with the compositional approaches of the classical musicians who follow below; their performances were routinely as improvisatory as their compositional methods explicit in comparison to their earlier classical counterparts.

Composers of the Ragtime Revival: Their Musical and Educational Backgrounds

Composers of the revival era can be distinguished just like their forbearers in the original ragtime age—along popular and classical lines. The distinguishing factors, however, are more compositional intent than compositional technique. Composers such as Trebor Tichenor, Donald Ashwander, David Thomas Roberts, Glenn Jenks and Robin Frost were all classically trained,

36 Contemporary performances of Jason Moran toe the line. For example, his 2003 São Paulo rendition of James P. Johnson’s You’ve Got to be Modernistic employs some traditional elements of Johnson’s Harlem Stride style, though it mostly operates in a highly dissonant style recognizable only as Moran’s. This is a tip of the hat to Johnson, but it is not music that could rhythmically, harmonically or pianistically in any way be called ragtime.

37 The relationship between ragtime and jazz may be directly akin to the gulf that separates the performance practice courses of today’s music conservatories – promoting the improvisation of cadenzas in Mozart concertos and the preluding prior to and in between movements of the early romantic composers—and the prepared cadenzas and exclusion of preluding found in the vast majority of (non-academic) contemporary performances.
yet chose to pursue a style of ragtime writing deliberately restricted to the compositional methods of popular composers at the beginning of the century. Tichenor, in particular, restricted his compositional style to what has been classified as “folk rag,” the style of ragtime writing based on folk themes, and having somewhat less melodic continuity than the “classic rags” of Joplin, Scott, and Lamb. The few rags Gunther Schuller wrote also fit the profile of conservationist composition, despite his normal compositional style being highly dissonant and often harsh, more akin to what may have emerged from Darmstadt than Decatur.

38 Frost is primarily involved in the more rarefied composition of novelty piano works, and is somewhat peripheral to this group. He is included in this list primarily because of his unusually strong following by performers within the present-day ragtime community.


40 Bryan Wright, personal email communication with the author, May 29, 2012. In his dissertation prospectus (working title “Musical Revival and Transformation: Ragtime Piano in America”), Wright refers to Ellen Stekert’s treatment of the different groups in a revival community: “(Stekert) identifies four types of performers within a typical revival. The first are the “traditional singers” who learned songs from oral tradition while growing up. In the ragtime community, this would translate to those pianists who are veterans of the “ragtime era.” Although none survive today, several such as Eubie Blake, Joe Jordan, Joseph Lamb, and Charley Thompson remained musically active into the early years of the ragtime revival—long enough to have a direct impact on the younger generation of performers who could interact with them personally.

Stekert’s second group, the “imitators” are those who may not have been raised with the music they revive, but who seek to absorb themselves totally in their chosen style—learning not only melodies and texts, but also style of performance as well (some going so far as to alter their own speech patterns). The ragtime community certainly has its share of “imitators.” On the mild side, there are those who appear at festivals and concerts in turn-of-the-century outfits and insist on playing in styles that recreate faithfully piano rolls or recordings of ragtime-era pianists—often learned note-for-note from transcriptions of past performances. At the extreme are those who, in addition, choose to live in Victorian-era homes decorated and furnished in period fashions, also adopting the speech and vocabulary (i.e., slang) of the ragtime era. The third group, which Stekert calls the “utilizers” take the revival material and alter it in the light of currently accepted aesthetics, frequently changing elements of tune, text, texture, or overall style in their performances. Such a group might translate in the ragtime community to the “classical” or “jazz” pianists who deliberately shape their performances to reflect the values and customs of another musical form. The 1970s, especially, saw the emergence of performers like Joshua Rifkin, E. Power Biggs, Itzhak Perlman, and others who took the traditional “concert hall” aesthetics of classical music and applied them to ragtime. At the other end of the spectrum are pianists such as Marcus Roberts who freely adapt ragtime melodies to their own highly individual jazz styles. The final group, which Stekert terms the “new aesthetic,” are those who mold the traditional music freely to fit their own set of aesthetic criteria, often composing new works and developing a new vocabulary for emotional expression. Whether through the insertion of anachronous musical quotes, new compositions drawing from a range of musical styles (e.g. Latin music or modern jazz), or the incorporation of computers and tools such as MIDI in composition and performance, there are some in the ragtime revival who see the music as a vehicle for experimentation and innovation.”

More recently, composers have emerged from a small but intensely dedicated ragtime festival scene, and true to the conservative nature of a revival festival, the writing has also been mostly in the style of classic ragtime. Standouts among this group include Andrew Barrett, Tom Brier, Bill Edwards, Fred Hoeptner, Brian Holland, Max Keenlyside, Vincent Matthew Johnson, Martin Spitznagel, Bryan Wright, and Brett Youens. Along with David Thomas Roberts, composers such as Frank French, Hal Isbitz and Scott Kirby have promoted a ragtime style they have termed “terra-verde,” a lyrical approach to ragtime composition, usually with the inflection of a habañera left hand and other vaguely Latino-influenced elements.

Other composers have been considerably more innovative in their approach to ragtime, drawing from a much wider genre spectrum. William Bolcom and William Albright were the first full-time classical composers to immerse themselves in the ragtime style. Through their enthusiasm, other composers, including Eugene Kurtz, George Rochberg, and pianist Milton Kaye, as well as the aforementioned Ashwander, began writing pieces that were either rags or at least deeply infused with ragtime character. They have been since joined by a younger generation of (pianist-)composers who include Jacob Adams, Thomas Benjamin, Matthew Davidson, Brian Dykstra, David Feurzeig, Gregory Hutter, John Novacek, Kevin Puts, as well as this author, along with a quartet of composers currently residing in Australia: Elena Kats-Chernin, Michael Easton, Hamish Davidson (no relation to the aforementioned Matthew), and Stephen Cronin. A composer of special distinction is Carter Pann, a student of both Albright and Bolcom at the University of Michigan, who wrote tribute rags to both teachers shortly before Albright’s premature death in 1998. (Pann actually worked on the rag entitled “Albright” with Albright.)

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41 Carter Pann, interview. See Appendix B, 235.
also proficient pianists. This runs against the current trend of composers distancing themselves from performance and also reveals the pianistic physicality of the ragtime idiom.

The primary subjects of this dissertation are composers who were at the forefront of revival era ragtime composition, and who each had (and in the cases of Bolcom and Pann, as of this writing, continue to have) important careers as composers of classical music beyond the ragtime genre. Ragtime was an important focus of Albright and Bolcom, though not their only focus. During the period of their most intense work on ragtime pieces (1967-1971), both were involved in numerous other composition projects more in line with contemporary classical compositional currents. (Still, ragtime elements crept into those works: Albright’s *Beulahland Rag* for large ensemble and his later *TIC* both included elements of classic ragtime juxtaposed against harsher textures, and Bolcom’s *Black Host* has an extended episode of syncopation in its middle section.) Rochberg’s connection to ragtime is more congruous with his general philosophy that composers weren’t obligated to write in the style of the serialists, but were free to write in any style.⁴² Eugene Kurtz’s compositional foray into ragtime was limited to the second movement of a two-movement work, *Animations* (1969), and it was dedicated to Albright, who performed it many times (sometimes both movements, and sometimes just *Rag*).⁴³ Kurtz alternates between fairly strict ragtime and serialist structures in *Rag*, but leaves no further clues across his compositional output than a rhythmic sense that ragtime was of serious interest. However, this one work is of sufficient character and innovation while adhering to some of ragtime’s core tenets that its inclusion here is necessary. It is also a representative style of writing utilized by many composers who drop bits of syncopated music into their scores as a

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⁴² From a National Public Radio transcript of Weekend Edition, Scott Simon, host, “Remembering George Rochberg, who died this week at 86.” <http://www.swarthmore.edu/news/ithenews/05/05.06.09.htm>

⁴³ Assorted programs, Box Nos. 5-8, William Albright Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
marker of nostalgia. The seven piano solo rags of Carter Pann (as of this writing) may number fewer than Joplin or Bolcom, but each is of extremely high quality. Furthermore, Pann frequently incorporates ragtime syncopation into his other works, as idiomatic implementation of popular music is a core component of his compositional style.

George Rochberg was born in Paterson, New Jersey in 1918, and took a serious interest in classical music as a young student. After he earned a bachelor’s degree at Montclair (New Jersey) State Teachers College, he spent several years at the Mannes College of Music, studying composition and counterpoint with Hans Weisse, George Szell, and Leopold Mannes. Following service in the US Army, he resumed studies at the Curtis Institute as a composition student of Rosario Scalero and Gian Carlo Menotti. He earned a Master’s degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1948, and around the same time joined the faculties of both of these schools. He traveled to Rome on Fulbright and American Academy fellowships and met Luigi Dallapiccola, whose style of serialism deeply impressed him.

The sudden death of Rochberg’s 20-year-old son in 1964 from an inoperable brain tumor prompted a change of compositional direction. Serialism seemed no longer to have any relevant meaning to Rochberg, and as an educator, his casting off of the technique proved to be a liberating gesture to the following generation of composers. In the words of one student, “If George Rochberg can do something like that, there’s nothing that I can’t do and get away with it. I don’t have to write twelve-tone music; I can if I want to. I can write stuff that sounds like

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44 Milken Archive of Jewish Music, a website. <http://www.milkenarchive.org/people/view/all/676/George+Rochberg>
Brahms. I can do anything I want. I’m free. And that was an extraordinary feeling in the late ’60s for young composers, I think, many of whom felt really constrained to write serial music.”

Rochberg had long been a performer of jazz; after his 1964 embrace of tonal elements in composition, jazz and earlier classical music styles began to appear in his works as direct quotations, genre recreations and pastiche. (This is disputed by Sally Pinkas, who in her liner notes calls Carnival Music, “the only one of Rochberg’s piano works to employ popular musical idioms.”) The pianist Jerome Lowenthal, for whom Carnival Music was composed, first encountered Rochberg’s music in 1966, when he was introduced to the score of Rochberg’s Nach Bach and immediately drawn to the tragic sounds of Rochberg’s use of Bach fragments that were left unresolved.

This work, originally written for harpsichord but readily adaptable to the piano, exemplified, along with Music for the Magic Theater and Contra mortem et tempus, Rochberg’s first post-serialist works, and each of these works extensively quoted (often severely out of context) the works of other composers. Eventually, Rochberg’s employment of direct quotations in his compositions gave way to a more open approach of using attributes of other genres to give character to his music. The ragtime element in Toccata-Rag, the fifth and final movement of Carnival Music, was one of several other genres employed; also included are manifestations of the blues, zither music, and pastiche on works by Bach and Brahms. In other words, ragtime in Rochberg’s music was one guest in a long line of previously imagined (and in Rochberg’s hands, re-imagined) music.

46 Jerome Lowenthal, interview. See Appendix B, 218.
47 George Rochberg, Piano Music: Volume 4, Sally Pinkas (piano), recorded December 1996 and June 1997, Naxos, 8.559634, compact disc. From the liner notes by the performer.
William Bolcom was born in Seattle, Washington in 1938, and despite a precocious talent for the piano displayed at a young age, his parents refused an invitation from a Los Angeles agent to begin concertizing at the age of six.\(^{48}\) Both his piano studies and composition studies had an unusually French lineage: his piano teacher, Berthe Poncy Jacobson, was a student of Blanche Selva and Vincent D’Indy, and one of Bolcom’s composition teachers, John Verrall, was the student of Aaron Copland and Roy Harris, both of whom studied with Nadia Boulanger in Paris. Notably absent, even stemming from his other teachers, was a Germanic lineage.

In 1957 Darius Milhaud invited Bolcom to study with him at Mills College in Oakland, and, per Milhaud’s arrangement, Bolcom spent alternating years in California and France with Milhaud, who held posts at both Mills and the Paris Conservatoire. While in Paris, Bolcom also studied with Pierre Boulez (performing in his ensemble *Domaine Musicale*), and cultivated a friendship with Luciano Berio.\(^{49}\) In the midst of his activities in Paris and Berlin, Bolcom also completed his doctorate at Stanford University in 1964, under the guidance of Leland Smith, another student of Milhaud and the inventor of the first musical notation software, SCORE.\(^{50}\)

Following a year of teaching at the University of Washington, Bolcom accepted a position at Queens College, which placed him in direct contact with Rudi Blesh, who had accepted a position there in 1956 teaching jazz history. It was during this period that Bolcom began to seriously cultivate both his ragtime compositions and performance. His first rags in classic ragtime style were written in 1967, following his composition *Black Hosts* that featured a ragtime section. As of this writing, he has published twenty-six rags for solo piano along with


\(^{49}\) Ibid.

\(^{50}\) http://composers.com/leland-c-smith
ragtime elements included in numerous other works of varying instrumentation. Some are very tonally stable and fully in the tradition of classic rags, and others are highly dissonant and formally distant from the system of strains prevalent in classic rags.

In 1944 William Albright was born in Gary, Indiana, and his early musical activity was focused toward the standard training of a concert pianist. This led to adolescent studies in the Juilliard Preparatory Department from 1959 to 1962, where he performed works of Schumann and Prokofiev alongside such fellow students as Itzhak Perlman. In 1963, 1964 and 1966, he was a composition fellow at the Berkshire Music Center (then under the direction of Gunther Schuller), and winner of the Koussevitsky Prize in Composition. He spent a year at the Eastman School of Music, and transferred to the University of Michigan, where he worked extensively with Ross Lee Finney, and also with George Rochberg. While there, he also developed his prodigious skills as an organist with Marilyn Mason, and a Fulbright fellowship enabled him to spend a year in Paris working with Olivier Messiaen.

Immediately following his earned doctorate and year of Fulbright studies, Albright was hired by the University of Michigan in 1970, three years prior to the appointment of Bolcom. He remained on the faculty until his death in 1998. Bolcom and Albright became close friends in 1966 (they met at Tanglewood) and immediately recognized a shared interest in ragtime. Through a rapid rate of correspondence they created and shared with each other more than a dozen rags each, even collaborating on one (Brass Knuckles).

However, their relationship with ragtime was quite different. Whereas Bolcom had devoted himself to the study and understanding of Joplin (and Joseph Lamb, to a lesser extent), Albright was familiar with the New York evolution of ragtime, and particularly the work of

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51 Programs, 1960-1965, Box No. 5, William Albright Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
Harlem stride pianist James P. Johnson.\textsuperscript{52} Between 1967 and 1971, Albright composed rags nearly as abundantly as Bolcom did, but preceding all of his ragtime works for solo piano was a starkly avant-garde work entitled \textit{Beulahland Rag}, written for David Bloch and the Portland Group for New Music. This work, with its non-traditional notation, shrieking horns and shouted speeches, was extremely removed from anything resembling traditional, classic ragtime, except for the inclusion of the eight final measures of the B-strain from \textit{Maple Leaf Rag}.

Though Albright had strong background as a pianist, he did not seriously perform ragtime until after Rifkin’s recording was released. While Albright eventually recorded the complete solo piano works of Joplin, as well as a number of works by James P. Johnson, his only recording of contemporary ragtime was a single album dedicated entirely to his own compositions. Concert programs illustrate his serious interest in ragtime ranging from Joplin to Lamb to Blake to Johnson, and also include frequent performances of fellow composition professor Eugene Kurtz’s \textit{Animations}, which was written for and dedicated to Albright.

Despite writing works of high quality, and being a serious pianist with fine musical taste and technical execution, Albright did not receive nearly the same ubiquitous attention for his ragtime compositions that Bolcom did. This may possibly be linked to difficulties Albright had with his publishers; his correspondence with both Elkan-Vogel and Edward B. Marks was frequently terse, and publication of his works was often delayed (apparently negligently) for years.

Born in Atlanta, Georgia in 1923, Eugene Kurtz’s compositional background appears to be a mix of Bolcom’s background and Rochberg’s. Kurtz’s collegiate education began in 1941 at

\textsuperscript{52} James P. Johnson (1894-1955) is known as the “father of stride piano.” From as early as 1914, he was actively composing and publishing pieces in the ragtime idiom, yet the left hand parts were already employing a great deal of stepwise motion. For more on James P. Johnson, refer to William Edwards’ biography at \url{http://professorbill.com/ragtime4b.shtml}, or Scott E. Brown, \textit{A Case of Mistaken Identity: The Life and Music of James P. Johnson} (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1984).
the Eastman School of Music, and was interrupted for war duties in 1944 when Kurtz served in a heavy artillery unit stationed in France. He resumed studies with Howard Hanson at Eastman following the war, but jumped at the opportunity to return to France in 1949 to study with Arthur Honegger and Darius Milhaud (with whom he had worked previously at the Berkshire Music Center). Later he studied with Max Deutsch (with whom William Albright later briefly studied), a student of Arnold Schoenberg and founder of Der Jüdische Spiegel, a Parisian theater responsible for premiering numerous works of Schoenberg and Berg.

Kurtz established French residency in 1952, and remained in Paris for the rest of his life, excepting a number of guest teaching positions. Notable among these guest residencies were stints at the University of Michigan (1967-68; 1970-71; 1973-74; 1980-81; 1988), the Eastman School of Music (1975), and shorter stays at the University of Illinois, the University of Texas and the Hartt School of Music. During his first residency in Michigan, Kurtz established a life-long friendship with William Albright; this was around the time Albright began writing music derivative of ragtime, and also when Albright met William Bolcom.

The origin of Eugene Kurtz’s personal interest in ragtime is unclear. However, despite Animations being the only work which was tied to ragtime, his interest must have been fairly serious. A few pieces of evidence point to this. The first was an essay Kurtz had intended to be published in French, entitled “Scott Joplin et le Ragtime Classique,” and the second lies directly in the score of Animations. Apart from a quote of Scott Joplin’s Maple Leaf Rag in Animations, Kurtz was highly sensitive to the formal structure of classic ragtime, as well as the harmonic structuring of the left hand. The final piece of evidence is tied more closely to Albright, for Animations was composed in 1969, after Albright and Kurtz knew each other well, which would

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54 Eugene Kurtz, Scott Joplin et le Ragtime Francais. Unpublished manuscript, last modified c. 1989. The document was never published, despite its ready state and apparent support from one publisher. At the time of this writing, the extant manuscript is believed to be incomplete.
likely suggest that Kurtz would have been aware of the frequent exchange of rags between Bolcom and Albright. For more than twenty years, Albright would frequently include Animations in his concert programs, possibly more often than any other work.\textsuperscript{55}

His success as a composer was widely recognized in France, where in 1979 Radio France honored him with “Eugene Kurtz Day,” in which Kurtz assembled two programs of classic and contemporary symphonic works, including three of his own compositions. Later he was granted two awards by the American Academy of Arts and Letters and one from the National Endowment for the Arts. However, beyond Animations and his Joplin essay, no other direct evidence of Kurtz’s activities in ragtime appears to exist.

Carter Pann was born in Le Grange, Illinois (a suburb of Chicago) in 1972, began his piano lessons at four years of age, and studied with his grandmother until he was eleven. From there, he studied with a local teacher, Doreen Sterba, who sent him to Emilio del Rosario, a pupil of Leon Fleischer, when Pann turned fifteen. Pann was also involved in his school’s music program as a trombonist and saxophonist, and his experience with these instruments appears frequently in his compositions.

Pann’s work as a composer began at the age of eight, when he began writing waltzes in the style of Tchaikovsky’s Nutcracker Suite, and formal composition lessons commenced with Howard Sandroff while he was a high school student. According to Pann, Sandroff gave him numerous Bach chorales to analyze, and exposed him to the compositional techniques of Ralph Shapey and Morton Feldman. However, a pivotal point in Pann’s studies with Sandroff came when the latter introduced Pann to a recording of Steve Reich: it was the first time Pann

\textsuperscript{55} This is based on the many programs this author read from William Albright’s archives (though likely not all of the programs which Albright ever performed on). Assorted programs, Box Nos. 5-8, William Albright Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
experienced what he called, “bold primary colors of this beautiful tonal landscape,” and he began to include more tonal elements in his compositions.\textsuperscript{56}

Pann was accepted to Eastman, his first choice school, on the basis of recommendations from Rosario and Sandroff, where he studied piano with Barry Snyder and composition successively with Samuel Adler, Joseph Schwantner, Christopher Rouse, Warren Benson, and David Liptak. Pann then applied to the University of Michigan for his master’s degree, seeking to move on from Eastman because he “was feeling a little stifled by the Rouse-Schwantner school of composition.”\textsuperscript{57} Though Pann had composed some fully mature works during his undergraduate years, he felt an explicit need to move on from an “antiquated style,” which heavily quoted and paraphrased extant works.

While a student of both Albright and Bolcom, Pann first encountered pushback from Bolcom about his extensive quoting: Bolcom pointed out a single excerpt of Stravinsky, and explained to Pann that he had lost himself as a compositional voice. In a parallel compositional development to Rochberg’s evolution from quoting to pastiche, Pann’s newfound sensitivity on how he used extant styles allowed him to fully develop his own unique voice.

It was not just ragtime that drew Carter Pann to Bolcom and Albright. Pann had heard several works by these composers, notably William Albright’s \textit{Chichester Mass} and William Bolcom’s \textit{Orphee Serenade} and Symphony no. 5, which inspired him to apply to the University of Michigan. However, he had encountered ragtime much earlier:

As a little kid, I was immediately attracted to Scott Joplin. It came from that. In fact, I remember seeing \textit{The Sting} when I was really little—probably before I should have seen it. You know, Scott Joplin’s all over that score. So, I picked up Joshua Rifkin’s album, you know, straight-up

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{56} Russell Pettitt, “Carter Pann’s Four Factories for Wind Symphony: An Analysis and Discussion” (D.M.A. diss., University of Oklahoma, 2010), Appendix B, Interview with Carter Pann, 110.
\item \textsuperscript{57} Pann, interview. See Appendix B, 229.
\end{itemize}
performances of Joplin’s rags. I really, really admired them. You know, I was nine years old, and I was really... I listened to them over and over—it was almost like lying on the carpet and listening to the Beatles, if it had been 1964. So I did that with Joplin. I also did that with Sousa, and these were really early, formative pieces for me. I didn’t think that down the line I was going to be a composer, and that some of the pieces I wrote would be rags. I just wanted to play them.

As I grew older and stopped hating the piano, and started loving it, because my hands were getting bigger, these were some of the first pieces I played. The Entertainer, Maple Leaf Rag—a pretty standard foray into Joplin.58

When Pann began working with Bolcom and Albright, he had the opportunity to actually compose his first two rags under their guidance; he dedicated those two rags, The Bills, to Bolcom and Albright, and actually had the opportunity to work on the one for Albright with Albright himself. (Unfortunately, Albright died only a few months after this lesson, and Pann was only able to dedicate the piece in memoriam.)

Pann’s compositions in ragtime idioms are, like Bolcom’s and Albright’s, sensitive to classic ragtime’s attributes and form, though his explorations of formal structure reveal an attempt at bridging the gap between ragtime’s ABACD form, and the rounded binary and rondo forms of classical music. There is also a sense of flexibility in straight and swinging rhythmic notations, possibly inherited from Albright’s interest in James P. Johnson and Harlem stride styles. Pann has said of “ragtime” that it is,

a term that is just written above all of those [ragtime, stride and novelty piano styles] to be a larger category. Stride is really just a pianistic term, and ragtime doesn’t have to be. It encompasses more, and even non-learned musicians when they hear ragtime used as a term [have

58 Ibid., 2.
a sense of its meaning]. “Novelty” is too wide. I mean, there’s a novelty in almost everything I’ve written. . . . “Ragtime” has turned into a term kind of like “march.” It’s that encompassing.59

59 Ibid., 5-6.
CHAPTER THREE
Analyses of Two Classic Rags

Classic Ragtime

While it is difficult to define the term “classic ragtime,” Joseph Scotti attempts to do so in his 1977 dissertation on Joseph Lamb. Though Scotti takes thirty-four pages to do this as part of an exploration of ragtime scholars preceding him, Edward Berlin accurately abbreviates Scotti’s main points below. It is noteworthy that Scotti eventually says, “The following observations apply foremost to the rags of Joplin, Scott and Lamb; their applicability to other piano rags at this point is gratuitous.”

Instead of a definitive proposition he [Scotti] formulates a tentative working list of the traits of classic ragtime: (1) the music is conceived as a notated art (i.e., it is not improvised); (2) it is idiomatic to the piano; (3) syncopation is but one of several equal musical parameters; (4) it is absolute music, intended primarily for listening; (5) it is newly composed (i.e., no medley/pastiches); (6) there is a conscious manipulation of the macroform and tonal plan.

Scotti’s suggestion that the music of the Big Three was intended to be performed as concert music or “absolute” music may have been refuted by Berlin based on a handful of conclusive points. However, the converse is much truer: most ragtime songs and works by lesser composers really do seem to be written for an audience sensitive primarily to ragtime’s characteristic

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1 In this chapter as well as chapter 4, note that measure numbers generally refer to the strain to which they belong, rather than a measure number counted from the beginning of the work. This reflects ragtime’s habit of composing completely autonomous strains. While it may be more relevant to classic rags than revival-era rags, this will assist the reader in viewing more contemporary composition methods as framed by the archaic genre mold.
3 Ibid., 177.
syncopations. Scotti’s point that the music weighs rhythm, harmony and melody equally is the most reasonable, if subjective, way of distinguishing the finest rags, what John Stark labeled “classic rags.”

The term “classic ragtime” is also tightly linked to a very specific set of pieces compiled by Rudi Blesh in a collection entitled *Classic Piano Rags*, at least by today’s community of ragtime performers. Blesh again promotes the notion of ragtime’s Big Three, and stresses the point that most of the other ragtime composers of note essentially composed in their image, Joplin’s in particular. The balance between rhythm, harmony, and melody are essentially present in all of the pieces in this collection, even if some of these pieces may not fit the formal mold of a classic rag.

Regardless of the semantics surrounding this label, each gesture in any Joplin rag, and in most of the syncopated works by Lamb and Scott, reflect only slight differences from the compositional decisions of their peers. It is those very gestures that cumulatively distinguish the works of ragtime’s Big Three as of the highest quality.

As commonly happens, ragtime’s Big Three were not always recognized by their contemporaries as being the genre’s finest composers. Certainly sales of their music did not suggest great celebrity: while Scott Joplin’s *Maple Leaf Rag* and James Scott’s *Frog Legs Rag* were the two best-selling rags in John Stark’s publication catalogue, sales of their other works were not nearly as brisk. Compositions by Scott and Joseph Lamb (though not Joplin) appeared in the widely distributed Christensen’s *Ragtime Review* (a ragtime publication similar to the

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6 A particular exception would be Artie Matthews’ five Pastime Rags, which are unique in combining classic ragtime compositional techniques with unusual harmonic diversity and phrase length. He also writes entire strains which completely suspend syncopated writing.
classical pianist’s *Etude*), and were favorably reviewed. Nonetheless, Lamb’s works were published after the cost-cutting sheet music wars had begun, with department stores selling scores for less than ten percent of their original sales prices. Lamb never seriously attempted to earn a living through sales of his compositions.

**Phrase Structure**

Commonly stated among historians and analysts of ragtime is the notion that the Big Three (as well as most other composers of rags) would usually group their sixteen-measure strains into four four-measure groups (with James Scott breaking four measures into two two-measure phrases and Lamb bridging two four-measure phrases into a single, longer line). Berlin, for example, describes a “generalized model of the typical early rag” as follows:

The main 16-measure themes are evenly divided into four-phrase double periods. These double periods are completely traditional, falling into a variety of evenly balanced, antecedent-consequent patterns, with the second phrase closing on a dominant semi-cadence, and the final phrase ending with a masculine, authentic—frequently perfect authentic—cadence.

If the perspective is taken that rag strains are in fact sixteen-measure double periods, and by extension that each eight measure “chunk” is to be taken as a self-contained musical fragment (with varying degrees of cadential closure), it is worth suggesting that both formal period and sentence structures are commonly employed. Just as the opening eight measures of Beethoven’s

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Sonata in F Minor, op. 2, no. 1, is the archetypal example of sentence structure, the first eight measures in James Scott’s Frog Legs Rag fulfills the exact analog in ragtime (example 3.1), what has in ragtime discussions been referred to as two-measure phrase structure. In example 3.2, the first eight measures in the A-strain of Joplin’s The Entertainer are as typical an example of period form as may be found, though the ragtime label for such a gesture is “four-measure phrase structure.” Further, The Entertainer’s first eight measures are a good example of the antecedent half of a double period, as Berlin suggested earlier.

Example 3.1 J. Scott, Frog Legs Rag, A 1-8

Example 3.2 S. Joplin, The Entertainer, A 1-8

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Harmonic and Rhythmic Balance in Classic Rags

The precise framework of the harmonic language which has defined “classic” ragtime has meant different things to the composers discussed in this dissertation, and has been a subject of controversy to more recent scholars attempting to define acceptable parameters of harmonic events. Scotti cites dissertations and articles by Addison Reed, A. R. Danberg Charters, and Frank Gillis in addition to Jasen and Tichenor, and Berlin in an exploration of this harmonic approach, notably contrasting Charters’ perspective with Berlin’s: “Ms. Charters’s postulation of melodic pentatonicism is summarily dismissed because Berlin can see no difference between modified pentatonicism and traditional diatonic melodic formations.” Yet the subtleties of the argument on the distinctions between pentatonicism and diatonicism are extensively superseded by the extant harmonic languages that chronologically surrounded both the era of classic ragtime and works of the revival/post-revival era. For example, Joplin’s consonant palette would not likely include many of the chords Bolcom employs. This is both a reflection of the time in which Joplin lived, and of the musical and cultural environment in which he was educated and professionally immersed, a fairly narrow swatch of the broader musical world.

Furthermore, Joplin’s compositional techniques evolved over the fifteen years during which he actively published. Guy Waterman asserted that Joplin’s pieces shifted rather dramatically in 1909, when his use of the oom-pah left hand was eschewed in favor of a more active line and an independent tenor voice. The complexity of his syncopations lessened to allow room for greater harmonic complexity. By detouring away from the pronounced beats of

the oom-pah sound, musical phrases became more linear, more melodically oriented. If ragtime is first and foremost a rhythmic genre, the active gesture of adding weight to the harmonic aspects, an approach utilized by all of classic ragtime’s finest composers, seems to be a strong statement that ragtime is not only about rhythm. This adjustment to the balance between rhythmic and harmonic elements was not just a point of craftsmanship for these composers; it was the primary compositional tool that they used to distinguish themselves from lesser contemporaries.

More importantly, it is that very balance between rhythmic and harmonic complexity that is at the heart of the differences between ragtime and classical composers, regardless of era. Despite writing *Golliwog’s Cakewalk* in 1908, long after more rhythmically complex rags had become well-known in France, Debussy clearly recognized this balance when applying harmonies that were far more unusual than the average American rag.13 Stravinsky went in a different direction with *Ragtime* and *Piano-Rag-Music*, writing music that was much more advanced both harmonically and rhythmically. The metaphorical scale here not only serves to measure a balance, but for many listeners has a total weight capacity that Stravinsky exceeded. The resultant sound likely overwhelmed or disoriented listeners unfamiliar with ragtime, and perception of this music would be based on the impressions of syncopation and sound rather than a feeling of more complete musical understanding.

James Scott and Joseph Lamb utilized the same harmonic language that Joplin did. Since Scott’s phrase structures tended to be more compact, harmonic expansion was slightly more

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13 Rags utilizing syncopation beyond cakewalks were being composed in France as early as 1903, when Alfred Margis published *Cock-Tail*. It is notable that until after 1910 most French syncopated works continued to be cakewalks in all but name, despite the evidence that more complex syncopations were known. Possibly composers found the cakewalk easier to transcribe for bands, which seem to form the bulk of the recordings of popular syncopated music before 1920 in Europe. For more on ragtime composed in France from about 1900-1930, see *Le Ragtime Français*, a webpage by Benjamin Intartaglia, at http://ragtime-france.fr/Ragtime/indexUS.htm.
limited in his rags; similarly, Lamb had more room for harmonic growth, though did not utilize it beyond what Joplin explored.

“Hot” Rhythm

As mentioned in chapter 1, Roland Nadeau succinctly discussed ragtime syncopation as “distinguished by the consistent use of a variety of accents on the weak part of the divided quarter-note unit.”\(^{14}\) Frank J. Gillis discusses in much greater detail the specific aspects of syncopation that make the music “hot,” which he globally defines as “the offbeat phrasing of melodic accents falling between the down beats and the up beats.”\(^{15}\) In his essay Gillis illustrates “hot” rhythms mostly through specific examples of rags by Joplin, Scott, and Lamb, as well as examples by Louis Chauvin, Scott Hayden, Joe Jordan, Arthur Marshall, Joseph Northrup, Tom Turpin, and Percy Wenrich—all successful and popular composers who fit the broader interpretation of “classic ragtime.”

The majority of Gillis’s rhythmic examples are ultimately derivations of the syncopated half of a cakewalk measure, which serve different functions of syncopation depending on where the rhythm is placed in a measure (or when placed across a barline). That rhythm, \(\frac{3}{4}\) (or \(\frac{3}{4}\) \(\frac{3}{4}\) alternately, and other such multiples), may, in the context of a \(\frac{2}{4}\) measure, be situated in any of the ways exhibited in example 3.3 as well as that same rhythmic gesture positioned across a


Example 3.3

The eighth notes (which bear stress as a natural result of not having the same forward momentum of the sixteenth notes) in examples 3.3b and 3.3d bear the sense of falling on the beat rather than against it, but may come across sounding syncopated depending on how it is approached or departed. Also, the syncopation may be extended by inserting additional eighth notes into the pattern, thusly: \( \text{dttg} \) or \( \text{dtttg} \), and so forth, again situated anywhere in the measure or across a barline.

Gillis concludes his essay of “hot rhythm” with a discussion of “secondary ragtime,” where a repeated three-note gesture is set against a duple-metered bass, for example in Joseph Northrup’s *Cannon Ball*.\(^{17}\) None of the rags of Joplin, Scott, or Lamb employs this exact rhythm, and similar repetitive melodic gestures are scarce. Despite not commonly occurring in rags until around 1912, *Cannon Ball* was one of several rags that employed this rhythmic pattern as early as 1905 (example 3.4).

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\(^{16}\) Actually, the first known published cakewalk, *Walking for Dat Cake* (1877) by Dave Braham, only contains polka rhythms, and not the \( \text{dttg} \) rhythm that later became associated with cakewalks. The earliest published cakewalk containing that rhythmic gesture is William Krell’s *The Cake Walk Patrol: Two-Step* (1895), published almost concurrently with the earliest rags. A notable feature of its rhythm is that it uses both \( \text{dttg} \) and \( \text{eqe} \) gestures.

According to ragtime analysts, the three-note gesture against the march bass needs to be repeated at least four times to be explicitly labeled as “Secondary Ragtime.” However, fewer repetitions of the gesture formulate a closely related rhythmic pattern found in many works of the Big Three. Example 3.5, excerpted from Joplin’s *Original Rags*, places a natural accent on the second sixteenth of each three sixteenth-note gesture, but the repetition of both the rhythmic and melodic elements are compelling in their similarity. While it was probably not the catalyst for the “invention” of secondary ragtime style, it demonstrates clearly the way ragtime syncopations are all highly similar.

Examples of near-“secondary ragtime” penned by the Big Three similar to the above example include Joplin’s *Gladiolus Rag*, *Pine Apple Rag*, *Rose Leaf Rag*, and *Searchlight Rag*, Lamb’s *Patricia Rag*, and James Scott’s *Hilarity Rag*, *Ragtime Oriole*, *Paramount Rag*, *Rag
Sentimental, and the unpublished Calliope Rag. Notably, all except for Original Rags were published after 1907, and other than Hilarity Rag, which opens with this gesture, occurrences are in the B- or D-strains, usually the D. The implication is that the B- and D-strains are structural responses thematically derivative of material from the A- and C-strains, and that repetitive gestures lend emphasis as a reiteration of a direct answer.

While the aforementioned works represents some of the finest composing from ragtime’s best pens, secondary ragtime rhythm was still a sparingly used gesture, and one that usually impeded melodic development in favor of rhythmic propulsion. Since melody was of such key importance to these composers, it makes sense that this gesture was used sparingly. Yet these composers were so intuitively sensitive to the music they were writing that the inherent power of repetition in music—when treated with care—was, as for generations of composers before them, a valuable compositional tool.

By extension, it is no accident that the propulsion of “secondary ragtime” forms the backbone of novelty piano’s rhythm later in the 1920s. Composers such as Edward Elzear “Zez” Confrey, Roy Bargy, and even occasionally George Gershwin would use this pattern as a way to sequence a phrase or bridge ideas. The repetition in the melody assisted with the execution of physically difficult gestures, and the polyrhythmic texture with the presence of the left hand gave the music its virtuosic flavor.

When used in the manner of the Big Three, however, the complexity of this rhythmic pattern had the potential to take on a second dimension. Not only could this be heard as repetitive groups of three sixteenth notes each, but it could also initially be perceived as a

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cakewalk rhythm. A second look at the E-strain from *Original Rags* demonstrates the potential to hear the rhythm first as a cakewalk, followed by a surprise (example 3.6).

![Example 3.6 S. Joplin, *Original Rags*, E 1-2.](image)

While ties across the barline were a valid way to syncopate, they were uncommon. Cross-barline ties were rarer still when not involved in the “near-secondary” pattern mentioned above, and even more unusual when occurring across consecutive bars. Notably, James Scott never tied across consecutive bars, and Lamb only did so a couple of times, most effectively in the opening measures of *American Beauty Rag*. Scott Joplin was the only composer of classic rags to have tied over more than two consecutive bars, and the effect is captivating. Examples 3.7 and 3.16 from *Maple Leaf Rag* demonstrate the prolonged sense of syncopation on which a listener could ride, and the level of sophistication at which Joplin manipulated rhythms. The other examples are *Weeping Willow, Gladiolus Rag, Sugar Cane*, and *Swipesy* (in the Joplin-composed D-strain). Notably, *Gladiolus Rag* and *Sugar Cane* are both very closely modeled on *Maple Leaf Rag*, both harmonically and rhythmically.

![Example 3.7 S. Joplin, *Maple Leaf Rag*, A 13-16.](image)
Harmonic Syncopation

In light of the variety of ways in which ragtime syncopation may be ambiguously interpreted, as in examples 3.5 and 3.6, or suspended, as in examples 3.7 and 3.16, and as a way of setting those examples in a harmonic context, a new term should be introduced. “Harmonic syncopation” has been defined by Paul Berliner as, “subtly offsetting pitch selection from the piece’s structure, drawing on pitches that either anticipate the following chord or delay the preceding chord’s resolution.” In a more explicit use of the term, David Huron provides the following example and definition:

In this example, the syncopation is harmonic. Here the syncopation is only indirectly caused by the change in harmony on the second beat. The real cause of the syncopation is the failure of the harmony to also change on the third beat. Harmonic changes on weak beats are (almost always) followed by strong beats that also change harmony. The syncopation arises from breaking this learned norm.

Huron seems to equate the general term “syncopation” with any interruption of linearity. For example, Huron suggests “tonal syncopation” is achieved in the ascending pattern of Do-Mi-Re-Fa-Mi-Sol-Fa-La-Sol-Si-La-Do-Si-Re-Do, compared with the linear, unsyncopated ascent of

19 Paul Berliner, Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 198. The context of Berliner’s definition is set against the methods a performer may use to interrupt a general state of flow within a musical context.

Do-Re-Mi-Fa-Sol-La-Si-Do. He presents explicit definitions for four types of syncopation, “onset, dynamic, harmonic and agogic,” expands the terminology set with the inclusion of “tonal syncopation,” and states that, “in real music, syncopation often combines several forms of syncopations simultaneously—what might be called mixed syncopation.” Fascinatingly, his discussion of the implications of syncopation concludes with the following exploration of Scott Joplin’s many uses of syncopation.

Some forms of syncopation are more common than others. Onset syncopation (omitting strong-beat onsets) and mixed onset-agogic syncopation are the most common forms of syncopation. Harmonic, agogic and tonal syncopation are comparatively rare. Dynamic syncopation is rarely notated in scores, but it appears to be fairly common in actual performance. Syncopation is often combined with other forms of melodic embellishments, such as appoggiaturas. Figure 14.19 [in this dissertation, example 3.17] shows a typical musical example from a piano rag by Scott Joplin.

More generally, figure 14.20 [below, Huron’s numbering] shows a distribution of note onsets from a broad sample of Joplin’s piano rags. The data were gathered from sixty randomly selected measures from works in $\frac{2}{4}$ meter. The eight columns represent successive sixteenth-note positions in the meter for $\frac{2}{4}$. The tallies indicate the number of tone onsets in the corresponding metric position. Tallies represent only the presence of an onset, and ignore the number of notes that might appear in a chord. Separate onset tallies were made for the left and right hands (bass and treble staves), and both tallies are combined in figure 14.20.

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21 Ibid., 297-98.
22 Ibid., 301-02.
…The most likely events have onsets falling on the downbeat at the beginning of the measure. However, the second beat (occurring in the middle of the measure) is not the next most common onset point in these works. Instead, the second half of beats 1 and 2 are more probable onset points. There is one further deviation from the common duple meter hierarchy. Typically, long-short-long patterns are evident at all levels of a (nonsyncopated) metric hierarchy. In the Joplin rags, this pattern is present when comparing metric positions 2 and 4 but it is reversed in positions 6 and 8. That is, in unsyncopated music, one would normally expect metric position 8 to attract more onsets than metric position 6.

Joplin’s syncopation is quite constrained and highly stereotypic. On average, there is only one syncopated event per measure, sometimes two, and rarely three. The *Maple Leaf Rag* notwithstanding, syncopations are not especially common on the downbeat at the beginning of the measure, and the left-hand accompaniment tends to maintain a conservative unsyncopated “stride bass” of alternating bass pitches and chords.

The context of Huron’s argument is entirely set against the backdrop of musical cognition, and processes of the meaning of syncopation (along with many other musical devices) from the perspective of a listener. To correspond with the earlier discussion of “hot rhythm,” Huron’s perspective on syncopation adds layers which are perhaps more complicated than the
compositional process practically allows. However, his point regarding Joplin’s regularity in his usage of syncopation in direct contrast with syncopation itself – defined as an irregularity – helps to frame what he calls “mixed syncopation” as part of classic ragtime’s balancing act.  

With the understanding that there are, according to Huron, several different kinds of syncopation, Berliner’s broader definition of “harmonic syncopation” seems to refer to what Huron calls “mixed syncopation.” Henceforth referring to Berliner’s term, “harmonic syncopation” appears in ragtime constantly, though by Huron’s reckoning, is highly sensitive to the number of different types of syncopation included. Example 3.8 illustrates the usage of the same rhythmic pattern while applying varying degrees of harmonic dissonance.


In example 3.8, Lamb sets the same rhythmic pattern twice on successive strong beats, then offers a near replication of the rhythmic pattern the following measure, noting that in m3 the chord on the final sixteenth of the first beat reemphasizes the I chord immediately preceding. On the first beat of m. 2, an accented lower neighbor resolves upward to the ninth of the dominant.

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23 For a different and fascinating perspective on the correlative relationship between rhythmic and harmonic syncopations, see Marc C. Wooldridge, “Rhythmic Implications of Diatonic Theory: A Study of Scott Joplin’s Piano Ragtime Works (Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Buffalo, 1992), 165-98. Wooldridge makes a comparative study of the melody and accompaniment of *Original Rags* (Joplin), demonstrating the fundamentally different ways in which these two components make use of generated duration sets, and the implications of this difference for syncopation between the two parts.
On beat two, a similarly accented lower neighbor resolves upward to complete the V chord, but this time without the ninth (effectively, the movement from beat one to beat two is of a V⁹ chord collapsing to a V⁷). In m. 3, the lower neighbor this time is merely the leading tone to the tonic. Here, the emphasis shifts from harmonic syncopation to rhythmic; the tonic on the second sixteenth is rooted in the right hand (though never in the bass), but is functionally weakened by the altered position in the fourth sixteenth, effectively usurped by the rhythmic element. Lastly, the circled notes in this example demonstrate Lamb’s sensitivity to resolving the sixth scale degree via a leading line, moving chromatically through scale degrees 6, 7 and 1 before deflating to 5. This line functions somewhat in opposition to the syncopation at play, though becomes an even more effective line with the inclusion of the accented lower neighbors (accented chromatic passing tones) as part of a chromatic ascent.

The Left Hand

After 1909, nearly all of Joplin’s rags incorporate at least one four-measure stretch without an oom-pah left hand, as in example 3.9 from *Euphonic Sounds*. This is similarly true of all twelve of Lamb’s published rags, with the single exception of his first rag, *Sensation* (1908).


The shorter two-measure phrases in James Scott’s rags explain the relative absence of these four measure stretches; yet, across his published output, there is probably an even smaller
percentage of measures with an uninterrupted oom-pah pattern. It was Scott who most frequently elided half cadences, as illustrated in examples 3.10 and 3.11. In many of these instances, as in example 3.11, the oom-pah is notably absent.²⁴

That oom-pah took two primary forms in ragtime: one in which the bass and the chord alternated regularly (oom-pah-oom-pah), and one in which it would alternately reverse order (oom-pah-pah-oom). The regularly alternating form is the most commonly found form across all ragtime compositions, though Joplin broke with this mold early in the development of ragtime. His Maple Leaf Rag commences with an oom-pah-pah-oom bass pattern, and appears to have been the first usage of this pattern—yet another bold move for a composer publishing his first

²⁴ Caplin, *Classical Form*, 51-53 and 99-101. Caplin outlines the subtle differences between non-elided rhythmic continuity and the looser structures of elided cadences in periods. Since continuity of rhythmic motion was such a critical element of ragtime, it is not surprising to see the frequent occurrences of elided cadences.
work in an established, if young, genre. It came into frequent usage across the next two decades, though was still most commonly found in the works of the Big Three, especially Joplin.

These two different forms of oom-pah allowed composers a great deal of flexibility with how and when to shift harmonies. Ordinarily, ragtime harmonies remain stable within a single measure. An oom-pah-oom-pah would reinforce this, giving a clear tonic bass on the downbeat followed by the fifth scale degree on the second beat. In example 3.12, the first two measures function clearly as a I chord, with the bass G’s suggesting an immediate return to tonic on the next downbeat. Meanwhile, the third and fourth measures offer a slightly less stable scenario: by retaining the fifth scale degree’s upbeat position, the weaker inverted dominant chord is placed on the downbeat and the stronger upbeat heralds more urgently a return to the tonic. Furthermore, the bass and chord of each oom-pah are inextricably harmonically linked. Writing an offbeat chord of a different harmony than any implied by the strong-beat bass would be jarring to the pattern.

![Example 3.12](image)

The oom-pah-pah-oom approach allows for much greater harmonic flexibility within the measure, and the final offbeat of each measure may either corroborate the upbeat or disagree with it. In example 3.13, the second offbeats function alternately to retain the harmony and to dismiss it. Also, since this upbeat most often acts as a leading tone, the sense that the last moment of a measure really belongs to the next measure departs radically from the feeling of the closed harmonic quality of oom-pah-oom-pah. This instability of the final upbeat greatly expands the harmonic choices a composer could make; it was used not only as a leading tone to
the five of a dominant, but as a leading tone basically to any other chord. Even the most remote
destination approached this way is still less jarring than moving without a leading tone anywhere
other than ii, vi, IV or V₃.

![Example 3.13]

Other left hand patterns existed, such asepam|epam (bass-chord-bass | bass-chord-bass,
found for example in Joplin’s Stoptime Rag and Scott’s Efficiency Rag), oreeemme (bass
only, moving stepwise, often descending from a tonic downbeat, like that found in Arthur
Marshall’s Kinklets or in ascending sequential clusters in Lamb’s Patricia Rag), but these
usually exceeded the role of pure harmonic function. They were primarily used a measure or two
at a time, not across entire four measure phrases, and were diversions or distractions from the
main two patterns.

These primary two left-hand patterns are as integral to ragtime as the aforementioned
right-hand syncopation patterns. Later, as jazz displaced ragtime, this fairly rigid approach to the
left hand pattern was one of the first attributes of ragtime to be reinvented and enhanced.25

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25 Henry Martin illustrates some of the differences between ragtime and stride in Table 1 of his article, “Balancing
Composition and Improvisation in James P. Johnson’s ‘Carolina Shout’,” Journal of Music Theory 49/2 (2005), 278.
Examples relating to left hand techniques are in italics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Stride Takes from Ragtime</th>
<th>What Stride Adds to Ragtime</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“March” bass with low octaves alternating with midrange</td>
<td>Faster tempo and harmonic rhythm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chords</td>
<td>“Tricks” (flashy techniques)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-bar sections called “strains,” usually three or four to</td>
<td>Non-doubled notes and occasional tenths in the bass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a rag, built duply from two-bar units</td>
<td>Bluesier “crush” tones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasional interludes (usually 4 bars), often introducing</td>
<td>“Shouts” (shorter ideas probably derived from the ring-shout)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>new strains</td>
<td>More linear melodies with less syncopated ragtime “pivoting”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modulation (often to the subdominant) at the “trio”</td>
<td>Introduction of “backbeats” or “change-steps” in the bass</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Scott Joplin’s *Maple Leaf Rag* (1899)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strain</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Measures</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Tonality</td>
<td>A♭ major</td>
<td>A♭ major</td>
<td>A♭ major</td>
<td>A♭ major</td>
<td>A♭ major</td>
<td>D♭ major</td>
<td>D♭ major</td>
<td>A♭ major</td>
<td>A♭ major</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The form (strain structure) of Joplin’s *Maple Leaf Rag* is as follows:

||:A:||:B:||:A:||:C:||:D:||. The piece is in A-flat major, and each strain remains in the home key except for the C-strain, which is in the subdominant of D-flat major. That Joplin returns to the home key after modulating at the Trio is an unusual compositional choice by ragtime conventions, though not so uncommon for Joplin.26

In standard fashion, each strain consists of four four-bar phrases; it is worth noting that each phrase is cadentially closed off. (As mentioned earlier, elided cadences comprise a healthy percentage of the culminations of ragtime phrases. Despite this elision, each phrase is still clearly distinguishable from the next, often for as obvious a reason as the repetition of the phrase.) More interestingly, of the sixteen four-measure phrases that comprise the work, thirteen move from dominant to tonic. The only three exceptions are clearly exceptions of necessity. The first phrase of the A-strain moves from I to V, clearly with the need of establishing a tonality. The first phrase of the D-strain moves from IV to I, but this is necessary to retonicize A-flat; the third phrase of the same strain is an exact clone of the first. The only other means of breaking up the redundancy of the V to I movement was readily available by the reprise of the A-strain following

26 Among Scott Joplin’s rags, twenty-five end in the subdominant, and fifteen return to the home key. Of those that end in the subdominant, all arrive in the new key at the beginning of the C-strain. Of those that end in the home key, most travel through a subdominant C-strain and return to the home key in the D-strain. A few modulate to other keys in the C-strain, such as a relative minor or other more remote key, but still return to the home key in the D-strain. A single anomaly is *The Cascades* (1904), which modulates down a whole step for the C-strain and then to bIII (the subdominant of the key of the C-strain) for the D-strain.
the B-strain; also, since the C-strain is in D-flat major, the V-I motion is less apparent than the key change itself.

As harmonically restricted as *Maple Leaf Rag* appears, Joplin does write into the music a few gestures that show both his interest in classical harmony and a keen ear for voice-leading. In the A-strain, m. 5, he begins a phrase with a stressed flat-VI chord, which alternates with a V chord, and resolves in m. 7 not on I but on i (example 3.14). In mm. 1-4 of the B-strain, the movement from V-I supports a chromatic descent in the melodic voice (example 3.17). And in the C-strain, from the end of m. 8 through m. 16, Joplin cycles through the long chain of secondary dominants rooted on steps 3 (briefly; labeled as V/vi), 6, and 2 proceeding to the dominant and tonic (example 3.15). A resultant characteristic of secondary dominant chains such as this are two voices which descend chromatically in parallel. While it is speculatively doubtful that Joplin would have been aware of this phenomenon in a technical sense, it is proof at the very least of Joplin’s sensitivity to the sound of excellent voice leading.


Progressions of this complexity had never before been seen in ragtime compositions. Perhaps most impressively of all, and in something that would become one of Joplin’s compositional trademarks, at the end of the piece he uses a chromatic descent from the sixth to third scale degree in an inner voice, here appearing also as part of a gesture of chromatic contrary motion (example 3.16).27


From a structural standpoint, this chromatic descent bears several interesting traits. The inner voice is set against an A-flat every time except for the B-flat in the cadential dominant (above the marked D-flat); it is the primary melodic line in motion, though not the top voice.

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(Usually melodic movement in an inner voice serves the main melody; here it draws the attention of the listener.) The repetition of the A-flat notwithstanding, each of the circled notes is still a chord tone. The most interesting of these chord tones occurs when the inner voice reaches F-flat, and the resultant chord is an inverted French augmented sixth (iii°).

In the B-strain (example 3.17), the descending line of the upper voice falls first three times by half-steps, then twice by whole steps and finally once by a minor third (whereupon that final minor third is repeated, or emphasized). The careful symmetry of this pacing may readily be viewed as another example of Joplin’s use of chromaticism to control a moving line. In contrast with the previous two examples where the inner voices were all chord tones, the primary (marked) melodic gesture in this phrase is comprised primarily of non-chord tones; as mentioned earlier, this is a clear example of harmonic syncopation. The real craftsmanship comes with the smooth descending line working as a pacifying agent in the midst of this otherwise harmonically and rhythmically dissonant phrase. (Note that the descending line expands: the circled notes show the chromatic movement, the squared notes show the broadening into diatonic descent, and the notes marked by a hexagon denote a leap out of the line, notably at the end of a phrase. Also, the sixth scale degree at the end of the phrase pointedly does not resolve.) Meanwhile, note that all of the notes that are not part of this descending line (the inner voice notes) are all chord tones.

While the first half of measure 2 in the C-strain may be the most dissonant moment in the piece, what was earlier discussed as a Joplin-esque four-measure phrase structure is here invoked to suggest that the F in the bass is still nothing more than a passing tone from the G-flat in measure 1 to the E-flat in the second half of measure 2 (example 3.18). In fact, all dissonances in every Joplin piano rag are either approached or followed by stepwise motion.

![Example 3.18 S. Joplin, Maple Leaf Rag, C 1-2.](image)

Yet the potent combination of conventional dissonances set on downbeats and other strong beats is a way of contributing to the rhythmic dissonance of the rag (harmonic syncopation). It is furthermore a way of stratifying the rhythmic dissonances: a dissonant chord on a strong beat that is either preceded or followed by a consonant chord on a weak beat serves directly to weaken the impact of the consonant chord. While the tonality is never in question, the increased instability serves to actively propel the music towards a resolution rather than comfortably expound upon a tonic which is already understood.

The Maple Leaf Rag, like most rags, is set in 2/4 time, with a tempo marking of “Tempo di marcia” (the tempo marking being quite possibly an editorial addition by the publisher John Stark). As mentioned above, the left hand of Joplin’s opening measures begins with the oompah-pah-oom eighth-note pattern. The melodic movement is almost constantly eighth and sixteenth notes; only four times in the entire piece does a beat exist with a single held quarter note, and in each of these instances, the quarter note is arrived upon by a syncopated tie: in the
A-strain, m. 2 and 4 the rhythm is \(\begin{array}{l}
\text{mm. 1-2 of the A-Strain constitute a basic idea, and} \\
\text{mm. 3-4 are the repetition of that basic idea); in the D-strain, m. 3 is } \\
\text{and m. 5 is } \\
\end{array}\) 
Joplin’s melodic rhythm is utterly in keeping with traditional ragtime rhythm, yet the frequent deviations to his left hand from that most basic oom-pah-oom-pah pattern join the many details normally taken for granted that set Joplin’s writing apart. *Maple Leaf Rag* was not merely a great success; it was an early high-water mark of musical composition within the genre.

It should here be considered that Joplin’s publisher, John Stark, recognized the quality of Joplin’s craftsmanship, and for his “House of Classic Rags” publishing business enterprisingly made the following statements (along with many similar statements) in advertisements and on the backs of sheet music:

*Maple Leaf Rag* marks an era in music composition. It has throttled and silenced those who oppose syncopations. It is played by the cultured of all nations and is welcomed in the drawing rooms and boudoirs of good taste.

We mean just what we say when we call these instrumental rags classic. They are the perfection of type. “The glass of fashion and the mold of form.” They have the genius of melody and the scholarship of harmonization. They are used in the drawing rooms and parlors of culture.29

The term “classic rag” was, if only a marketing tactic, clearly intended to target a more musically educated consumer. Still, Stark was an astute enough businessman to recognize that identifying any product with higher class than its competition would boost its sales. Thus, while Stark may legitimately have been publishing rags of greater musical quality, this should not be taken to mean that he was specifically targeting a classical music audience.

While debates over the value of ragtime raged as hotly as the music grew in popularity, the subtleties of Joplin’s music may have been appreciated, but were not specifically identified.

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The classical musicians of Joplin’s time were not to be found performing this music, though many quietly expressed taking pleasure in ragtime. Thus ragtime, both high-class and low, was created for (and consumed by) the widest possible audience, and it was practiced, danced, and listened to in parlors and salons, saloons and brothels, hotels and restaurants, and occasionally concert halls.

Joseph Lamb’s *Top Liner Rag* (1916)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strain</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>Bridge</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Primary Tonality</td>
<td>A♭ major</td>
<td>A♭ major</td>
<td>A♭ major</td>
<td>A♭ major</td>
<td>A♭ major</td>
<td>D♭ major</td>
<td>D♭ major</td>
<td>D♭ major</td>
<td>D♭ major</td>
<td>D♭ major</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If *Maple Leaf Rag* is a good example of Joplin at his young and innovative best, *Top Liner Rag* represents Joseph Lamb at the peak of his maturity. The work has been called “one of the three greatest rags ever written,” “the most perfect classic rag ever composed,” and was apparently Lamb’s own personal favorite. It was also one of the last rags Lamb published with John Stark, followed only by *Patricia Rag* later in 1916 and *Bohemia Rag* all the way in 1919. It is worth noting here that Lamb published only a dozen rags, but also that they were all published between 1908 (after most of ragtime’s best known composers were well established) and 1919 (around the time enthusiasm for ragtime began its relatively sudden and significant decline).

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31 Lamb did write rags and other works for piano prior to 1908, some of which were published in Toronto. He also wrote roughly another thirty rags that were not published until much later, including some (like *The Alaskan Rag* included in the fourth edition of *They All Played Ragtime*) written as late as 1959. Evidence suggests that composing was genuinely pleasurable to Lamb, and that publishing was of secondary importance. Ted Tjaden maintains a website that hosts many of Lamb’s more obscure works <http://www.ragtimepiano.ca/rags/lamb.htm>. For more details on Lamb’s interest in and cessation of ragtime composition, see Carol J. Binkowski, *Joseph F. Lamb: A Passion for Ragtime* (Jefferson, N. C.: McFarland, 2012).

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Like *Maple Leaf Rag*, the structure of *Top Liner* is ||:A::B::A::C::D::||, with the addition of a four-measure bridge preceding the C-strain. In those twelve rags published by Stark, Lamb rarely deviated from the ||:A::B::A::C::D::|| structure, and those deviations were structurally minor. The exceptions are: *Champagne Rag*, where an unrepeated D-strain (which functions more as a bridge than as independent music) is followed by one final statement of the A-strain transposed to the subdominant; *Contentment Rag*, where the C-strain is not repeated; *Nightingale Rag* and *Cleopatra Rag* (written and published consecutively), where the D-strain is replaced by an unrepeated B-strain; and *Bohemia Rag*, where the Trio section is an unrepeated C-strain followed by a hybrid eight-measure D-strain and sixteen-measure C-strain (which is repeated). All of Lamb’s rags, like most others in the genre, move to the subdominant at the beginning of the C-strain (the Trio) and remain there through the conclusion of the work.

Also in common with *Maple Leaf Rag* (and in mild opposition to many other rags of this era) is a left-hand part in *Top Liner* that avoids one of the standard patterns. In this case a steady left-hand pulse is discarded entirely in favor of the less insistent sound of varied rhythms. At first, in mm. 1–2, the left hand presents a common type of ragtime syncopation, a 3-3-2 grouping of sixteenth-note durations. What is unusual, however, is the alignment of both hands in this same pattern (example 3.19). Rather than hearing the melodic syncopation against a stable left hand, this rhythmic agreement actually lessens the impact of the rhythmic gesture and focuses the listener’s attention on melodic and harmonic elements.

This was not the first rag to utilize this rhythmic pattern (which was often referred to as a habanera rhythm), but among the compositions of the Big Three, it was one of only a few. Scott Joplin’s collaboration with Louis Chauvin, *Heliotrope Bouquet* begins this way (example 3.20). (This rag, whose A- and B-strains are attributed to Chauvin, was unlike anything Joplin had composed in several regards, such as opening on the secondary dominant, but the habanera rhythm later appears in Joplin rags such as *Wall Street Rag* and *Solace: A Mexican Serenade*.)


It is notable that ragtime strains usually are independent, autonomous entities, even in the finest rags.³² (In 1997, Martin Spitznagel won a piano based on a competition in which MIDI-recorded strains from various rags were transposed, adjusted for tempo and assembled to create a

new work.)\(^{33}\) It may be possible that this very independence of thematic material between strains assisted public digestion of ragtime. Since a rag is already a brief piece, usually between three and five minutes long, the formal layout of rags (both folk and classic) allows listeners to hear a sixteen measure strain twice (thus offering a chance to fully absorb the content) and then to move to entirely fresh material (again repeated for clarity and understanding).\(^{34}\)

Yet in Lamb’s *Top Liner Rag*, there is a real sense of thematic continuity between the strains. Scale degree three is approached from the tonic one octave below in both the A- and B-strains (examples 3.21 and 3.22) through a generally stepwise motion introduced by a chromatic gesture. Not only are both representative gestures of rising lines, but the impact of the culminations of both lines are deliberately weakened by a contrary descending voice in the bass.\(^{35}\) In the line which rises more than two octaves in the A-strain, Lamb reaches all the way to G\(^6\) (the leading tone), yet does not resolve that leading tone. That G is a truly beautiful accented upper neighbor non-chord tone crowning a dim./V\(^7\).

\(^{33}\) Robert Winter, *Crazy for Ragtime* [computer program], (Calliope Media, L.P.), 1996. Despite all strains coming from rags which are generally acknowledged to be quality works, the rag Spitznagel arranged from these disparate parts yielded a greater sense of unity than any of the rags from which it was assembled. This is a particularly salient point when one then looks forward to the compositions of the 1960s and 70s, where the implementation of a broader harmonic palate produced a greater sense of individuality.

\(^{34}\) While Berlin argues that, “the various themes of a piece are not related, and motivic resemblances …are usually insignificant” (Ibid., 94), David Jasen makes the reasonable observation that, "most ragtime composers wrote in one sustained mood. Joplin was the only one to use moods of varying intensity in one composition" (*Rags and Ragtime*, 112.) This last statement is certainly subjective, but makes the point that programmatically written works such as Joplin’s *Wall Street Rag* and *Magnetic Rag* were the exception; and, despite the lack of thematic connection between strains in most rags, a character and tempo did still bring cohesiveness to most rags.

\(^{35}\) A detailed (if somewhat romanticized) account of Lamb’s familiarity of the works of, and his meeting with, Scott Joplin can be found in Carol J. Binkowski, *Joseph F. Lamb: a Passion for Ragtime* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2012), 70–81. The observation of the importance of contrary motion may be attributed to Lamb’s oft cited 1907 meeting with Joplin. Binkowski states, “Joplin only made one suggestion regarding the music that evening or, as far as it is known, at any time thereafter. In *Dynamite Rag*, he suggested that Lamb consider re-working the octaves in the left hand in contrary, rather than parallel, motion to those in the right hand. Lamb tried it and liked it. Otherwise, no record exists of any mentor or teacher type of relationship of this sort. *Dynamite Rag* was published many years later as *Joe Lamb’s Old Rag*. The title was changed in 1959, and Lamb humorously commented that ‘in view of *Scott Joplin’s New Rag*, why can’t I call it *Joe Lamb’s Old Rag* for it certainly is old – it was written in 1907.’ Joplin’s suggestion of the contrary motion remained in the published edition.
Berlin also points out the frequently occurring $V_3^4$ non-tonic opening chord of many ragtime strains (especially B-strains); Lamb thus achieves both thematic continuity and a familiar ragtime gesture in a single stroke, even as he enters into a broad and uninterrupted eight-measure phrase atypically advanced compared to most other rags.\footnote{Berlin, \textit{Ragtime: A Musical and Cultural History}, 94-95.}


In addition to Lamb’s documented interest and familiarity with the work of Joplin, as well as his encounter with Joplin himself, there is a significant body of compositional evidence that Lamb incorporated some of the more sophisticated devices that Joplin favored. Like Joplin, Lamb was consistently sensitive to good voice-leading, including chromatic inner-voice movements. In a direct parallel with Joplin’s final four measures of \textit{Maple Leaf Rag}, the final four measures of the B-strain of \textit{Top Liner} feature a chromatic descent from F-flat to C distributed throughout several inner voices (example 3.23).
In the concluding four measures of the A-strain, and in another gesture of thematic continuity, Lamb takes the falling inner voice even further, this time commencing on F-natural (example 3.24); this time he maintains the line through its initial appearance in the top voice into its Joplin-esque home in the alto.

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The F-flat is a prominent feature across *Top Liner Rag*, and more generally, the use of flat-VI plays a significant role, appearing in all four strains. In a final gesture of thematic unity, and in a stunning display of compositional virtuosity, the final five measures of *Top Liner* feature a rising line in direct functional opposition to the falling flat-VI-III line which rises from B-flat (natural-VI) all the way up to a D-flat an octave higher, crossing triumphantly from the bass all the way up to the top voice (example 3.25).

![Example 3.25 J. Lamb, Top Liner Rag, D 12-16.](image)

Though Lamb’s subtle craftsmanship may be explored in much greater detail, his harmonic structural vocabulary remains in keeping with the highly diatonic (and overwhelmingly major) approach utilized in most other works of classic ragtime. With the exception of a few rags written in mild parodies of other folk styles such as George Botsford’s *Russian Rag* (a take-off on Sergei Rachmaninoff’s famous C-sharp Minor Prelude, op. 3, no. 2), Abe Holzmann’s *Flying Arrow* (featuring pentatonic runs stereotyping Native Americans) and even Joseph Lamb’s own *Bohemia Rag* (with its distinct gypsy flavor not unlike Mozart’s *Rondo alla Turca*), diatonicism was the commonly spoken language; it was Lamb’s, too. Noteworthy is Lamb’s use of such intricate harmonic devices and voice-leading while remaining so structurally conservative.
Conclusions

Classical listeners are better exposed to longer musical thoughts and thematic visitations and manipulations. As will be discussed in chapter 4 in greater detail, nearly all of the ragtime works by composers of classical idioms since about 1950 contain thematic elements and gestures that link the different strains. (Unlike classic rags, strains in many revival-era rags aren’t necessarily sequestered from each other via a cadence.)

Before proceeding, it is important to recognize that some combination of the core elements found in most rags and the special elements that set apart the rags of Joplin, Scott and Lamb were taken together by the composers of the revival. Aspects which were basic tenets of ragtime composition were occasionally discarded. Devices that were special or unique to the finest works were appropriated and assimilated with both the basic tenets and entirely new perspectives. The Big Three may have been the exceptional ragtime composers of their time, but they became the standard point of departure for those who later visited the genre. The opportunity to observe the cream of classic rags (and the compositional techniques within) rise to the top was a luxury that the contemporary classical composers to the Big Three were not afforded.
CHAPTER FOUR

Analyses of Five Rags Written Since 1967

Ragtime, a beautiful, classical, syncopated music from the turn of the century, has turned out to have a new fascination for composers nurtured in our century’s subsequent modernism. Imagination, as well as tonality and rhythmic vitality, could run rampant: why not have fun and sentimentality? It’s very avant-garde!

-William Albright

Revival Era Ragtime

The musicians who contributed to the ragtime revival were also part of a community that had the perspective of seeing everything ragtime bred. As they wrote new music in an archaic mold, evidence of composers’ awareness of ragtime’s stylistic heirs was often—and unavoidably—present. Elements of stride bass, novelty piano technique, and jazz harmony made appearances despite an apparent deliberateness to keep them out of that very same music for the sake of authenticity.

Elements of classical music were also present, and those elements traverse several hundred years of compositional tradition. It is fitting that classical musicians were the people who first broached the idea of compositionally reviving this outmoded form. Just as Mendelssohn brought Bach back to prominent attention early in the nineteenth century, and as Prokofiev, Stravinsky and composers of the Second Viennese School brought back into harmonic and structural focus the forms and ideas of the (First) Viennese School, composers such as William Bolcom, William Albright, George Rochberg, Eugene Kurtz, and Carter Pann

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1 Complete scores of the five primary works discussed in this chapter are found in Appendix A, beginning on page 162.
3 See note 18 in chapter 2.
brought ragtime back to life only with a considerably wide array of musical experience erstwhile obtained. What had been heard in the intervening years between the demise of ragtime and its “rediscovery” could not be unheard, and its effect on ragtime composition of this time was significant.

Of critical interest here are the choices these composers made on what would remain from classic ragtime and what would be jettisoned, and on what external ideas were and were not admissible. Further, the reasons for these inclusions and exclusions were guided by both musical and extra-musical forces. This chapter focuses on the musical issues.

Classical Composers Writing Rags

The following analyzed works were drawn from a relatively narrow pool of prospective candidates. Although dozens of composers active in the world of classical music (and on its fringes) have written works that in some way incorporate elements of ragtime (or that use the word “rag” or “ragtime” in their titles), a majority of these were written out of a general rather than a comprehensive understanding of the intricacies of ragtime. The composers included here stand out as being intimately familiar with the form, and in some cases were directly involved in pivotal events in the ragtime revival, including the events that led to Joshua Rifkin’s recording of Scott Joplin and the scoring of the movie *The Sting*. They were also writing music that evidenced attributes of their own personal styles, and music that was in various ways distinct from the restrictions and habits of classic ragtime style.

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Among the five composers investigated in this chapter, William Bolcom stands out as being the most acutely aware (at least as evidenced by his compositions) of what was necessary for a rag to qualify as “authentic.” While out of his twenty-five rags for solo piano, only *Seabiscuits* follows the $\text{A:|B:|A|C|D:|}$ form precisely, with an eight-measure introduction and four-measure coda, all but a few are in closely related forms. Those near-departures of form, which often return to the A- and B-strains to close the work, include $\text{A:|B:|C:|A-or-B|}$, or $\text{A:|B:|A|C:|A-or-B|}$ forms such as what James Scott did in *Kansas City Rag* and Joseph Lamb utilized in *Nightingale Rag*, respectively.\(^5\) While the earlier composers usually returned to the B-strain when returning to earlier thematic material, Bolcom often closes works with an A-strain in structural and harmonic emulation of the recapitulation in sonata form. Bolcom also employs eight-measure strains akin to what Scott Joplin wrote in *The Ragtime Dance* and *Stoptime Rag*, and strains exceeding sixteen measures, a technique in classic rags evident perhaps singularly in the twenty-four measure C-strain (a likely reference to the 12-bar blues) in Joplin’s *Magnetic Rag*.\(^6\)

William Albright also uses traditional ragtime forms verbatim, with a similar propensity for $\text{A:|B:|C:|A|}$ structure. However, his left-hand parts rarely reflect classic ragtime’s harmonically based oom-pahs. Instead, he writes left-hand parts that were highly melodic, or in the style of Harlem stride, replete with backbeats.\(^7\) Compared to classic rags, where according to Roland Nadeau “the proportion of syncopated to nonsyncopated measures is roughly four to

\(^5\) See Bolcom’s “Graceful Ghost Rag” and *Last Rag, The Eternal Feminine, Raggin’ Rudi*, respectively. For a complete compilation of the forms of the twenty-two published rags of William Bolcom, see Yeung Yu, “A Style Analysis of William Bolcom’s Complete Rags for Piano” (DMA dissertation, University of Cincinnati, 2007).

\(^6\) Ibid. Eight-measure strains occur in *California Porcupine Rag, Rag-Tango, Knight Hubert, Glad Rag, Epitaph for Louis Chauvin, Incineratorag, Old Adam, The Serpent’s Kiss, and Lost Lady Rag, Bolcom’s Poltergeist, Rag-Tango, and The Serpent’s Kiss* all contain strains that exceed sixteen measures. He also frequently composed strains in which the four concluding (cadential) measures are simply repeated or echoed with slight alteration.

\(^7\) See chapter 3, note 24, Table 1.
one,” Albright’s rags seem to have relatively fewer syncopated measures. Furthermore, Albright seems to syncopate less often within a measure, almost as if syncopation is something to be savored.\(^8\)

Although Eugene Kurtz may appear to be somewhat of an outlier compared to the other composers in this chapter, his single contribution to the ragtime genre stands out as both extremely progressive and highly sensitive to some of the ideals of classic ragtime. Further, Kurtz is tied to the other composers here as the dedicatee of a work by William Albright, *The Queen of Sheba*, written in 1968, the same year as Kurtz’s *Animations* was completed – and reciprocally dedicated to Albright. A couple of other works by Kurtz do include some traditional elements of American music, such as *Logo I* for piano, clarinet and ensemble, in which the “Breakdown” section alludes to a mid-nineteenth century American dance; the bass (when stable) is the oom-pah pattern of a march bass. (It also briefly quotes Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue*.)

George Rochberg, in addition to having been at one point a composition teacher to Bolcom, frequently performed in jazz nightclubs throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s. Though ragtime was out of style, a few pieces, including *Maple Leaf Rag*, never left the repertory. They were performed in the styles of Harlem stride pianists, but were devolving into a near-caricaturized state, ripening the arrival of the honky-tonk pianists.\(^9\) Rochberg bore witness to this, even as the jazz styles he played were more suited to the hot-five combos popular at the

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time. Like Kurtz, Rochberg was not a prolific composer of ragtime music, though his background in the style was considerably more extensive and ingrained. A handful of his other works relate to ragtime in less distinct ways, such as the third movement of his Duo for Oboe and Bassoon, in which the march-like bassoon provides a stable platform upon which the oboe can syncopate. Rochberg’s flirtation with tonality was realized entirely by 1975, when he composed the completely diatonic *Trancendental Variations* for string orchestra.

Carter Pann represents a newer generation of composers incorporating ragtime into their compositions. He is part of a general trend since the 1970s (when Rochberg encouraged composers to realize that tonal composing was not out of bounds) that embraced collage and pastiche. Pann’s own composition lessons with Bolcom allowed him to realize that he had been pursuing other composers’ styles, and his ragtime genre compositions reflect this to varying degrees.¹⁰ His earliest two rags, *The Bills*, are at least as technically reflective of the works of Bolcom and Albright as the works of the classic ragtime composers. From Bolcom in particular, Pann learned to value voice leading, and consciously brings the listener’s attention to this.¹¹ Ultimately, Pann’s inclusion in this dissertation is representative of the notion that writing rags does not need to be a reflection of the tenets of classic rags (and the composers specifically associated with these works). Rather, Pann’s music supports the notion that “ragtime is a term that is just written above all of those [stride, novelty, etc.] to be a larger category.”¹² Composers can now draw on a ragtime canon that includes not just the works of Joplin, Scott, and Lamb, but also Bolcom, Albright, and the other composers (and distinct tangential styles) of the ragtime revival.

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¹⁰ Pann, interview. See Appendix B, 228. “I had been needing to write music, and I was good at writing in antiquated styles. So, I didn’t feel any guilt or any real push [to be a modernist composer].”
¹¹ Ibid, 233.
¹² Ibid, 232.
On the Distinction of the Five Pieces Selected

The pieces discussed in this chapter were chosen both for their relevance to the ragtime revival and for their compositional attributes. Each composer uniquely contributed to the flourishing of ragtime activity in a culture ripe to consume it (regardless of whether that culture was familiar with ragtime’s origins or social context). William Bolcom’s contributions to the revival were directly linked to Rudi Blesh (whom many consider to be the revival’s primary catalyst), William Albright’s and George Rochberg’s link was to Bolcom, Kurtz’s link was to Albright, and Pann’s link was to Albright and Bolcom both. There were of course other rags written, and other connections to be drawn—many by the conservative pens discussed in chapter 2—but until the revival reached its fevered pitch following the release of Rifkin’s recording, there appear to be few if any rags written by those not in some way directly linked to that core group of Rudi Blesh, Trebor Tichenor, and Max Morath, Bolcom, and Albright.¹³ (Besides Blesh’s obvious impact through They All Played Ragtime and his academic work and association with Bolcom, Tichenor was the person responsible for sourcing the vast majority of sheet music for the musicians who were becoming interested in ragtime. Morath was responsible for setting the tone of ragtime performance, and also for being a strong social link between many involved in ragtime work. Together, Blesh, Tichenor and Morath served as the primary facets to those exploring ragtime in the 1960s.)

Selecting one composition that best represents each of the composers discussed here presents various challenges. Eugene Kurtz’s “Rag” was the only syncopated work that he composed, as was Rochberg’s “Toccata-Rag.” They contribute different aspects to the narrative,

¹³ See chapter 2, pgs. 3-7.
however: Kurtz’s work represents a personal correspondence with Albright, and pits contemporary ideas (dodecaphonic structures) against archaic ideas (ragtime), while Rochberg’s piece sought to liberate ragtime as much from its formal structures as he did to liberate composers of mathematically derived music from their formulas. The result for Kurtz was ragtime straining to break free of contemporary constructs, and for Rochberg, free, contemporary thinking trying to break free of ragtime.

Albright’s “Nightmare Fantasy Rag” was selected for this study in part because of the composer’s own admission of extreme syncopated decadence; after several years of writing rag-correspondences with Bolcom, Albright viewed his Dream Rags as well as Bolcom’s Ghost Rags as the point where both composers exhausted the practical limits of the form. Bolcom’s “Graceful Ghost Rag,” on the other hand, is arguably Bolcom’s best-known work of any type. Despite Albright’s suggestion that it was a culmination, it is a work quite accessible to listeners. The dissonances contained within are rarely more than well-structured “blue” chords; none are jarring or especially challenging to hear and viscerally understand.

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, Carter Pann embodies the new attitudes and directions of ragtime composition. Not only did he hear ragtime as he was growing up – especially endless performances of The Entertainer once The Sting was released – but as a young classical composer and musician he grew up hearing the sound of some of Bolcom’s best known rags, such as “Graceful Ghost,” in the context of a body of music already in circulation. In a sense, Pann’s rags are the nostalgia rags of the revival itself, a reflection of (and tribute to) the activities of classical composers of the ’60s and ’70s who were immersed in the revival. His

14 Before playing Bolcom’s Ghost Rags at a concert in New York on December 16, 1979, Paul Jacobs spoke of “Graceful Ghost Rag”: “This [piece] you may have already heard. I have students who have never heard of Beethoven, but sometimes if I use “Graceful Ghost” as a demonstration, they go, ‘yeah, we know that.’ So, “Graceful Ghost” has already been played and published.” See Stravinsky Music for Four Hands, Paul Jacobs and Ursula Oppens (pianos), Nonesuch Records and Arbiter of Cultural Traditions, ARBITER 155, CD (2008).
Upstate is similar to Bolcom’s Graceful Ghost, in that it is a relatively conservative rendering of the ragtime style (at least in comparison to Pann’s other works). Yet it resonates with complete understanding of the style, and while it is discreetly formally unique, it is also very accessible.

There are many other noteworthy composers of rags written between the mid-’60s and the present, yet ultimately no other works seem to exist that so neatly represent both classic ragtime composition and new ideas in classical music.

George Rochberg’s Carnival Music (1971) V. “Toccata-Rag”

| Strain | Introduction 1 | Introduction 2 | A | B | B’ | C | C’ | D | E | F | A’ | C” | Coda |
|--------|---------------|----------------|---|---|----|---|----|---|---|---|----|----|----|-----|
| Length in Measures | 2 | 3 | 12 | 16 | 16 | 8 | 8 | 12 | 45 | 48 | 6+ | 12 | 4 |
| Measure Number | 1 | 3 | 6 | 18 | 34 | 50 | 50 | 58 | 70 | 115 | 163 | 169 | 181 |
| Primary Tonality | B Major | sequential | F Major | F Major | F Major | B Major | B Major | B Major | indeterminate | indeterminate | F Major | B Major | B Major |

Although Carnival Music (and its concluding movement of interest here, “Toccata-Rag”) was composed a bit later than many of the works written by the revival’s most prominent composers, its composer George Rochberg is representative of an earlier generation of composers, many of whom were bound to the aesthetics of the Second Viennese School and the composers of the Darmstadt School. Rochberg’s oft-cited reversal of compositional method and purpose was directly influential on his students Bolcom and Albright: Bolcom confirmed that Rochberg helped him realize that tonal composition in classical music was still possible, even if it was against the grain of the current academic compositional trends.15

By writing Carnival Music, Rochberg was contributing to classical music the compositional freedom he had been advocating for the preceding six years; this was his

15 Bolcom, interview. See Appendix B, 213.
contribution to ragtime, but was also a work that distinctly employed many compositional
techniques “invented” (or at least identified) over the past century. Preceding the fifth and final
movement of Carnival Music are the following four movements: I. “Fanfares and March”; II.
“Blues”; III. Largo doloroso; IV. “Sfumato,” with each movement drawing on clearly
recognizable compositional techniques.

The work was first conceived in June, 1968, to be based on thematic material from J. S.
Bach’s Sinfonia (Three-Part Invention) no. 9 in F Minor, BWV 795; however, following some
sketch work, the project lay dormant until April, 1971. At that time the work was recast, and the
majority (and conclusion) of compositional work took place in mid-June of that same year. That Rochberg chose ragtime as the predominant style to crown the work is most interesting: the
“Toccata-Rag” has been performed far more frequently as an independent movement than
Carnival has been played in its entirety, despite the admonition of the work’s dedicatee that the
final movement of the work requires the preceding four movements in order to be fully
understood and appreciated (and especially that the “Sfumato” movement, not “Toccata-Rag,” is
the one most closely derived from Rochberg’s initial idea). Ultimately, only the blues A-strain
and some of the material from the F-strain would utilize the motive from Bach’s Sinfonia, which
Rochberg then put through various working permutations and paired with the permutations of the
B-A-C-H motive (B-flat – A-natural – C-natural – B-natural) before he commenced
compositional work (examples 4.1 and 4.2).

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16 George Rochberg, Carnival Music suite for piano, June 1971”--Additional t.p., dated July 22, 1968, George
Rochberg manuscripts, American Music Collection, JPB 86-18 no. 46, New York Public Library.
The work’s two measure Introduction (the first of two introductory gestures) manages to quote Rachmaninoff’s Prelude in C-sharp Minor, op. 3, no. 2, establish a strong mood of ragtime/stride, and function tonally without revealing the tonic, all underneath a melody which is as simple as a minor scale descent from the fifth degree to the first (example 4.3). In the preceding movements, all quotations and implied gestures were distinct references to a single composer or idea, but Rochberg begins the final movement with a statement informing the listener that the music will not only be fast and exciting, but it will be akin to an extended stretto, with a generous pileup of inferred ideas from the earlier movements. The second part of the
introduction introduces the primary thematic material of the B-strain, and then the A-strain reflects the earlier blues movement, and so forth.


Following the C-strain (really an eight-measure strain that, when repeated, forms a perfect double period), Rochberg enters a twelve measure D-strain in the same style, but begins to mix meters and move sequentially (example 4.4).


However, the feeling of classic ragtime is absolutely disintegrated in the following E “strain” (really a forty-five measure stretch of thematically unified but lyrically fragmented ideas derived from the first and fourth movements). The mixed meters progress from an extra eighth note added to measures with regularity in the D-strain to different meters nearly every measure: $\frac{5}{16}$, $\frac{1}{8}$, $\frac{5}{16}$, $\frac{1}{16}$, $\frac{7}{16}$, $\frac{2}{8}$, $\frac{1}{8}$, and so forth.
Also notable is Rochberg’s use of \( \frac{4}{8} \) meter in the beginning of the work; this runs contrary to both classic ragtime’s customary \( \frac{2}{4} \) notation and to the oom-pah feeling of the left hand. Since this musical material is not derived from an earlier movement (unlike most of the rest of the “Toccata-Rag”), there is no particularly discernable reason that Rochberg did not simply write in \( \frac{2}{4} \) time. Not that Rochberg’s goals with ragtime were to be authentic: Bolcom seemed to be of the opinion that Rochberg’s “ragtime piece is impressionistic in the same way as Debussy’s Golliwog’s Cakewalk. Neither one was interested in the history or the genre for itself.”\(^{17}\)

Rochberg’s work includes a number of overlapping chordal techniques that recall the modernist language of his not-too-distant past. Following the sequential movement of the D-strain, we clearly leave the B major tonal center behind (first presented in the Introduction, then revisited following the F major A- and B-strains), and move to primarily octatonic chord constructions in sections E and F. The same Octatonic chord (OCT\(_{2,3}\)) is built upon two different bass notes (example 4.5).\(^{18}\) Though only the bass is different, Rochberg uses their different pitch ranges with clear distinction: one chord is expanded (with a pitch range of a minor 15\(^{th}\)) and the other chord is more condensed (with a pitch range of a perfect 11\(^{th}\)) and thus more dissonant-sounding. Additionally, in a virtuosic display of voice-exchange, the outer pitches in each hand from the expanded chord become the outer pitches in the opposite hands in the condensed chord. In this example, the chords are broken: the first octatonic follows two dyads belonging to Interval Class 1 with two dyads in Interval Class 5, and the second octatonic bookends the two dyads belonging to Interval Class 5 with those in Interval Class 1. Later in the piece the chords are played intact, and Rochberg occasionally leaves the expanded chord incomplete, though clearly implied.

\(^{17}\) Bolcom, interview. See Appendix B, 214.

Ultimately, this music is unsustainable; the mixed meter, octatonicism, and return of thematic material from earlier movements yields to the return of the blues A-strain (taken directly from movement II of *Carnival*, “Blues”), then to the energetic C-strain complete with the Rachmaninoff quote from the Introduction. It is here at the coda that Rochberg’s choice of title for the entire work becomes clear: *Carnival* really is based on Schumann’s work of the same name, and all of the characters have their analogs. There is even a Floristan and a Eusebius: the ever-present extrovert and introvert in Schumann’s compositional world are present here in the dichotomy between Rochberg’s extensive work history in serialist music and his relatively new desire to communicate more tonally and accessibly. The list of characters in *Carnival* ranges from Bach and Brahms (in the fourth movement, “Sfumato”), Rachmaninoff as discussed earlier, and the composers of the Second Viennese School, to the “ragtimer” (maybe James P. Johnson?), and the blues musician (Miles Davis playing in a low, breathy register?).

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19 Quoting the work of other musicians was nothing new for Rochberg, nor would this be the last instance of such paraphrasing. Many of his most successful works were conceived out of canonic works of the past: *Music of the Magic Theater* (1965), in which there are long stretches of Mozart, *Nach Bach* (1966), which draws heavily on material from Bach’s E Minor Toccata, and *Caprice Variations* (1970), fifty-one variations for solo violin on Paganini’s 24th Caprice – some of which are based on works by Brahms, Schubert, Mahler, Webern and others, are prime examples of Rochberg’s frequent use of quotation and pastiche from around the time he wrote *Carnival Music*. One further observation made by Dr. Norman Carey in personal correspondence was the possibility that the B-strain of “Toccata-Rag” derives from Schumann’s Toccata, op. 7.
Rochberg’s idea of ragtime was likely similar to that of Carter Pann, who suggests that ragtime is more than just the classic rags of Joplin and Lamb – it is an idea.\textsuperscript{20} After all, Rochberg’s only strain in “Toccata-Rag” that sounds convincingly like classic ragtime is the B-strain (example 4.6), and even here he directs the performer to play “with a gentle swing; easy pace; relaxed singing,” despite the fact that a swinging beat simply did not exist in classic ragtime.

\begin{example}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{example4.6}
\caption{G. Rochberg, “Toccata-Rag,” B 1-4.}
\end{example}

For Rochberg, it was more important that the idea of ragtime, and its nostalgia, were conveyed to the listener. Though this B-strain is the part of the piece most akin to classic ragtime, it is not the only part of “Toccata-Rag” to evoke both the traditional compositional attributes of classic ragtime and the mood it evoked. The whole movement is considerably more tonally stable (either in F major or B major as referenced in the chart above), and the vast majority of harmonies are triadic or seventh chord structures, at least until the E-strain returns to the material from earlier movements. The oom-pah left hand makes its first appearance right in the first Introduction, and the rhythmic pattern and stepwise motion of the second Introduction are much like the C-strain in Joplin’s \textit{Solace}.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{20} Pann, interview. See Appendix B, 232.

\textsuperscript{21} See also the connection Pann’s “William Albright” has to \textit{Solace}, pages 121-22, and corresponding note 43.
William Albright’s *The Dream Rags* (1967-70) II. “Nightmare Fantasy Rag (A Night on Rag Mountain)”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strain</th>
<th>Introduction 1</th>
<th>Introduction 2</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>B'</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>D'</th>
<th>E'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Length in Measures</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12 (including cadenza)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure Number</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Tonalities</td>
<td>(not established)</td>
<td>D# major</td>
<td>d minor</td>
<td>F Major</td>
<td>F Major</td>
<td>d minor</td>
<td>b minor</td>
<td>b minor</td>
<td>b minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D#</td>
<td>A'</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>C'</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G Alt</td>
<td>G Alt'</td>
<td>Bridge</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>16+1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b minor</td>
<td>d minor</td>
<td>F Major/d minor</td>
<td>d minor</td>
<td>F Major</td>
<td>F Major</td>
<td>F Major</td>
<td>sequence</td>
<td>D# major</td>
<td>b minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H Alt.</td>
<td>1 Alt. &amp; Cadenza</td>
<td>Bridge</td>
<td>A''</td>
<td>B''</td>
<td>D''</td>
<td>E''+Cadenza</td>
<td>Coda</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>6+4+16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19+Cadenza</td>
<td>24+21+Cadenza (2 m.) + 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>217</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>325</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D# major</td>
<td>a min. - b</td>
<td>min. - sequence</td>
<td>E# major + d minor</td>
<td>d minor</td>
<td>F Major</td>
<td>b minor</td>
<td>b minor</td>
<td>d minor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second and by far the largest of the three rags comprising *The Dream Rags*, “Nightmare Fantasy Rag” in Albright’s own words,

may or may not be the longest work ever written in that [ragtime] style, but it is probably the maddest. The attempt is a Lisztian kaleidoscope of fast-moving images and Mephistopholean visions. The work falls into three large sections (fast-slow-fast) with an extended coda in a hard-rock tempo; alas, the sweet strains of ragtime meet the real world.\(^\text{22}\)

Albright also states, “The parts of the *Dream Rags* are linked by a common theme in their titles rather than by similarity of material.” While the moods set by the three *Dream Rags* are each quite distinct (including at least four distinct moods in “Nightmare Fantasy Rag” alone), there are several significant compositional links. In addition to the unorthodox bass line which at times in all three movements walks in parallel fifths (an occurrence which only happens briefly in one other Albright rag, *Burnt Fingers*), and melodic themes which move chromatically and operate

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\(^*\) This particular strain is thematically derivative of the D-strain, set a half step up. It is labeled as a separate strain in keeping with the practices of classic rag strain-labeling, whereby strains generated from the thematic material of earlier strains – a common compositional practice – are nonetheless labeled separately.

\(^\text{22}\) *Albright Plays Albright*, William Albright (piano), released in 1980, Musical Heritage Society, Inc., MHS STEREO 4253, LP. From the liner notes by the performer.
within the narrow confines of a major third or perfect fourth, Albright’s quotations and paraphrases comprise important thematic material across the *Dream Rags*. By stating that the rags are linked (only) by the common theme in their titles, it seems most likely that Albright wanted to draw the listener’s attention away from the nonexistence of motivic follow-through which usually accompanies multi-movement works to at least some degree.\(^{23}\)

The quotation of materials from other works is pivotal to the *Dream Rags*, especially the first two pieces therein, and the *Dream Rags* also were plumbed for subsequent material. Though it is not a focal work of this dissertation, the C-strain of *Sleepwalker’s Shuffle* (the first piece in the set) yields a nearly intact rendering of the final strain in William Bolcom’s subsequent *The Gardenia*, transposed from B-flat major to F major (example 4.7). Yet while quotations seem to frequently pass between Bolcom’s rags and those by Albright, “Nightmare Fantasy Rag” seems to be Albright’s summation of the most conspicuously virtuosic works of the classical pianist’s canon.

\(^{23}\) Jennifer Louise Gray Trent, “The Style Characteristics and Performance Problems of William Albright’s *The Dream Rags*” (DMA dissertation, University of Houston, 2000). 34. Despite being apparently the only scholarly work extensively focused on any of William Albright’s rags, Trent’s only statement on the relationship between the three rags is this: “While the three pieces that comprise *The Dream Rags* might seem thematically related from their titles, musically they could hardly be more contrasting.”
Set primarily in d minor, “Nightmare Fantasy Rag” is not simply a Lisztian kaleidoscope, but a direct play on Liszt’s *Après une lecture du Dante. Fantasia quasi Sonata*, S.161/7 (often simply called *Dante Sonata*).\(^24\) Though the formal outline charted above makes note of nine distinct strains plus cadenzas and a substantial coda section, the work is still essentially built like Liszt’s, with two turbulent “Mephistophelean” sections surrounding a slower, more lyrical “Marguerite” section in major, ultimately an extended sonata form.\(^25\) The introductions of both

\(^24\) Of peripheral interest is the subtitle, “Night on Rag Mountain,” obviously a play on Modest Mussorgsky’s orchestral tone poem *Night on Bald Mountain*. This author has not been able to find any more substantive links between the two pieces; however, the widely viewed Disney animation of Mussorgsky’s piece in the movie *Fantasia* would have been on its sixth theatrical run in 1969, its most heavily advertised and distributed screening to that point. An interesting review of *Fantasia* – and how it was viewed under the influence of psychedelic drugs during this run – may further illuminate how Albright may have intended his work to be received. See Kaspar Monahan, “Revisited ‘Fantasia’ Still Thrills,” *Pittsburgh Press*, April 5, 1970.

\(^25\) The definition of sonata form is a complicated and imprecise one, with numerous parameters adjusted by the myriad theorists who for nearly two centuries have attempted to describe it. Charles Rosen speaks to this issue: “The ‘sonata’ is not a definite form like the minuet, a da capo aria, or a French overture: it is, like the fugue, a way of writing, a feeling for proportion, direction, and texture rather than a pattern…[a misleading interpretation of ‘sonata form’ is that] we are allowed one new theme in the development, and it often appears; the ‘bridge passages’ are most often what they should be, and sometimes they even sound connective rather than expository; the development not
pieces are grand statements with frequent metric pauses, and rhythmically propulsive action commences: Albright marks “Agitato fantastic” (m. 13) and “Hard and Driving” (m. 18); Liszt writes “Presto agitato assai” (m. 35). More specific examples between the two works include Albright’s first three measures, which rework mm. 52-3 of the *Dante Sonata* (example 4.8), and Albright’s cadenza preceding the coda, which follows the same alternating hands pattern as in Liszt’s mm. 273–74 (example 4.9).

infrequently starts according to rule with the main theme in the dominant. [This] recipe was not only inflexible; it also did not take account of the fact that by 1840 the proper ingredients were no longer being produced. Nineteenth-century tonality had become too fluid for the system of strictly defined modulations, bridge passages, and the like…"

Rosen continues the discussion with a focus on defining sonata form as it relates to eighteenth-century style: “There is no question that every sonata-exposition goes from the tonic to the dominant (or to a substitute for the dominant, relative major, or median and sub-dominant being the only possible ones), but I cannot believe that a contemporary audience listened for the change to the dominant and experienced a pleasant feeling of satisfaction when it came. The movement to the dominant was part of musical grammar, not an element of form. Almost all music in the eighteenth century went to the dominant…” [author’s italics]. With this in mind, the notion that composers since the eighteenth century have labeled their works as “sonatas” may or may not fit the harmonic confines of the narrower definition of sonata form, but ubiquitously, the feeling for proportion, direction, and texture is present when the term is applied. Here in “Nightmare Fantasy Rag,” the expanded ternary form with multiple thematic areas in the expository section and return to the original key following the development easily fits the parameters of sonata form when that term is unburdened by too-specific (specifically eighteenth-century period-specific) harmonic boundaries. For the complete argument, see Charles Rosen, *The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972), 30-42.

A more current perspective is put forth by James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy: “One prominent feature of the study of sonata form in recent decades—very much in the wake of Tovey’s [and later Rosen’s] similar assertions—has been the repeated declaration that the “textbook” view of sonata form is inadequate to deal with the actual musical structures at hand. At best, such a scheme represents a conformist trap that master-composers avoid falling into. The problem of determining the role of convention within this “classical” repertory was more complex than the reflex denunciations suggested. The reiterated conviction that there was no single plan for sonata form in the later eighteenth century, true enough in its narrow, literal sense, rises to the level of an error when it is naively taken either to dismiss the presence of substantially more complex systems of standard practices or to discourage inquiry into those practices. Within the humanities norms, generic options, and more-or-less standard procedures are not laws at all. And since they are not, there was no need to suppose that the existence of numerous exceptions or deviations invalidated the norm. Perhaps the many deviations were purposeful dialogues with the background norm.” James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late-Eighteenth-Century Sonata* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3-13.

The function of this extended discussion on sonata form and its broadly interpreted meanings is to suggest that sonata form (and form in general) is not reinvented so much as adjusted. In discussions about ragtime, sonata form has been broached by other historians: “*Magnetic Rag* (Joplin), it could be argued, points towards the sonata form essentially. The return to [the] A[-strain] has all the attributes of the classical recapitulation. The two preceding themes (C[-strain] and D[-strain]) resemble, as closely as ragtime could, a development section.” Guy Waterman, “The History of Ragtime,” in John Edward Hasse, *Ragtime: Its History, Composers, and Music* (New York: Schirmer, 1985), 48. While sonata form (in its stricter definitions) is not explicitly adhered to by the works (or their composers) discussed in this chapter, it is a familiar formal point of departure for any classical composer, regardless of whether it is adhered to, dismissed, or adjusted. When Liszt wrote the Dante sonata, he did not follow an explicit roadmap, yet the work bears many characteristics of sonata form; here, so too does Albright’s *Dream Rags.*


Nor is Liszt the only composer quoted by Albright. Example 4.10 shows how Albright’s first cadenza prior to the A-strain (part of what is listed in the chart as “Introduction 2”) is a direct analogy to a gesture from the end of the cadenza in the first movement of Rachmaninoff’s Third Piano Concerto, op. 30. The thematic material in the A-strain could perhaps derive from
the third movement of Beethoven’s Sonata No. 17 in D Minor, op. 31, no. 2 (“The Tempest”), as demonstrated in example 4.11. Lastly, and boldly, Albright’s final two measures are almost exactly the same as the close of Bolcom’s The Serpent’s Kiss, the third of a four-piece suite entitled The Garden of Eden, written in 1969, a year prior to Albright’s Dream Rags (example 4.12).


A closer look at the form of “Nightmare Fantasy Rag” reveals further derivative ideas from other composers with whom Albright felt pianistic or stylistic kinship. As mentioned earlier, Albright viewed his Dream Rags and Bolcom’s Ghost Rags to be a sort of culmination. They were written at approximately the same time, each set is comprised of three rags, and in both sets those three rags proceed slow – fast – slow. The second piece in each set is in both cases the least formally congruent with classic ragtime (and amongst all of Albright’s rags, the “Nightmare Fantasy Rag” was by far the greatest formal departure from classic ragtime structures).

In terms of compositional rhetoric, Albright shares a commonality with Rochberg in his use of arcane dynamic markings. His score is heavily peppered with the mark of sforzandissimo (sffz) and culminates with a sforzandississimo (sfffz). Historically, exaggerated expressive marks such as this or Rochberg’s fortissississimos (fffff) are the gestures of composers who seek to elevate the intensity of their intent above their direct stylistic progenitors, as in Tchaikovsky’s use of ppppppp and ffff in his Sixth Symphony. When Albright concludes the “Nightmare Fantasy Rag” with sfffz, it is clearly a tongue-in-cheek gesture to his astute friend Bolcom, who concludes The Serpent’s Kiss with one more f (ffff), but one less letter (which ending is bigger?).

The presence of these kinds of markings can achieve two goals: to control utterly the performer’s own gradations of dynamic shading, and, as previously mentioned, to imply greater

force or inaudibility than works which came before. While such a gesture appears to be a dint of ego on behalf of the composer, it does also connect their work with earlier work—a comparison is forced. Thus, it becomes clear that Albright’s dynamic markings are present at least in an effort to distinguish his music from the music of a more nascent, less intense time, and present that music to a more seriously intense audience.26

The elements which Albright drew from classic ragtime are equally fascinating: a gesture in the G-strain behaves very similarly to the B-strain of Joplin’s Paragon Rag (example 4.13), and is one example of the replication of the physicality of ragtime playing. Another such example is Albright’s use of octaves in the right hand: they don’t need to be filled or carry an inner voice. Across all of Bolcom’s and Carter Pann’s rags, they never once writes parallel octaves in the right hand for more than half a measure without filling them, despite that being a common gesture in the works of Joplin, Scott, Lamb and numerous other ragtime composers near the turn of the twentieth century.

26 Each of the rags discussed in this chapter have both fortissimos and pianissimos (with the exception of “Graceful Ghost,” which has no fortissimo, and Upstate Rag, which has no pianissimo but does utilize markings such as dolcissimo and hymn-like). In striking contrast, Joplin only marked fortissimo eight times across his entire pianistic output (in fact, quite a few of his earlier works have no dynamics at all), and James Scott only used the marking twice. Lamb used fortissimos more frequently, though never more than once in a piece. Most interesting of all, though, is that despite all three composers regularly using mp and mf markings, none ever wrote a pianissimo in any piece.

The breakdown of the infrequently utilized fortissimo dynamic markings in the piano music of Joplin, Lamb and Scott is as follows. (Note that two of the Joplin works mentioned are not rags, but marches. Also, only one occurrence of a fortissimo mark exists in each work, unless otherwise specified. Note that the rags Joseph Lamb wrote after 1920 were not examined for this brief survey.)

- Scott Joplin: Original Rags, March Majestic, Antoinette, Euphonic Sounds (3 instances), SJ’s New Rag.
- Joseph Lamb: Sensation (4 instances), Champagne Rag (3 instances), Nightingale Rag, Reindeer Rag, Bohemia Rag
- James Scott: Paramount Rag, Troubadour Rag
In his B-strain, Albright promotes the notion of Secondary Ragtime by inverting the concept and working with a melodic idea five eighth notes in length – one eighth note too long (example 4.14). (This also results in the $\frac{3}{8}$ fourth bar conclusion of each of the first two phrases in this strain). Albright’s balance of harmonic dissonance with rhythmic consonance—specifically in how he prolongs to an offbeat the resolution of a harmony in the melodic voice—is extremely similar to Joplin’s, Albright’s more complex language notwithstanding. (Refer again to example 4.14, where the D and D-sharp in m. 35 don’t resolve to the E until the very weak second sixteenth note of m. 36.) A pianist familiar with the physical feeling of classic ragtime will recognize not only the compositional impact of these gestures, but will also note the actual series of movements that this kind of writing generates.

“Nightmare Fantasy Rag” does not have an agenda to forcibly push the boundaries of contemporary classical music; rather, as seems to be suggested by Bolcom’s correspondence with Albright, ragtime was a distraction, a chance to compose for pleasure. Nonetheless, the incorporation of Liszt and Rachmaninoff on one hand, and of rock music on the other (in the coda, marked “cruel rock tempo”), suggests the placement of ragtime as a mediator, or perhaps a portal, between the old and the new.27


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strain</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>A’</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>B’</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>C’</th>
<th>A''</th>
<th>Coda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Length in Measures</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16 (including the final, elided measure of the A strain)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure Number</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17 (in 1st :</td>
<td></td>
<td>)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Tonality</td>
<td>B♭ minor</td>
<td>B♭ minor</td>
<td>B♭ minor</td>
<td>B♭ minor</td>
<td>G♭ major</td>
<td>G♭ major</td>
<td>B♭ minor</td>
<td>B♭ minor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Graceful Ghost Rag” occupies a unique place in the ragtime repertoire: to both classical and ragtime community audiences, it is probably the best-known work of ragtime written since 1920. As such, it is of considerable interest to carefully examine what aspects of this work allowed it to be of such great appeal to both audiences. In an exploration of the commercialization of music, Gerald Groemer states that, “although [Bolcom’s rags] do not reject the “classical” ragtime forms and gestures, they are not bound by them.”

Formally, it is the most straightforward of the five rags discussed in this chapter, complete with three sixteen-measure strains (with two one-measure extensions noted in the chart). The elision of the A-strain cadence into the new material of the B-strain, as well as the extension of the cadential area at the close of the second statement of the C-strain to resolve a relatively remote sequential key change, are evocative of the elision techniques of Schubert and Brahms.

In example 4.15, the second half of measure 16 in the first and second endings is compared: the dominant chord is the same, though differently inverted, and the melodic line is also almost the same. The last eighth note of m. 16 in the first ending is a dominant, clearly preparing for the tonic (occurring squarely on the downbeat of m. 17, circled), but the dyad at the end of the second ending (m. 16, circled) actually anticipates the tonic in a manner which weakens the impact of the tonic on the first downbeat of the B-strain. This is a beautifully subtle way of acknowledging the classic ragtime technique of an A-strain with a strong tonic and a B-

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28 Gerald Groemer, “Paths to the New Romanticism.” 80. Groemer goes on to state that, “Graceful Ghost Rag’ does not utilize any patented twentieth-century techniques. [It] is to traditional ragtime what some of Chopin’s more languid mazurkas are to the traditional Polish dance.” Considering the many similarities between the rags of Bolcom and Albright, this partly contradicts the earlier statement (note 27). Both of Groemer’s claims substantially ignore the many nuanced observations of classic ragtime made by Bolcom and Albright in their rags.

29 Yueng Yu correctly observes, “Musically, there is no obvious break between the A- and B-strains in this rag. The B-strain continues the musical flow of the A-strain by retaining both the syncopated rhythms and the lyrical melodic style of the A-strain.” Yeung Yu, “A Style Analysis of William Bolcom's "Complete Rags for Piano" (DMA dissertation, University of Cincinnati, 2007). 118.
strain built more around the idea of the prolonged dominant delaying the return of the tonic. In fact, Bolcom telescopically comprises the primary thematic material of the B-strain through this final measure of the A-strain: one note of anticipation (the B-flat/D-flat dyad in the second ending, m. 16) creates the theme’s primary characteristic, and one anticipated measure of thematic material (m. 16, second ending, in its entirety) yields a strain of ragtime.


Rather than returning to the A-strain in the middle of the work and concluding on fresh material, this work utilizes the B- and C-strains similar to the way in which a sonata form often employs a second thematic area followed by the development section. As “Graceful Ghost Rag” is the first in a set of three rags that fit very neatly together, the idea that the work is a three movement sonata is sensible, just as it is in Bolcom’s *The Garden of Eden* (four movements), and Albright’s *Dream Rags* and (of course) *Grand Sonata in Ragtime*. These works are, at the very least, more analogous to sonata structure than to a suite of dances.

Innovations in ragtime composition are almost always devices that have already been applied to other music, but when combined with the basic traits of ragtime yield unique textures:

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30 See note 25 in this chapter regarding sonata form. While the difference in scale between “Graceful Ghost Rag” and “Nightmare Fantasy Rag” are obvious, a sense of proportion and harmonic relationship across both works is held in common. “Graceful Ghost” also exceeds ternary form by utilizing two thematic areas (the A- and B-strains) prior to the development (the C-strain).

31 Notably, with the exception of *Grand Sonata in Ragtime*, the composers place the slower, more lyrical rags at the beginning and end of each of these sets. This may suggest that they valued the melodic and lyrical qualities of ragtime in a way that later jazz had abandoned.
it is the cumulative result that is the innovation. “Graceful Ghost Rag” was approximately the fourteenth rag that Bolcom wrote, and most devices present in this work may be found in his earlier rags. Examples of this include the frequent chromatic inner voice leading mentioned above (occurring in such earlier rags as *California Porcupine Rag* (1968), *Tabby Cat Walk* (1968), and all three of his *Three Classic Rags* (1967).

“Graceful Ghost Rag” is also indebted to classic ragtime in some more specialized ways. In example 4.16 the C-strain left hand rhythmically moves together with the right, in a similar manner to the A-strain of Joseph Lamb’s *Top Liner Rag* (refer to example 3.21), or perhaps the C-strain of Joplin’s *Solace* (refer to example 4.23). This kind of left hand setting is highly distinct, especially here where Bolcom employs it in twelve of the strain’s sixteen measures; further similar to Lamb’s approach, Bolcom only utilizes this technique for a single strain.

![Example 4.16 W. Bolcom, “Graceful Ghost Rag,” C 1-4.](image)

Among the rags of Joplin, Lamb and Scott, only a small handful commence the A-strain with an unsyncopated measure, and “Graceful Ghost Rag” emulates the graceful opening A-strain in Joplin’s *Peacherine Rag* and Scott’s *Peace and Plenty Rag*. Rather than immediately drawing the listener’s attention to a blatantly ragged element of the music, the audience is instead invited to focus on the lyrical shape of the melodic line. Other than the C-strain (discussed below), Bolcom employs a harmonically traditional oom-pah left hand, unlike Albright’s generally more stride-oriented left-hand approach. It is not an incessant oom-pah machine (an
approach commonly used by inferior rag composers trying to cash in on the sheet music boom),
but one based primarily on the harmonic needs of the melody and interspersed with melodic
replies to right hand gestures, again similar to how the Big Three wrote left hand parts. As in
works by each of the Big Three, Bolcom occasionally pauses the forward movement of the right
hand melody on a half note in order to allow the left hand a one-measure solo (or sometimes a
duet with an inner voice from the right hand).

On the other hand, the complex differences between classic rags and classical
composition are especially apparent in the multiple continuously active voices. Unlike classic
rags, Bolcom’s right hand is richly polyphonic in the B-strain, and both hands have multiple
active voices in the C-strain. As mentioned above, the left hand also eschews oom-pah setting for
all but one measure in the C-strain, instead focusing on harmonies which rhythmically
complement the right hand. Throughout “Graceful Ghost Rag,” Bolcom essentially applies the
same descending chromatic inner-voice technique that Joplin used in the final four measures of
the D-strain of *Maple Leaf Rag* (refer to example 3.16). However, where in Joplin’s piece the
gesture is recognizably a compositional masterstroke within the relatively limited harmonic
range of the style, Bolcom picks up the idea and uses it as a tool to enhance an already more
complex texture.

The fact that there is a coda at all is something unusual to the ragtime style, though quite
common among Bolcom’s rags. Here, Bolcom chooses to build a four measure coda out of the
thematic material from m. 15 of the A-strain, rather than introduce new material. Among all of
his rags, Joplin only wrote two codas—in *Scott Joplin’s New Rag* and *Magnetic Rag*—and only
in *Scott Joplin’s New Rag* is thematic material from earlier in the piece reworked.32

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32 From among more than 230 classic-era ragtime works surveyed by this author, only seven had codas, though a
few others simply repeated the final four measures at the end of the piece. The seven clearly demarcated codas are in
“Graceful Ghost Rag” is more an outstanding example of great craftsmanship than great innovation. In the highly introspective coda (example 4.17), which is introduced by m. 16 of A”, the bass line descends stepwise all the way from the tonic B-flat down to C, yet does not immediately achieve the final B-flat. Instead, the line retreats back up to F, leaps to the starting B-flat at the beginning of the final measure, then descends, I-V-I. We are thus given the final note which we had been gently teased with, yielding a strong feeling of satisfactory conclusion, especially after the arrival was gently detained.


The “Graceful Ghost Rag” is everyone’s rag: its elegant and thoughtful voice leading appeals to the traditional classical audience, its form pays homage to classic ragtime, and its unapologetic adoption of tonal language has a certain modernist appeal. As such, it has been played as everyone’s rag: in 1979 Bolcom transcribed the work for violin, clarinet and piano (as part of a six rag set, Afternoon Cakewalk: Rag Suite Of Joplin, Lamb, Scott And Bolcom, premiered by the Murray Louis Dance Company with David Shifrin on clarinet, Sergiu Luca on violin, and Bolcom at the piano), and revised this arrangement for simply violin and piano immediately thereafter, entitling this arrangement, “Graceful Ghost Rag – Concert Variation”.

the following works: Robert S. Roberts: The Pride of Bucktown (1897); Joseph Northrup: The Cannon Ball (1905); John W. “Blind” Boone: Blind Boone’s Southern Rag Medley No. 2 (1909); Scott Joplin: Scott Joplin’s New Rag (1912) and Magnetic Rag (1914); Robert Hampton: Cataract Rag (1914); Charles Thomson: The Lily Rag (1914).
There have been dozens of recordings made of the work in varying instrumentation since then. It was dedicated to the memory of Bolcom’s father, who had passed away only a few weeks prior to the work’s composition, and Bolcom knew he had written something special. He wrote to Albright: “You will be getting a new rag!! in the mail. I had vowed never to write another one—but you demoralized [?] me and it’s coming… No hints (about the rag itself)—you’ll see.”

Eugene Kurtz’s *Animations* (1968) II. “Rag: à la mémoire de Scott Joplin”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strain</th>
<th>Introduction</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>A’</th>
<th>Bridge 1</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Bridge 2</th>
<th>A’</th>
<th>A+B+Bridge 2</th>
<th>Bridge 3</th>
<th>Coda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Length in Measures</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure Number</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Tonality</td>
<td>Chromatic</td>
<td>A♭ Major</td>
<td>A♭ Major</td>
<td>Chromatic</td>
<td>Sequential/ tri-chordal</td>
<td>Bi-modal: Pentatonic/ Diatonic</td>
<td>A♭ Major</td>
<td>As previously listed</td>
<td>D Major</td>
<td>F Major</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eugene Kurtz had this to say about the second movement of his *Animations*:

“Rag” was written for the pianist and composer William Albright, who has always been one of the most vocal advocates of the music of Scott Joplin. “Rag” pays sincere homage to Joplin at the same time as it pokes fun at certain aspects of contemporary music. If one thinks of the piece as a contest between these two elements, it must be said that Joplin comes out the

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34 The dedication to Bolcom’s father does not appear together with the title of the work. However, Bolcom writes, “The three *Ghost Rags*, so named by the late piano virtuoso Paul Jacobs when he recorded them, begin with “Graceful Ghost,” written in memory of my father...” See William Bolcom, *Complete Rags for Piano* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard, 1999), prelude.

35 Bolcom, William Correspondence (Bolcom to Albright), 1967-1971, Box No. 3, William Albright Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan. The letter referred to here is dated Nov. 20, 1970.
winner by a long shot: contemporary music is seen as a caricature while the Joplin elements retains [sic] a sense of timelessness. If one listens carefully, a short quote from *Maple Leaf Rag* can be heard midway in the piece.\(^{36}\)

Indeed, mm. 42-44 of “Rag” directly quotes the right hand of the first three measures of the B-strain in *Maple Leaf Rag*, in fortissimo (example 4.18). It should be audible to many listeners even if they are not listening carefully.\(^{37}\)

Example 4.18 E. Kurtz, “Rag,” B 13-17 (mm. 41-45).

Although about half of the music of “Rag” only suggests, rather than adopts, the language of classic ragtime, the formal layout may still be broken into distinct “strains,” as charted above. The so-called “A-strain” is written quite closely to a classic ragtime style, though there are some occurrences of dissonance unlikely to be found in classic rags (example 4.19). Kurtz uses the same chromatic tetrachord (Set Class 4-1: \([0,1,2,3]\)) in the first and third sixteenth note dyads in the right hand at the beginning of the A-strain (m. 5) as in the first four notes of the introduction (m. 1).\(^{38}\)

\(^{36}\) *Rags to Riches: a Syncopated Century*, Donna Coleman (piano), released in 1996, ABC Classics, ABC454519-2, CD.

\(^{37}\) Bolcom, interview. See Appendix B, 214-15. Bolcom stated that Kurtz could write with a strong sense of satire, and this appears to refer to both his prose and musical compositions.

\(^{38}\) Much of the analysis, as well as the sets mentioned by set class name, benefit from an understanding of basic post-tonal theory. For more on the topic of sets and set classes, see Joseph N. Straus, *Introduction to Post-Tonal Theory*, 113
Kurtz further utilizes the contrary motion between the major second and major third in the right hand beginning in measure five as a way to avoid a more traditional movement in parallel motion, and uses the major second dyad as a substitute for a more traditionally consonant interval. Yet for all of the dissonance present in the right hand, the very stable and traditional left hand, which for the first twelve measures mimics the left hand of the B-strain from Maple Leaf Rag almost verbatim, forces the right hand to be heard in a tonal context: the pervasive major second dyad becomes a consonance in the face of the minor second, and the whole A-strain or “Rag” becomes a consonance set against the B-strain. (In reference to his statements on “Rag,” it is interesting to note that Kurtz discusses the right hand quotation of Maple Leaf Rag, but does not mention this at all.)

The remaining measures of the A-strain extend the sixteen-measure form to nineteen, and overshoot the cadence (example 4.20). Kurtz does come from the B-flat secondary dominant in measure 18, and like Joplin moves through the E-flat dominant on the way to an A-flat major.

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Example 4.19 E. Kurtz, “Rag,” Introduction through A 4. Note the related set classes at the beginning of m. 1 and m. 5.

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For the naming of the sets, established by theorist Allen Forte, see Allen Forte, *The Structure of Atonal Music* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1973).
resolution, but Kurtz’s cadence is imperfect, and doesn’t stop there. Instead, he throws the whole
tonal progression overboard when he abruptly leaps to the dominant of A major (a flat-VI chord
to the home key of A-flat), and immediately apologizes for it the next measure with the
“corrected” though lame imperfect authentic cadence.


The B-strain and other parts of this piece are quite different, cast with serialist
insinuations (example 4.21). (Kurtz gets directly to the point: in mm. 25-26, all twelve tones are
used, albeit via a fairly blatant chromatic line.) Despite the frequent use of all twelve notes of the
chromatic aggregate, the work does not achieve serialism, as no statement of the aggregate is
repeated intact or in any permutation.
Rather than actually composing serially, Kurtz applies several trichords and tetrachords in the B-strain that possess other attributes evocative of diatonicism. The primary trichords employed are set classes 3-1 ([0,1,2]), 3-5 ([0,1,6]) and 3-6 ([0,2,4]); the tetrachords are set classes 4-9 ([0,1,6,7]) and 4-21 ([0,2,4,6]); these chords are always played within the pitch span of an octave. The set classes containing minor second dyads (3-1, 3-5 and 4-9) are used as a dissonant foil to the whole-tone set classes (3-6 and 4-21). Additionally, the whole-tone chords are never used directly against a chord with chromatic elements, though there are instances where two whole-tone tetrachords (one in the bass and one in the treble) are set against each other which result in an eight-note chromatic aggregate (though the chromaticism in this instance requires accounting for octave equivalence).

Later, larger tone clusters are introduced; a nine-note chromatic cluster appears in m. 33 (broken between the two hands at the end of the measure). Beginning in m. 41, as Maple Leaf Rag is being quoted, complete diatonic clusters are introduced, first with two C major runs, and then a broken D-flat diatonic chord overlapping the barline into m. 45 immediately followed by a higher-pitched E major diatonic seventh chord played intact (example 4.18). The D-flat and E
major clusters are split between the hands into separate whole-tone trichords and tetrachords.
(The left hand plays the whole-tone trichord 3-6 and the right hand plays the whole-tone
tetrachord 4-21.)

While the other composers discussed in this chapter have found ways of incorporating new ideas into a classic mold, Kurtz sets the ideas blatantly side-by-side for direct comparison. This theory is further borne out by having the aforementioned Maple Leaf Rag quote embedded in one of the tonally unstable sections of the work: it places classic ragtime in stark contrast to the chromatically dissonant texture, in the superior (melodic) position to the chaotic dissonances that underpin it. It is, as Kurtz says above, the victory of ragtime.

“Rag” opens by taking some rhythmic elements as well as the chromatic set 4-1 ([0,1,2,3]) from the preceding movement (“Résonances”). However, the rhythmic element—groups of four consecutive sixteenth notes rhythmically set upon different parts of the primary beat—is in “Résonances” a disjointed gesture, while in “Rag” (primarily the A-strain) conforms to the parameters of “Hot” Rhythm as discussed in chapter 3. Assisting the relative rhythmic consonance of the Hot rhythm is the very traditional rhythmic structure of the oom-pah present in the left hand.

The rhythm in the B-strain is also syncopated between eighth and sixteenth notes (not counting tuplet runs). However, the frequent metric changes (including single and grouped measures in \( \frac{2}{4}, \frac{3}{8}, \frac{5}{6}, \text{ and } \frac{7}{3} \)) shift the listener out of the rhythmic “groove” generated by the traditional ragtime syncopations, and the loss of the oom-pah left hand further disorients the listener. When the Maple Leaf Rag quote arrives, it is unanchored by a stable rhythmic pattern, and instead floats on an arrhythmic tremolo.

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39 See chapter 3, 56-61, for a more in-depth discussion of “Hot rhythm” and other conventional rhythmic elements of the ragtime style.
The conclusion of this work (example 4.22) sees the twelve-tone aggregate statement in its entirety (first in m. 89 through 91 and again from the pickup of m. 94 through 96) ushered out by a downward spill, a pentatonic scale in the left hand (black keys) and a complete diatonic gesture in the right (white keys). Both instances of the aggregate are mostly composed of minor second dyads, but further similarity between the aggregates appears to stop at that. Though the last page of music is primarily comprised of fragmentary and tonally uncertain gestures, Kurtz makes it clear that it is a disintegration of his contemporary music in the face of the bolder tonal and rhythmic traditions of ragtime – the disorganized pieces of the row audibly skulk off the page.


The following program notes were included in a performance of Animations (both movements) given by William Albright:
The Stravinskian methods of development by juxtaposition, intercut, splice, dissolve, flashback, and blackout deliberately court the listener’s sense of visual time. As employed in Eugene Kurtz’s *Animations pour piano* these techniques are rank-shifted from means to ends—the piece is, after all, not concerned with any consistent or logical language of sound in time. Rather it is about the listener’s eternal, frantic, and (finally) foolish attempt to hear it that way rather than see it as it is. In short, by becoming a piece about the listener’s stylistic rigidity, *Animations* becomes a parody—a cartoon. One is not encouraged to make value judgments on composer, piece or self.

Meanwhile, the music flickers on.40 Apart from the poetic approach to these notes, a reader may get the sense that this piece should be heard in the context of the general sense of nostalgia and sentiment that surrounded classic ragtime. Considering that this piece predates the Rifkin recording and all of the fervor surrounding it, the nostalgia to which this primarily refers is that which had put forth by the honky-tonk players of the fifties and by the televised presentations of Max Morath, all of whom additionally relied on costumes and shtick to portray not only a musical style but the relative innocence and lighter mood of a bygone time.

Ultimately, Kurtz created a work that pitted the traditional against the progressive, and in doing so made a deliberate value judgment (in favor of the traditional). He did not adhere to the strict formal guidelines of classic ragtime, yet his innate understanding of the rhythmic elements of ragtime is as constantly accessible to the listener as the harmonies are frequently unstable. Kurtz successfully elects the ragtime style, long held in contempt by classical musicians as inferior music, as a valid representative of traditional (tonal) compositional ideals.

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40 Assorted programs, Box Nos. 5-8, William Albright Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan. This particular program was dated Oct. 22, 1969, and the concert featured various performers playing works by Stravinsky, Castiglioni, and Berg in addition to Kurtz’s *Animations*. The program notes were jointly written by University of Michigan faculty members Richmond H. Browne (theory) and Thomas Taylor (conductor).
Carter Pann’s five published rags for solo piano are in many ways the middle ground among rags written in a classical idiom since the 1950s. The left hand in Pann’s piano rags is more strictly traditional than Albright’s use of stride, though less so than Bolcom’s consciously structured chords and generally less frequent use of stepwise, stride-like motion. Pann does use mixed meters, though this usage is not as foregrounded as in pieces by Kurtz and Rochberg (who, in every instance of a meter change, draw the listener’s attention to either the shortened measure or the unfamiliar location of the downbeat; additionally, accent marks are usually present). A wide variety of compositional methods are present in Pann’s rags, including notational differences in swing.\(^{41}\) Notably, it is the only rag among the examples presented here

\(^{41}\) On the topic of swing notation, different composers of both novelty-era and later classical composition have dealt with the issue quite differently. Novelty works, such as Arthur Schutt’s published masterpiece, *Bluin’ the Black Keys*, write out triplets when all three notes are present, but when only the first and last note of the triplet would be played, the notation was written as a dotted-eighth—sixteenth, or alternately (and somewhat confusingly) just as two eighth notes.

Among Pann’s rags, the inconsistency of a dotted-eighth—sixteenth or two notated eighths—both effectively standing in for a quarter—eighth triplet grouping—is avoided Pann approaches the issue differently in different works. In *The Bills*, Pann writes in straight rhythm (without swing) for “William Albright,” and in novelty-style swing (two eighths equaling quarter—eighth under a triplet) for “William Bolcom.” In *Soirée Macabre*, Pann composes in compound meter when the music is to swing, though switches to a precisely notated simple meter when the music is not intended to swing. *The Cheesegrater* is written to be played in straight rhythm, except for the D-strain, where the tempo marking given is “swing with quick rolls”; there, the music is written squarely, and this marking is to suffice for any alterations of notational intent.

In *Upstate*, the entire piece is written in straight rhythm. Here, however, one may swing in a manner similar to how Bolcom approached the notion of swing in “Graceful Ghost Rag,” which is to say with some flexibility. In Bolcom’s 1971 recording of “Graceful Ghost Rag,” he swings nearly in the triplet style of novelty playing, but this was a common way to approach ragtime. More recent performances Bolcom has given of “Graceful Ghost Rag” have a nearly imperceptible swing, though it is undeniably present; this rhythmic feel is a hallmark of Bolcom’s
that is not part of a larger set or suite, which seemingly endorses the notion that each rag is a self-contained entity, and that the classic rag form is already a perfect and complete framework.42

Of Pann’s five rags, *Upstate* is by a considerable margin the most rhythmically, harmonically, and formally conservative. His two earliest efforts, *The Bills* (two tribute rags, the first dedicated to Albright, the second to Bolcom), are both sensitive to the attributes of classic rags as well as the idiosyncratic gestures of their dedicatees. The first, “William Albright,” directly quotes Scott Joplin’s *Solace* in the Trio (example 4.23). Pann further states in his introduction that, “its serious elegance points in the direction of Scott Joplin’s concert waltz *Bethena.*”43

performing style. As is discussed later in this chapter, Pann endorses divergent approaches to swing in the piano and trombone concerto versions of *Upstate.*

Classic ragtime was not meant to be played with swing. This is one of the most commonly misunderstood aspects of ragtime performance, but the history of swing in ragtime originated mostly through the honky-tonk performances in the 1950s, and was a derivation of the novelty piano style of equating a pair of eighth notes to a triplet quarter-note-eighth-note pattern.

However, William Bolcom and William Albright became familiar with the ragtime style before Joshua Rifkin’s “classical” rendition of Joplin’s rags was released. The sound they must have heard would have been that of the honky-tonk pianists such as Joe “Fingers” Carr and Max Morath’s pre-1970 recordings, which generally swing the sixteenth notes.

42 While Kurtz and Rochberg each contributed but a single work of ragtime in their compositional outputs, the rags of Bolcom and Albright are often clustered in groups of three or four. Albright’s only published rag that is not part of a set is *Sweet Sixteenths*. Bolcom has a number of such rags, yet only four were published as separate works prior to 1970, compared to thirteen published as sets. Pann, meanwhile, has composed five rags as of this writing, and two form a set, *The Bills*: each work is a tribute to Pann’s two composition teachers, Bolcom and Albright. The third, *Soirée Macabre*, belongs to a set of twelve pieces, *The Piano’s Twelve Sides*, though it is the only work in the set related to ragtime. Lastly, *The Cheesegrater* stands alone, like *Upstate*.

43 Pann, interview. See Appendix B, 236. “Albright has more of the vibe of *Bethena* to me, even though it’s not a waltz, than *Solace*. *Solace* you can’t really tell that it’s a rag, and *Albright* is very much a rag. *Solace* is like a song; there’s no real stride going.

You know, Albright loved *Bethena*. I remember playing around with that in my lessons with him, so I wouldn’t put it past the fact that I mentioned [the relationship of *Albright to Bethena*] because of that.”

This statement is further borne out in the frequency with which *Bethena* appears in the ragtime programs of William Albright, as well as the greater concentration of marks and notes which appear in Albright’s annotated copy of *Bethena*. 

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While both of these rags are mostly cast in classic rag style (though pushing at formal and rhythmic boundaries), Pann’s *The Cheesegrater* is a combination of ragtime (primarily written in what has been named earlier as “secondary ragtime” rhythm), novelty gestures, and a dissonant, up-tempo waltz section. Lastly, his *Soirée Macabre*, the eighth piece in his suite *The Piano’s 12 Sides* (perhaps not coincidentally the eighth, as Bolcom’s *Rag Infernal* is the eighth in his set of *Twelve New Etudes*), is by far the most dissonant and formally untraditional rag in his output. Written mostly in $12_8$, the work is actually more of a novelty piece than ragtime, and the bass is written in a style much more akin to stride than ragtime.

Pann’s *Upstate* is an adaptation of “Rutherford’s Rag,” the first movement of his *Triple Trombone Concerto* (2001). While the musical content of the two works is mostly the same, some of the notations and tempo indications take the piano version in a distinctly different direction. The introduction in the concerto directs the performer to play, “sweet, sensitive, Eighth note = 92,” while in the piano version the marking is, “Relaxed, flexible throughout.” At the outset of the A-strain, the piano is marked “Con moto, Eighth note = 96,” whereas the concerto
changes gears and style: “Swing, Eighth note = 160.” This is not just a subtle difference, but an entirely different perspective of the piece; further corresponding divergences occur across the piece. (Refer again to note 36 in this chapter for more on the topic of swing in ragtime.)

*Upstate* is formally cast in three distinct strains ||:A::B::C::A||. Following a four measure introduction, the A-strain is somewhat extended, with three distinct thematic areas. The first theme is a phrase in which the antecedent opens with a gently oscillating chromatic line moving towards a blue note and then away (example 4.24), and the consequent concludes with a not-so-deceptive cadence prepared over the course of the final two measures of the phrase.44 Though this is hardly the only rag written since 1950 that utilizes blue notes, the frank foregrounding of this motif is reflective of a later era in composing, where explicit rules and styles have given way to compositions integrated with increasingly diverse ideas.


The second theme within the A-strain is just a three-measure idea, focused on the chromatic descent of an inner voice, again reminiscent of both Joplin’s conclusion to *Maple Leaf Rag* and Bolcom’s use of the technique throughout “Graceful Ghost Rag” (example 4.25). Then the third thematic area similarly features the parallel movement of the inner voices, this time more akin to the C-strain of Joplin’s *Solace*, already recognized as a work that fascinated Pann. Taken alone, each phrase is musically self-sufficient, but Pann skillfully utilizes the differing

44 “Blue notes” are defined here as the downward-resolving minor third, the often-downward-resolving diminished fifth and the minor seventh in a major context. For a more complete discussion on “blue notes” and the flexibility of this term, see Gary Giddins and Scott DeVeaux, *Jazz* (New York: Norton, 2009), 18, 45, 502.
thematic areas as interchangeable parts: both A’ and the return of the A-strain at the end of the piece are not presented as intact copies. Instead, Pann juggles, compresses and expands the three different thematic areas, and the implication of each theme area changes with its position in the strain.


Pann’s use of loose-knit forms comes across as distinct from the formal freedom displayed by Kurtz and Rochberg, despite also being considerably more flexible than the classic sixteen-measure strains generally employed by Bolcom and Albright. By eliding the thematic areas in the A-strain, Pann generates a sense of continuity and phrase structure generally present in the traditional sixteen-measure form. He gains a measure from the theme in example 4.25a that may be reapplied later, but instead Pann retains the lost measure, and the resulting ambiguity is not so distracting that the listener notices the missing precision to the form. The harmonic language supports this as well – phrases never end in authentic cadences, and frequently do not even end in half cadences. In conjunction with the flexibility of time, this harmonic approach continually leads the listener forward, rather than offering individually packaged ideas.

Pann’s inclusion of the aforementioned blue notes as well as a melodic line replete with chromatic passing tones precludes *Upstate* from drawing directly upon any classic rags for direct
quotes. Since harmony in classic rags was predominantly focused on movement between the tonic and dominant, any movement which is not toward either the tonic or dominant may be considered anomalistic. Channeling Beethoven’s penchant for modulating to the sub-mediant (something common in local ragtime gestures, but not so much in the structural form), Bolcom moves from B-flat minor to G-flat major as he crosses from the B-strain to the C-strain. Pann copies this approach of modulating down a major third at the corresponding position in *Upstate*, moving from a D-flat major B-strain to the A major C-strain.

Some elements gleaned from specific classic rags include melodic similarity to Joplin’s *Gladiolus Rag* in the introduction to *Upstate* (example 4.26), though given the restrictions on using a tonal language with restricted rhythmic gestures and a necessarily narrow melodic line (to compliment the broken left hand), the similarities here may be arbitrary or generated from the composer’s subconscious familiarity with *Gladiolus Rag*. Yet in contrast with the other rags discussed here, the old and new approaches to ragtime are set opposite each other: the left hand in this introduction doesn’t resemble anything found in a classic rag, despite its unobtrusive nature.
It is worth remembering that Pann’s ragtime influences (at the time he began writing rags) were equal parts classic ragtime and the works of Bolcom and Albright. From both the classic and more modern rags Pann derived a consistently respectful approach towards the strict formal guidelines of classic ragtime. At the same time, Pann had no barrier of originality to cross when he introduced a more chromatically sophisticated texture to what would have been otherwise simple set of melodic themes. He is generationally positioned to draw upon both classic and revival-era rags in equal measure, and composes with a keen sense of balance between the old and new(er).

*Upstate* in particular feels more akin to classic rags than Pann’s other works, and also more so than the majority of rags by Bolcom and Albright. This may be due in part to a more moderate tempo (as opposed to tempos that are either more upbeat or notably slow in most of Bolcom’s and Albright’s rags). It may also be the melding of so many subtle influences that they cannot all be traced. It is certainly the case in this piece that more may easily be said about how it is different from classic rags than alike, yet this melding is likely the key to its nostalgic
success. *Upstate* is to classic rags what Prokofiev’s First Symphony or Stravinsky’s *Pulcinella* are to classical era music.

**Reflections on the Ragtime Revival**

What Carter Pann said about ragtime being a feeling, an idea, rings true after exploring the aforementioned five works: each is formally, harmonically, and rhythmically distinct, and showcases a broad variety of compositional methods. In every piece, the idea of ragtime is highly and unmistakably visible, and the characteristic visceral elements of nostalgia and rhythmic infectiousness dominate the music.

While nostalgia may not be an element that listeners of ragtime music would have felt when listening at the beginning of the century, the ragtime revival promoted a strong connotation of the music with the era of its origin. Those who were ragtime’s strongest educational proponents perpetuated this: Rudi Blesh and Harriet Janis told the “story” of ragtime, and Max Morath continued that tradition, mixing tales of the teens with songs and pieces from the same time (though Morath generally rewrote the lyrics). Furthermore, though ragtime songs were generally avoided in performance during the revival because of their racially denigrating lyrics, those lyrics did also often reflect – if only in caricature – situations representative of that era.

Despite the dearth of ragtime songs performed during the revival (especially with the original lyrics), nostalgia remained a key to the genre’s newfound success, proving that nostalgia requires no facts, nor full understanding, in order to still be an impactful visceral force.46 Following the most pivotal events of the civil rights movement, the ragtime revival allowed

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white Americans to perceive ragtime as nostalgically reflective of the creativity of African-American musicians without addressing head-on the strong, racially denigrating overtones of the lyrics that had so acutely been attached to the ragtime style. This form of nostalgia has been referred to as “restorative nostalgia,” where the utopian ideals of a past idea are removed from the relevant facts of the idea’s setting.47

One specific technique espoused by Albright, Bolcom, and Pann is frequent cadential elisions between strains. (It would perhaps have shown up in the works of Rochberg and Kurtz as well, though the two examples cited here utilize such stark stylistic contrasts between strains that an elision would likely have been impossible.) A common cadential device in classical music, elided cadences rarely appear in marches of the late nineteenth century, and (presumably by extension) never found their way into classic rags. The formal structure of classic rags was in fact so utterly rigid that it appears such tinkering with form was either blatantly inadmissible, or simply a mark of careless or inferior composing. The fact that Joplin expanded the C-strain of Magnetic Rag to twenty-four measures was quite a stretch, even though by the time he wrote this strain the practice of phrase expansion was utterly commonplace in classical music for more than a century.48

Though the five works explored here are essentially brief character pieces (with the possible exception of Albright’s oversized rag), short enough that on their basis alone, comparisons of compositional technique between the composers is limited, it is apparent that these composers are drawing upon the same well of compositional knowledge. That body of knowledge is different than the one sourced by ragtime’s Big Three, and its contents have

matured. Nonetheless, for all of the composers discussed in this chapter and the last, a genuine connection with their respective audiences was achieved. This concludes the analytical portion of this essay, and opens the door for a focus on how these disparate techniques achieved similar visceral reactions from disparate audiences, which will be discussed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER FIVE
The Reception History and Theory

Reception and Preconception

Composers have always elevated simple musical styles, of either aristocratic or popular origin. The difference in this origin is significant, though it affected their works’ audience receptions differently. The potential Chopin saw in the mazurka, or what Beethoven, Schubert, and Brahms perceived in the ländler, or more recently, Ernesto Nazareth saw in the tango, Scott Joplin, James Scott, and Joseph Lamb all recognized in ragtime.¹ It was never their individual expressions of the ragtime style that was belittled by their contemporaries in the classical establishment, but the ragtime genre itself, which was as defined by its performances and performers as it is by its works.² (This is not to mention the character of the venues in which these works were most notably performed—bars, brothels, and similar venues—though ragtime was certainly also frequently heard in park band shells, churches, and certainly at home on the parlor piano).

The racial aspect of the origins of ragtime songs complicated the way the entire ragtime genre was (and still is) perceived by the listening public. Though none of the classical composers just mentioned were born into notably affluent circumstances, they were all privileged with formal musical training. In sharp contrast, Scott Joplin and James Scott were born into abject

¹ Unlike the classical composers mentioned, Joplin and Scott did in fact write rags for dances and staged performances. However, at least as is evidenced by publisher John Stark’s use of the terms “classic ragtime” and “House of Classic Rags,” the notion that works by ragtime’s Big Three be considered “absolute music,” was visibly under consideration, even while being utilized as dance music in a manner that Chopin’s Waltzes, Polonaises, and Mazurkas are not.
² This author is not aware of a single specific work referenced amongst the denigrating comments made by those who expressed disdain for ragtime. The vitriol was directed at the style, not a piece.
poverty and further encountered the restrictive limits established by white society to restrict the social, educational and political development of African-Americans. Joplin was particularly sensitive to his racial position:

The black preachers of Sedalia, in their opposition to the Maple Leaf and Black 400 clubs, protested against ragtime, and their attitude was typical of many in the African-American community. Churchgoing blacks, those who were educated, and those who sought respectability tended to accept the stated values of white America. In doing so, they became vocal critics of ragtime [partly by denying] ragtime’s black heritage.

Scott Joplin sought acceptance as an educated, cultured, and respectable individual. In this regard, he could be expected to ally himself with others in the black community who had similar aspirations. But his art, ragtime, was rejected by these very same circles. This was one of the conflicts of his life.

**Early Performance Practice of Ragtime**

The piano works written by ragtime’s big three (especially Joplin) were certainly better-known early on through performances and amateur readings than from careful theoretical study and analysis of the musical score. As discussed in chapter 4, expressive and interpretive

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3 Joseph Lamb is left out of this conversation not only because he was white, but also because he entered the ragtime scene later, after ragtime’s supporters and detractors had been voicing their opinions and ragtime had become entrenched as a popular musical style embraced across racial boundaries. His earliest rags, including *Walper House Rag* (1903), *Ragged Rapids Rag* (1905), *Hyacinth - A Rag* (c. 1907), *Greased Lightning* (c.1907), *Rapid Transit* (c.1907), *Rag-Time Special* (c.1908), and *Dynamite Rag* (c. 1908) (also known as *Joe Lamb's Old Rag*) all predate Lamb’s 1908 meeting with Scott Joplin and the subsequent publication of *Sensation*, around the time Lamb truly became socially familiar with other major figures in ragtime. It is the rags Lamb published with John Stark (beginning with *Sensation*) for which he became known, later canonized by Rudi Blesh.

4 Edward A. Berlin, *King of Ragtime: Scott Joplin and His Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 89. Additionally, the theme of Joplin’s internal struggle between his racial identity and his creative voice is a primary theme of this book. Perhaps even more importantly, it does not appear to be a serious point of discussion in the biographies of Joplin’s peers. This raises additional questions on how biographical treatment of the canonized and epitomized Joplin may be differently approached than the biographical treatments of lesser composers – a valuable topic to be explored elsewhere.
markings in classic ragtime pieces (beyond the pitch and duration of notes) were quite sparse. This correlates closely with the sheet music industry catering to a wider audience by simplifying most of the music it published, and possibly also a reflection of the frequently informal musical training attained by many published composers of ragtime. As a result, ragtime works could be—and were—interpreted quite broadly. The performances of Mike Bernard, arguably the first notable ragtime pianist whose playing was eventually recorded, were blatantly virtuosic, with quick tempos and rapid octave runs. The recordings of *Maple Leaf Rag* by the United States Marine Band (1907) and the two virtuoso banjo players Vess Ossman (1907) and Fred van Epps (1908) are all decidedly up-tempo, as is (apparently) the recording of *Wall Street Rag* played by the Zon-O-Phone Orchestra (1910).

Joplin began marking his tempos as “Not fast” as early as the publications of *Peacherine Rag* and *The Easy Winners* in 1901 (only his third published rag). Most of his rags published after 1905 include the insistent directive, “Do not play this piece fast. It is never right to play Ragtime fast.” These admonitions reflect not only the limits of his own pianistic abilities, but also his vision of ragtime (or at least his ragtime) as a refined, genteel, and especially unhurried form. Yet few if any in the early years of the twentieth century, regardless of their stance towards ragtime, would have characterized the music as demure or polite. Therefore, in a much more fundamental way than most classical music, ragtime composition must be treated separately from ragtime performance, in that performers intentionally drew from this music unsolicited vigor.

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5 See chapter 4, note 25.
6 This author has not heard this recording. However, David Jasen refers to this “peppy arrangement” of one of Joplin’s slowest works: David A. Jasen and Gene Jones, *Black Bottom Stomp: Eight Masters of Ragtime and Early Jazz* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 26.
7 A reasonable analogy may be drawn between the gulf between composition and contemporary performance of most of the songs written by Beethoven and Schubert; the analogy holds true when this music is interpreted and performed by historical performance practice scholars. At the time of this writing, the topic of ragtime performance practice has not yet been seriously explored.
This gulf between composition and performance also extends to the more recent works explored in chapter 4.

The topic of swing must be revisited here: while in this dissertation it was earlier stated that classic ragtime was to be played without swing, there are several interesting pieces of evidence that should be considered carefully.\(^8\) Presented chronologically, the first piece of evidence is from Scott Joplin’s *School of Ragtime* (1908), in a quote which—in its entirety—has been used by various ragtime historians to draw various conclusions: “Play slowly until you catch the swing, and never play ragtime fast at any time.”\(^9\) The statement is problematic on several levels, but taken literally, and when recognized as being written before the word “swing” was in some specific way codified by jazz musicians, Joplin likely intended the word “swing” as a synonym for “syncopation.” This would lead to the conclusion that a beginning student of ragtime simply needs to grasp the unorthodox rhythmic patterns present in the *School of Ragtime*’s five exercises, and they will correctly “swing” the music.

The second piece of evidence again comes from Scott Joplin, though questions surround its authenticity. Joplin supposedly cut a handful of player-piano rolls in 1916, when his syphilis was in its final stage and he had less than a year to live. Of these rolls, the six made for the Connorized company were heavily edited and redacted (and very possibly not even played by Joplin at all). The only roll which was left (relatively) untouched, and which has been more convincingly identified as being played by Joplin, was the one of *Maple Leaf Rag* made for Uni-Record. Since a piano roll can be both recorded and played back at any speed, there is no safe

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8 See chapter 4, note 41.
way to know how fast Joplin actually was playing when he made this recording. Nonetheless, the rhythmic unevenness of the playing was a clear indicator of the decline of Joplin’s health.

Bearing the limitations of the mechanics of piano-roll recording and Joplin’s health in mind, it may be observed in the more heavily edited Connorized rolls (that Joplin may or may not have played) with a certain “swing” to his beat that is not an exact reflection of his notated works. Did this mean that he always played with swing? Was it reflective of his inability to control his hands well (a known symptom of tertiary syphilis)? Or was it a performance trait developed since Joplin arrived in New York in 1907? Though these questions are not readily answerable, they are worth pondering in conjunction with the final pieces of evidence regarding swing in performances of classic ragtime and other ragtime near the beginning of the twentieth century.

In addition to piano rolls, acoustic recordings exist of a number of virtuosic soloists from as early as the aforementioned Ossman and Epps banjo recordings of 1907 and 1908. Both of their Maple Leaf Rag recordings, as well as other tunes recorded by Ossman as early as 1900, are all played with no swing; this holds true with all of their recordings through 1913, though a 1923 recording of James Scott’s Ragtime Oriole played by Epps is played with a strong triplet swing in the novelty style.10

An interesting transitional record exists from ragtime composer and bandleader Charley Straight and singer Gene Greene: their King of the Bungaloos (rec. 1911) features the band playing in completely strict rhythm, yet Greene sings with swing when he enters the scat portion

near the end of the song. Straight’s own piano roll of *S’More* (composed and cut in 1916) features heavy swing throughout, as do the strong majority of Straight’s rolls and recordings that followed.

As the ragtime age progressed, so did the flexibility of performance styles. Though a swinging beat was prevalent by the 1920s, the overall approach to syncopated music had departed substantially from ragtime’s origins as a march with regularly occurring irregular rhythms. Orchestration became increasingly flexible, and the overall form of ragtime broke down as musical styles from Sedalia and St. Louis merged with styles from New Orleans, Chicago, Baltimore, and New York. And in New York, thanks to the Great Migration of African-Americans beginning around 1910, the same audience was able to hear the merging styles of classic ragtime, folk ragtime, New Orleans jazz, songs of the Yiddish theater, and Harlem Stride. This mixing of styles, arguably apparent in Scott Joplin’s *Magnetic Rag*, written in New York City in 1914, cross-pollinated the musical landscape irreversibly.

**The Composers’ Reception: Interpreting Syncopation**

Differences in compositional style between the ragtime composers (of classic rags), classical composers of the ragtime era (of pseudo-rags), and the classical composers of the ragtime revival (through to the present) exist not only because of factors motivated by their respective audiences but also because of their own personal choices, musical considerations, and

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11 “KING OF THE BUNGALOOS by Gene Greene 1911,” YouTube video, 2:35, Gene Greene, (baritone) and Charley Straight (piano), Victor 5854, 10 inch single sided, posted by “cdbpdx,” August 19, 2012. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fdt8MKx589Q. This recording is also one of the earliest known recorded examples of scat singing.

aesthetic tastes. Though the composers of classic ragtime confined their formal structures and syncopation styles to a narrow formula, it was basically a new formula; then-contemporary classical composers (and later, the revival composers) wrote in emulation of this new genre, and therefore focused on the attributes of the music most characteristic of the ragtime style. Still, writing in such emulation while still pursuing individual compositional agendas yields some significant incongruence with the original confines of the style. Studying some of the differences in these rhythmic elements, specifically the frequency of onset syncopation occurrences and the distribution of these syncopations between the hands, quantifiably yields significant variances of compositional approaches between the different groups.

In a recreation of the study performed by David Huron (discussed at length in chapter 3), the following data showing the distribution of note onsets in Joplin rags are confirmed. The data were gathered from two randomly selected measures from each of Joplin’s rags in $\frac{3}{4}$ or $\frac{4}{4}$ meter.\textsuperscript{13} As in the Huron experiment, the eight columns represent successive sixteenth-note positions in the meter for $\frac{3}{4}$. The tallies indicate the number of tone onsets in the corresponding metric position. Tallies represent only the presence of an onset, and ignore the number of notes that might appear in a chord. Separate onset tallies were made for the left and right hands (bass and treble staves), and both tallies are combined in table 5.1.

\textsuperscript{13} See page 62 for an explanation of “onset syncopation.” Randomly generated measure numbers were obtained by using the True Random Number Generator at https://www.random.org/
A problem with this chart is that a failure to separate the hands gives the impression that note onsets on positions 1, 3, 5 and 7 are far more frequent. However, viewing the onsets of the hands separately demonstrates that melodic notes are almost exclusively responsible for offbeat onsets. In Joplin rags the right hand always carries the melodic voice. The few notes in which the left hand plays an offbeat onset in a Joplin rag—where the texture is not a constant string of eighth notes, or oom-pah—is either an instance of the hands playing together in octaves, playing arpeggios in contrary motion but in rhythmic unison, or the left hand playing a one-measure instance of a connecting idea. More interesting is that, beyond Huron’s observation that the greater frequency of onsets in positions 4 and 6 than position 8 demonstrates a basic characteristic of syncopated music, is that the second-strongest beat of the measure, onset position 5, is equally or slightly less likely to be melodically played than positions 4 and 6 (table 5.2).
When this experiment was repeated with the complete rags of William Bolcom, William Albright, Carter Pann, Eugene Kurtz, and George Rochberg (here with sample size increased to three randomly selected measures per piece to increase sample size), a similar favoring of right hand onset positions 4 and 6 was maintained over positions 2 and 8 (table 5.3). Far more striking is the distinctly avoided onset position 5, which occurs less than half as often as any of the offbeat positions. This suggests that while these composers went to great efforts to maintain many of the more subtle rhythmic attributes of classic ragtime, they all felt that the second strong beat of the measure was to be avoided. Perhaps they sensed that the second beat undermined the maintenance of the all-important syncopated feeling which they felt defines ragtime.

Table 5.2

Note Onsets in Joplin Rags (both hands, and hands separately)
As has been earlier hypothesized, the ragtime composers of the revival era are still far more rhythmically true to classic ragtime conventions than their classical counterparts from earlier in the century. As suggested, the approach commonly applied by the earlier classical composers of distracting in various ways from the identifying traits of ragtime actually weakened a core attribute of syncopation (Table 5.4). (The increased frequency of onset position 5 occurrences may also be a result of the conflation of the terms “ragtime” and “cakewalk,” commonly used interchangeably in European syncopated works. The term “cakewalk” traditionally requires the utilization of onset position 5, and generally avoids onset positions 6 and 8. It is possible that these European composers were simply more familiar with the cakewalk style than true classic ragtime.) What is here revealed to be most fascinating is that the revival-era composers do not fall somewhere between the classical and classic-rag composers from the first half of the century, but in a syncopation position more extreme than either group. The composers of the revival era who so enthusiastically syncopated the music with what must have seemed to be an authentic ragtime approach actually exceeded the inventors of the ragtime style.
An examination of left-hand samples reveals further differences: the rate of left-hand offbeat onsets in Joplin are close to nonexistent, as would have been expected, though the revival-era composers utilize left hand activity with considerably greater frequency. Even though the revival-era composers used the oom-pah pattern ubiquitously, their more frequent technique of employing inner-voice leading, often in the tenor (generally played by the left hand), is the most common cause of this increase in left-hand offbeat onsets.

Pianistically, however, each of the classical composers of the earlier half of the twentieth century included in the graph above (Debussy, Stravinsky, Milhaud, Vladigueroff, Hindemith, and Gershwin) tend to fragment the various defining characteristics of ragtime, and to foreground one element at a time.\(^\text{15}\) The oom-pah, a vital element of classic ragtime’s left hand, is often divided between the hands by each of these composers except for Gershwin and Vladigueroff (see example 5.1). Furthermore, in its divided state, there was little room left over

\(^{15}\) This author does recognize the complications of identifying Gershwin as a “classical” composer, and in the case of a work like *Rialto Ripples*, it is perhaps more appropriate to identify him as a product of Tin Pan Alley. Nonetheless, he had an educational background which set him significantly apart from the other composers of classic ragtime.
in such a measure for a syncopated melody; all attention was to be focused on the feeling of oom-pah. Also, the oom-pah could be played “double-time” but functionally convey the same element of the musical texture (example 5.1a), or the right hand could be involved in a non-melodic gesture which serves primarily to enhance the “pah” of the oom-pah (example 5.1c).

Example 5.1 a. P. Hindemith, 1922 Suite für Klavier, op. 26, V. “Ragtime,” mm. 1-2; b. C. Debussy, Children’s Corner, “Golliwog’s Cakewalk,” mm. 6-7; c. I. Stravinsky, Piano-Rag-Music, mm. 15-16.

Because each composer category other than Scott Joplin has more left hand activity in the musical texture, the resultant ratio of right hand to left hand syncopations yields little surprise. More interestingly, classical composers contemporary to the composers of classic rags are here clearly the most active in offsetting the left hand instead of the right, whereas Carter Pann is simply more likely to utilize offbeats with such regularity that the very feeling of a downbeat or strong beat in his music is less common than the feeling of an offbeat. (tables 5.5 and 5.6)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>RH % syncopated</th>
<th>LH % syncopated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scott Joplin</td>
<td>6.51%</td>
<td>45.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Bolcom</td>
<td>17.29%</td>
<td>54.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Albright</td>
<td>11.35%</td>
<td>54.94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carter Pann</td>
<td>20.59%</td>
<td>61.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revival Era Composers, Averaged*</td>
<td>15.87%</td>
<td>55.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classical Composers, 1908-1925</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
<td>46.03%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.5
Table 5.6

The various balances between left and right hand syncopation utilized by the revival era composers and 1908-1925 classical composers actually alters listeners’ visceral reactions from what was so often described in classic rags. A reference to popular ragtime early in the twentieth century alleges:

Suddenly I discovered that my legs were in a condition of great excitement. They twitched as though charged with electricity and betrayed a considerable and rather dangerous desire to jerk me from my seat. The rhythm of the music, which had seemed so unnatural at first, was beginning to exert its influence over me. It wasn’t that feeling of ease in the joints of the feet and toes which might be caused by a Strauss waltz, no, much more energetic, material, independent as though one encountered a balking horse, which it is absolutely impossible to master.16

Without the juxtaposition of offbeat onsets directly against beats, this disjointed feeling so often referred to by both the supporters and detractors of ragtime earlier in the century is

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replaced by a feeling of floating, waiting for the next strong beat to land. (This is often the case in Carter Pann’s rags: while rhythm is clearly a foregrounded element in his musical texture, the music often comes across as more graceful and less bumpy.) It is not that the syncopated onsets define the style, but rather that the interaction of beats and offbeats gives classic ragtime its distinct rhythmic flavor.

As David Huron discusses, this onset syncopation is only one piece of the puzzle of syncopation and its meaning to listeners. Further analysis of the sampled works referenced in the above study would demonstrate that lack of onset syncopation does not correlate to lack of other kinds of syncopation. In fact, in the ragtime-inspired works of the classical composers early in the twentieth century, that onset syncopation is not only balanced, but overwhelmed by harmonic, agogic, and dynamic syncopation (the last of which is almost—if not completely—unutilized in classic ragtime). Stravinsky especially uses agogic syncopation in his Ragtime and Piano-Rag-Music, not only in alternating his syncopations between two different planes of notational duration (mixing eighth-sixteenth note syncopations with quarter-eighth syncopations), but also through individual instances of halting the musical flow or abandoning the use of syncopation altogether for a period of three or more measures, an approach which would starkly interrupt musical flow in a classic rag. (In Piano-Rag-Music this is further borne out with extended periods of unmetered composition.)

17 See pages 61-63.
18 For an extremely useful and relevant glossary of cognitive terms for musical events, see David Huron, “Musical Rhythm: A Glossary of Terms,” accessed March 3, 2015, http://www.musiccog.ohio-state.edu/Music839D/Notes/glossary.html. Agogic syncopation is there defined as: “Syncopation that arises when metrically unstressed notes are longer in duration than metrically stressed notes.” Harmonic syncopation occurs when a harmony of relative dissonance falls on a strong beat, or when a harmony of relative consonance falls on a weak beat. Dynamic syncopation broadly accounts for any accents occurring on beats that supersede the primary beat.
More recently, though, the patterns of onset syncopation usage in the contemporary rags discussed here are not only more closely related to those of classic rags, but the balance of proportions is more closely maintained. In each of the pieces analyzed in chapters 3 and 4, a central tonality is established as well as a level of harmonic complexity. Despite a broader harmonic palate used by Bolcom, Albright, Rochberg, Kurtz, and Pann, their levels of complexity remain essentially stable throughout a piece. Therefore, the severity of harmonic syncopation (Huron’s definition) from one chord to another, wherein each individual chord would be analyzed as more complex (and thus dissonant) in the music of the more recent composers, nonetheless remains approximately the same in proportion. In example 5.2 the use of agogic syncopation in the works of the classical composers may be greater than that of ragtime’s Big Three. However, in each individual work it is still a stably utilized element – and even more so in the revival-era rags than the early-twentieth century works. Again, the proportions are maintained.

Example 5.2 a. S. Joplin, *Maple Leaf Rag*, D 15-16 (second ending); b. C. Pann, *Upstate*, A” 22-23 (mm. 105-06). Parenthesis indicate non-chord tones, including neighbor and passing tones. Note the E-flat/G-flat voice exchange.
The Audience Reception

The question of how ragtime fits into today’s music scenes (both classical and “vernacular”) remains aptly problematic. It is not a new question, nor patently American: British pianist and musicologist Peter Dickinson wrote:

The problem of definition is compounded by other issues. Ragtime has frequently been described by people from various standpoints to suit themselves. As a result of fitting into no category [not quite jazz, racially awkward in today’s context, beneath classical notice], the ragtimers—the people who cultivate and play ragtime—have become isolated and tend to view their subject on its own. The subject owes an enormous amount to these individual collectors and dedicated players who have helped to preserve the repertoire and keep it alive. New Rags are being composed and played all the time.19

In table 5.7, audiences were polled on the decidedly subjective topic of whether ragtime is an ongoing and evolving style or one entirely focused on the period from which it first flourished. It is representative of the era of its birth simply because it is of the era of its birth, and because of its immense popularity ragtime remains as affixed to that era as most popular musical styles do to their own times (e.g. as disco corresponds to the 1970s and grunge to the 1990s). However, this particular question, in correlation with the surveys in tables 5.8, 5.9, and 5.10, suggests that with greater interest and awareness in past musical styles comes an interest in the continuance (or evolution) of the style.

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As discussed briefly in chapter 2, Bryan Wright drew on various categories of participants in a revival setting.\(^{20}\) Dickinson, referring to those who “fit into no category (and are) isolated and view their subject on their own,” points directly to the group whose performers are mostly termed by Stekert as “imitators,” with a few “innovators” also performing for the same audience. Yet despite a clear sense that this ragtime revival audience is today confident in the notion that “ragtime is a dynamically evolving style,” they seek ragtime events to listen to the music performed primarily by the “imitators.” Today, the most popular performers at these festival concerts, pianists such as Jeff Barnhart, Brian Holland, and Morten Gunnar-Larsen, focus their repertoire on works by ragtime’s Big Three and some other composers of classic rags, and extend into early Harlem stride composers such as Thomas “Fats” Waller and James P. Johnson or to Ferdinand “Jelly-Roll” Morton.

The young pianist Adam Swanson, already a favorite of the ragtime festival community despite his young age (he was born in 1992), claims to “hate dissonance,” and focuses his

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\(^{20}\) See chapter 2, note 36.
repertoire entirely on classic rags and songs of the 1910s.  His own compositions, though few, demonstrate outstanding understanding of the traits of classic rags. The few pieces in his repertoire that were written post-1950 are also firmly in the “imitator” camp, including works by Tom Brier and Trebor Tichenor.

These pianists from today’s ragtime festival circuit, each also a fine performer in their own right, and not just a proponent of the “imitators,” do not appear to represent the forward thinking of a group claiming to seek a “dynamically evolving style.” Yet it is a balance between old (familiar) and new (innovations atop the familiar) that appears to define the kind of dynamically evolving style that this audience actively seeks.

In addition to favoring pianists whose style is strongly reminiscent of the early performance practices of ragtime (or at least the perception of those performance practices, which have been more strongly dictated by piano rolls, writings, and the Joshua Rifkin recordings than they have by actual recordings of pianists of the ragtime age), their interest in the compositions of revival-era composers includes works almost exclusively by those reasonably categorized as “imitative.”

In tables 5.8, 5.9, and 5.10, respondents were asked to rate the appeal of various composers or popular musical musicians/groups. Referring back to table 5.7, it is compellingly suggestive that the more an audience is familiar with and attracted to music that has a performance and study tradition that substantially outlives the composer and the era during which they were active, the more they share custodial interest in maintaining and furthering the style. However, the most dedicated of ragtime audiences (the festival audiences) appear to prefer listening to works composed by the most famous musicians active early in the twentieth century.

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21 Swanson does acknowledge the basic relationship between dissonance and consonance inherent in most common-era genres, including ragtime. This author contends that his perspective is based on distaste for unresolved non-chord tones.
In both the ragtime festival and classical concert surveys, opinions towards the various musicians were strong. The strength of positive favorability held true for some popular groups (especially the Beatles) as well as earlier classical composers like Beethoven and Chopin. However, in the classes survey, in addition to a far greater degree of unfamiliarity with most of these musicians (interestingly, the popular musicians as well as the classical), opinions tended to be far less strong, even towards more contemporary popular music. One possible conclusion is that those who have strong opinions about any musical styles or performers are more likely to demonstrate custodial responsibility towards all music.

Table 5.8
Table 5.9

Table 5.10
The Interest and Entry of Classical Composers into Ragtime’s Mainstream

The aforementioned current perspective on ragtime is not reflective of the environment in which ragtime returned to the mainstream in the 1970s. As a subculture interest in ragtime grew through the 1960s, a letter from classical composer Vincent Persichetti, who was also the Director of Publications at the Elkan-Vogel Company, in response to William Albright’s application to publish a new set of rags, was met with the most completely dismissive tone (example 5.3).  

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Despite the fact that Albright had actually sent his *Grand Sonata in Ragtime* to Elkan-Vogel at their explicit request, Persichetti, the preeminent voice of composers at the publishing house at the time, was as scornful of ragtime in 1969 as the majority of classical musicians were
toward the publications of ragtime music early that same century. An interesting matter of speculation arises as to what Persichetti’s answer to Albright’s attempt to publish *Grand Sonata in Ragtime* might have been if the initial request had come just a year or so later, coinciding with the burst of popularity that came with the release of Rifkin’s performance of Joplin rags. Persichetti’s answer to Albright was likely also somewhat motivated by questions of profitability, which would ultimately have been the only difference.

William Bolcom’s perspective on creating rags, despite his very clear attention to historically accurate detail, was that he was writing music that he enjoyed. The following exchange puts some perspective on Bolcom’s audience concerns as he composed:


WB (William Bolcom): I wrote rags for myself first, but William Albright and I began to correspond and send each other rags, sort of like chess problems by mail. Suddenly other composers were doing them. I think we found composing that way refreshing. The fact that listeners liked what we did was ancillary.

WM: Did you find yourself writing to please an audience, or was this not a concern?

WB: It would have ruined the fun if I thought of the audience, though it's nice when they came along for the ride.

WM: How do you feel your compositions reflect the time they were written (as opposed to how these pieces could have been understood in the 1900s)? Were they specifically intended for an audience experienced with more complex musical forms?

WB: As I said before we who wrote these nouveaux rags did them for pleasure. Audience involvement was part of the fun.

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23 In a letter from Bernard A. Kohn to William Albright dated Dec. 13, 1968, Kohn writes, “We shall look forward to receiving the manuscripts to your *Grand Sonata in Ragtime* and the other compositions you mentioned and which you are working on.” Ibid.

Referring to the inclusion of ragtime-themes in his early opera *Dynamite Tonight*, Bolcom has also said, “They [the composition professors of the Paris Conservatoire, though likely alluding to composition teachers in general in the 1960s] believed in purity of style and I didn’t believe in purity of style. I still don’t.”

In the discussion of Albright’s works in chapter 4, a number of examples were presented detailing some compositional quotes passed between Albright and Bolcom, including most visibly the C-Strain of Albright’s *Sleepwalker’s Shuffle* and Bolcom’s *The Gardenia*, and Albright’s *Nightmare Fantasy Rag* and Bolcom’s *The Serpent’s Kiss*. Albright and Bolcom met for the first time as composition fellows at the 1966 Berkshire Music Festival. Though documentation has not been found to determine Albright’s earliest familiarity with ragtime, Bolcom was apparently unaware of Scott Joplin until 1967 (though he was familiar with *Maple Leaf Rag*). Both Albright and Bolcom wrote their first rags in 1967.

Since Bolcom was quite comfortable drawing upon compositional styles ranging from ragtime to Boulez (by his own admission), the following exchange with this author came as a surprise:

WM: Can you tell me which rags of Albright’s borrowed or quoted from your works as opposed to which of yours borrowed/quoted his? (I’ve discovered a number of similar phrases between your works, and they usually are from pieces written the same year.)

WB: I don't think either of us intended to quote each other.

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26 See chapter 4, examples 4.7 and 4.12.

27 Ibid. Bolcom recollects, “A colleague whom I met as a student at Tanglewood, William Albright, and I started writing rags. We had more to do probably than anyone in putting together the ragtime revival, and of course there was Max [Morath]. We have more to do with bringing it into classical music than any one, except for Joshua Rifkin who brought out recordings of Scott Joplin, on Nonesuch.”

28 Bolcom, interview. See Appendix B, 214.
A glimpse of candor followed. Amongst the many letters that Bolcom had sent to William Albright as they feverishly exchanged rags by mail in the late 1960s, and which were later compiled and organized for the William Albright Papers, was a letter in which Bolcom wrote, “I stole unashamedly from your ideas and hope that it won’t make programming problems for that reason.” (Bolcom and Albright later collaborated on numerous ragtime-themed concerts.) Albright must have replied to this letter, for Bolcom’s next letter to Albright explains the situation further:

NYC, Sept. 14 [1967]

Dear Bill,

Happy Labor Day.

Thank you for liking “Black Hannah.” Like it enough to be able to play it some time when I’m there and I’ll be more than happy. I hope it works as well as I think it oughta.

I didn’t say, “steal from second rate guys,” which you AIN’T. I said – or Yeats said and I quote – “Bad poets imitate: good poets STEAL.” [illegible] that’s what I meant. I am not anyways ashamed if my LIFTS of you and you should be [illegible] complimented to steal of your super stuff. Enough self-love acrobatics. I really mean, plagiarism is an act of love.

Sometimes it’s legal and most of the time it’s not – who knows which when?

- Bill

Bolcom’s more recent statement bears testament to the challenges a composer faces when trying to present music to the public—that it should be perceived as new, original and fresh; the obligation to protect one’s own material is common amongst composers. Yet it is certainly unnecessary that every newly composed work completely reinvent the basic concepts or

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29 Bolcom, William Correspondence (Bolcom to Albright), 1967-1971, Box No. 3, William Albright Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan. The letter referred to here is dated August 15, 1967.

30 Ibid. The year is presumed to be 1967 based on the consistent use of the same pen and paper around this time, that the location where the letter was written is consistent with Bolcom’s activities, and that the subject matter corresponds.
language of music, and in bringing fresh vitality to a mostly forgotten genre it is against the very purpose of writing in that genre. Just as transcriptions, paraphrases, theme-and-variations, pastiche, and all other manner of composing bear the marks of the usage of the material of other composers, writing in a dormant genre is a near-extension of this approach to composition.

The composer’s intent, on the other hand, varies as a result of his or her willingness to acknowledge the use of other composers' ideas. Whether composers wish for their listeners to be aware of the source from which a central (or peripheral) idea in their work came, or to suggest that it was their own idea, can alter several aspects of the listening experience. This is akin to the differing reactions of listeners reacting to the same piece at different times and/or in different settings, and to whatever extent the composer has control over the time and setting (or knowledge of their sources), they may choose to exercise that control.

In Bolcom’s case, by simply not discussing the presence of another composer, the listener is meant to focus more on Bolcom’s own reinterpretation of the ragtime idea than on the friendly quotes that appear from his friend’s music (remembering again that Albright also quoted Bolcom frequently in return). What is perhaps most intriguing is that, from their very earliest forays into writing in the ragtime style, both Bolcom and Albright (two composers who quickly grasped the basics and subtleties of ragtime composition), felt comfortable exchanging and incorporating each other’s musical thoughts.

In this personal letter, Bolcom jokes about plagiarizing Albright, but really does no such thing; he incorporated tiny bits of reference into his works from Albright, four measures here, two there, and in doing so immediately re-contextualized the meaning of the music. Both composers would have relied less upon the inclusion of the quoted materials of the other than they would the structural, formal, and stylistic traits of ragtime’s Big Three.
A final observation about all of the composers of the revival era is that the repertoire from which they became familiar with the ragtime style was highly vetted. From the 1950 publication of *They All Played Ragtime* and the PBS broadcasts of Max Morath beginning in 1959, ragtime enthusiasts of the 1960s were raised on a diet of the music of Joplin, Scott, and Lamb, together with some other singular examples of what are still today considered to be the finest ragtime works by composers like Percy Wenrich, Artie Matthews, Charles Johnson, and a small handful of others. Perhaps it was because these works of quality reached the ears of the strongest proponents of the ragtime revival that the composers of the revival era discussed here had the opportunity to write works of staying quality. (Regardless of performance style or quality, a good musician can often distinguish a great composition from a mediocre one.) And perhaps it was because they had each other’s support in writing such music before it became popular again, and an unassailable belief that ragtime was music with value.
CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

Writing a rag is in many ways similar to writing any other formally constructed work of music. As demonstrated, the formal elements in classic rags as well as revival-era rags are tightly prescribed, and the best-known and most musically successful of these works both play to the strengths of the formal elements as well as use form as a framework in which to explore other musical ideas.

From the audience perspective, it appears that the strong, successful compositions that are performed with some regularity in concerts contemporary to this writing—from both the classic rag camp and the revival-era rag camp—follow a near-algorithmic formula. A certain level of rhythmic complexity combined with a fairly standardized phrase pattern and length, and a contained amount of harmonic complexity and/or polyphonic movement, presented to an audience with reasonable musical listening experience to competently understand the music’s communicative points, has the potential to yield a work of long-term staying power.

This last statement requires clarification, because each of these elements is not indeterminate, and also each element is related intimately with its counterparts. Rhythmic complexity in ragtime, as discussed in chapter 1, functions most commonly between adjacent durational levels (syncopations occur between eighth notes and sixteenths, or quarters and eighths). This remains mostly constant between classic rags and revival-era rags, as do sixteen-measure strains, with allowances for phrase expansions and insertions. Harmonic complexity and polyphonic movement increase greatly in works of the revival-era, yet the primary audience (before the explosion of interest by the general public following the Rifkin recording) was a
classical audience that had grown accustomed to the regular programming of far more challenging works ranging from Debussy’s *Preludes* to Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring* to some works of Arnold Schoenberg and Anton Webern, and enthusiastically supported the works and ideas of composers like John Cage and Morton Feldman. (It was Harold Schoenberg, a classical music critic, whose support of the Rifkin recording singularly launched the ragtime revival into an entirely new stratum.)

The eight-measure period, and by extension the sixteen measure double period, as discussed in chapter 3, was an appropriation of ragtime, not an invention. It is a device of such profound effectiveness that not only was it employed from before the Baroque and with extreme pervasiveness from the Classical period to the present, it has also been the basis for the vast majority of western popular music forms. It may be suggested that this length is a particularly digestible quantity of music: a sixteen measure strain of up-tempo ragtime takes roughly fifteen to twenty seconds to perform, and a sixteen measure strain of the slowest and most lyrical ragtime music takes as long as about forty seconds. Assuming a double period, with a basic idea lasting two measures and an answering or contrasting idea lasting another two, we therefore come to the idea that two to five seconds of music leaning against another two to five seconds may be a reasonable capacity for listeners. The remaining ten to thirty seconds of a strain allows time to contemplate these first critical seconds (often repeated in the ensuing four measures or at the halfway point of the strain), and once the listener has fed fully upon this strain (and allowed an opportunity to gain perspective based on the repeat of that strain), the music may move to fresh ideas, the next strain.

As the composers discussed in chapter 4 became aware of ragtime, and eventually became active ragtime composers, it is clear that they sought to employ the same clarity of
harmonic delineation and rigorous form that earlier ragtime composers did, even as they were concurrently composing much more complex works. There was music being written as high art, and music being written for the people, yet their audience for both styles was generally one and the same. In a sense, these composers were writing both above and below their audience, pushing them past their comfort, erstwhile offering a strong sense of familiarity.

Retrospectively, this dissertation seeks to open the door to further exploration of the ways in which contemporary composers revisit music of the past, and weigh the importance of different compositional elements key to the compositional success and originality of the earlier style. It may be stated here that works composed in what may be called satire or caricature (classical composers early in the twentieth century emulating ragtime) focused more narrowly on fewer elements, and that composers writing in tribute or emulation (the “imitators”) of the classic ragtime style barely contributed (really, pointedly avoided) elements foreign to the classic ragtime style.

A parallel evolutionary process may be drawn to the history of the fugue. For example, a technique such as fortspinning (literally “spinning out”) was critical to many of Bach’s fugues, but few of Mozart’s, where greater emphasis was placed on more frequent entrances of the subject and on creating a more stable harmonic texture. Whether this results in a superior or more complex work is not at question, but it is of significance that just as time moves only linearly forward, the reflectiveness of the compositional process oscillates in a predictable, and perhaps chartable, pattern. Today’s music conservatory students are still commonly tasked with writing a fugue in the style of Bach, and similar to the composers of tribute rags, do not seek to innovate so much as to recreate.
Ultimately, following a skip of a generation or more (or, enough time for the musical style to be “fully explored” and then recognized for being “fully explored” by younger composers and avoided in favor of new or different innovations), composers can revisit a compositional style freshly and with the perspective that a style is not only represented by the parts of the whole, but also the whole. Foregrounding the defining elements of a style is the first method of compositionally exploring a style outside of direct adherence. Recognizing that the key elements alone define but do not make a style is how composers generationally removed from the style identify the keys to the compositional success of the style’s originators.

Audiences realize this as well. When a style is “new,” the newness of the sound attracts listeners to focus on the distinguishing elements of the style. If the style achieves recognition and longevity, it then settles into a chronological place in the history of music. Through repeated listenings to a work or style, the distinguishing elements fade in the face of the work itself, taken as a single entity, represented by the name of that style, remembered by its melodic content or perhaps by its exact rhythmic patterns. It is the value of the work as a whole, rather than the value of select traits, that composers of a later generation will seek to investigate when exploring and reinventing a compositional style.
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MAPLE LEAF RAG.

BY SCOTT JOPLIN.

Tempo di marcia.

Copyright 1899 by John Stark & Son.
V. Toccata - Rag

Fast (\( \text{j} = \text{ca. } 224; \text{j} = \text{ca. } 112 \))

Slow: sentimental (\( \text{j} = \text{ca. } 84 \))

Slow drag: sultry; quasi “blues” (\( \text{j} = \text{ca. } 96 \))
With a gentle swing; easy pace; relaxed singing \( (\dot{q} = \text{ca. } 112) \)
fff brilliant!

Fast and furious!
G.P.
a piacere

Slow at first

pp

cresc. ed

accel. poco a poco

110-40612
poco mf
gradually increase speed and volume; repeat at will and break off at point of maximum intensity anywhere in figure

Fast! (£ = ca. 112)

ff

dim. e r.i.t. molto pp

Presto! Toss it off!

fff ff
2. The Nightmare Fantasy Rag
(A Night on Rag Mountain)
Moderato, but swinging (Fox trot)
GRACEFUL GHOST RAG

Moderate Rag \( \left( \frac{3}{4} \text{ ca. 120} \right) \) (Don't drag)

WILLIAM BOLCOM

\( \text{cantabile} \)

\( \text{mp smoothly} \)

1.

2.
rag

à la mémoire de Scott Joplin

VIVEMENTE \( \text{\textit{d} = 96} \)
Andante Lirico (walking lazily)

delicato (moving)

cantabile, with style

rall. .......
Appendix B

(Abbreviations: WB = William Bolcom; JL = Jerome Lowenthal; CP = Carter Pann; WM = William McNally)

Author’s note: The following interviews, particularly those with Jerome Lowenthal and Carter Pann, are conversational in nature, are not always about material relevant to this dissertation. However, it is strongly felt by this author that there is a wealth of other information contained within these texts, and that the subjects’ opinions on a wide variety of topics are worth retaining. For posterity, and sometimes for context, all interviews are presented here intact and unabridged.

Questionnaire with William Bolcom

The following questionnaire was constructed and answered in lieu of an in-person interview. The questions were delivered via email to William Bolcom on June 30, 2014, and answered on July 26, 2014.

WM: How and when did you first encounter ragtime?

WB: I actually played things like *Twelfth St. Rag* when a boy. But I had the most serious encounter with it about 1967 when I was given the name of Scott Joplin by a friend who told me of his ragtime opera, which I pursued. I also befriended Rudi Blesh, whose landmark book *They All Played Ragtime* had an enormous effect on me; Rudi introduced me to Max Morath who got my copies of Joplin's rags. I then suddenly decided to write a few rags of my own, inspired by Joplin.

WM: Why was the ragtime form a good vehicle for you to express your compositional ideas?

WB: I was beginning to rankle at the feeling of being boxed-in by a general esthetic so many composers seemed to share, a sort of total-chromatic vague atonality de rigueur in the ‘60s here and abroad. Somehow putting four flats in a signature seemed liberating.

WM: What aspects of your formal musical education do you feel contributed to your growth as a composer of ragtime?

WB: I have no idea.

WM: What elements of your experience with ragtime serve your other (non-ragtime) compositional work?

WB: Again I am unable to answer.


WB: I wrote rags for myself first, but William Albright and I began to correspond and send each other rags, sort of like chess problems by mail. Suddenly other composers were
doing them. I think we found composing that way refreshing. The fact that listeners liked what we did was ancillary.

WM: Did you find yourself writing to please an audience, or was this not a concern?

WB: It would have ruined the fun if I thought of the audience, though it’s nice when they came along for the ride.

WM: How do you feel your compositions reflect the time they were written (as opposed to how these pieces could have been understood in the 1900s)? Were they specifically intended for an audience experienced with more complex musical forms?

WB: As I said before we who wrote these nouveaux rags did them for pleasure. Audience involvement was part of the fun.

WM: A few true/false questions: You got into ragtime while teaching at Queens College, and knew little to nothing about it beforehand.

WB: Correct.

WM: You became less involved with ragtime following all of the copyright battles and legal shenanigans.

WB: Very correct.

WM: Do you see your works which have ragtime elements incorporated, but which are not built on classic rag structures, to still fit a so-called “third stream” philosophy? If so, do you generally believe composers today are almost bound to a philosophy of making challenging music accessible by utilizing or remobilizing extant compositional techniques?

WB: I have no idea what other people do. It's hard enough to figure out what I'm doing.

WM: Did Darius Milhaud help you build ideas that came to be identified [by Gunther Schuller] as “Third Stream”?

WB: Not one bit - Milhaud was actually tired of jazz and couldn't understand my interest in ragtime.

WM: Is it true that George Rochberg helped you realize tonal composition in classical music was still possible, even if it was against the grain of the current academic compositional trends?

WB: Yes, that’s true.

WM: How much do you think Rochberg really understood what ragtime was (as we currently define it)? What I mean to say is, do you think that Rochberg perceived the dividing lines between ragtime, novelty and stride?
WB: I doubt it - his ragtime piece is impressionistic in the same way as Debussy's *Golliwog's Cakewalk*. Neither one was interested in the history or the genre for itself.

WM: What was Rochberg's familiarity with ragtime (as opposed to jazz) prior to his composing *Carnival Music*?

WB: I have no idea.

WM: Did William Albright become interested in ragtime through you?

WB: He did tell me he was aware of Joplin, probably before I was. But we started exchanging rags soon after.

WM: Are you at all familiar with the background of Albright’s *Juba*?

WB: Background? I've heard the piece and enjoy all of Bill's wonderful organ music. (By the way, it’s now being recorded in its entirety by Douglas Reed of Evansville, Indiana, who plays it all superbly.)

WM: Can you tell me which rags of Albright’s borrowed or quoted from your works as opposed to which of yours borrowed/quoted his? (I’ve discovered a number of similar phrases between your works, and they usually are from pieces written the same year.)

WB: I don't think either of us intended to quote each other.

WM: How did Max Morath enter your life, and what impact did he have on you?

WB: Rudi Blesh introduced us. We also worked on several CD's - one, *These Charming People*, has to do with Max's other side, as a singer of ballads by the classic songwriters.

WM: Did Eubie Blake explicitly encourage you to write rags?

WB: No.

WM: Was he familiar with your works, and if so, what did he think of them?

WB: He became of aware of what I wrote after we met.

WM: Did you know Eugene Kurtz? When was Kurtz at the University of Michigan?

WB: Eugene taught out here several times but I don't remember which years; his home was in Paris.

WM: Kurtz seems to employ a serialist approach in his *Rag*.  

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WB: I have to say I can't remember; he often was satirical, too.

WM: Did you intend at all for *Rag Infernal* to actually be serially chartable, or did you just write dissonantly as you imagined it?

**WB: I wrote non-serially throughout. There is a passage where I telescope intervals about 3/4 through.**

WM: Do you know of Albright’s use of serialism?

**WB: No.**

WM: (Kurtz seemed to base some pretty specific gestures on Albright’s rags, such as the backbeats in the left hand, and I’m interested if there’s any precedent for serialist rag.)

**WB: None that I know of - I'm sure some academic did it somewhere to be cute.**

WM: Much has been written and discussed about your *Graceful Ghost Rag*, but is there anything in particular about its composition that you'd like to further note?

**WB: Nope.**

WM: Any quotations, inspirations, specific applications?

**WB: Ditto**

WM: Was there anything especially significant about its premiere, or the people who first heard it?

**WB: Not particularly.**
Personal Interview with Jerome Lowenthal

The following is a transcript of an interview with Jerome Lowenthal conducted by the author at the subject’s home in New York City, on July 17, 2014. This transcript has been approved by the subject.

WM: Let me tell you a little bit about my dissertation. You have composers like Scott Joplin, James Scott and Joseph Lamb writing rags at the beginning of the century. They write it in a very precise form with very precise constructs. Then you have [William] Bolcom and [William] Albright and a handful of other composers in the late ’60s and early ’70s that take the archaic genre and put it into a modern language for a different audience at a different time. So my question is this: “Why did that different time and different audience require these changes to the old form?”

[George] Rochberg’s role in this is singularly limited to the “Toccata-Rag” [movement]…

JL: Although, what he did with the “Toccata-Rag” in Carnival Music is analogous to what he did with many other forms. So, in that sense, his role, in my opinion, is quite important, quite critical, even.

WM: Indeed. Let’s go back a bit, starting with how you first met Rochberg; in what capacity did you know him?

JL: Somebody brought me Nach Bach in the middle sixties. The piece was 1966, but somebody brought it to me not too long before it was published – I don’t know when. It was brought to me oddly enough by two people, separately. I of course knew Rochberg’s name from Philadelphia. I was a student at the University of Pennsylvania, and a man named Alex Ringer, who later became quite a well-known figure writing about music from the University of Illinois, but at that time he was a graduate assistant (or something like it) at the University of Pennsylvania. I took an elective course with him, and he talked about Rochberg all the time, so I knew Rochberg’s name.

WM: Was Rochberg teaching there at that point?

JL: No, he was at Curtis at that point. And then these two people brought me Nach Bach, and I instantly fell in love with it. And the things that I loved about it are exactly what I still love about it. And to me, it’s one of Rochberg’s most successful pieces. People sometimes thought it was supposed to be funny because of the in a way unfortunately clever title, which invited people to say “I prefer Bach’s for Rochberg” on the model of Pier la Lot saying, “the Tombeau de Couperin was alright, but I would much rather hear the Tombeau de Ravel by Couperin.” Anyway, my point is that the piece was not humorous at all – it’s tragic, and it’s in intent. Whether it’s felt as tragic, you see, you cannot discuss that; but it’s tragic in intent. The intent is the same as, let’s say, in T. S. Eliot’s The Wasteland: “These are the fragments I have shored against my ruins.” The meaning of the Nach Bach s perfectly captured at the end which ends in a dissonance (demonstrates ending of Nach Bach) which is from the Sarabande (of Bach’s E Minor Toccata), but of
course in the Sarabande it resolves, and in the Rochberg, it’s the end of the piece like that, meaning, it’s the projection of its meaning, that there’s no resolution. Now, in any case, the piece just fascinated me, I just loved it. I’ve always been fascinated by inter-quotations, inter-allusions, and I enjoy very much the way Schubert does that, but even more, say, the way Stravinsky does it, because it’s more sophisticated. I don’t mean that I like Stravinsky more than Schubert. (He manipulates it a little further) It’s more consciously, aesthetically motivated with Schubert, it’s just he’s completely absorbed in Beethoven’s music, and just repeats it, or Mozart in his earlier music. I also in literature, I’m always fascinated by intertextual references. Charles Rosen, in one of his last pieces for the New York Review of Books, said about something… He took words from the following sentence – but the point is that he did not attribute them. The sentence is, “What song the siren sang, or what name Achilles used when he hid among women, though puzzling questions are not beyond all conjecture.” That’s kind of a famous sentence from Sir Thomas Browne and Rosen used the second part of that, saying, “a puzzling question beyond all conjecture,” but he didn’t attribute that. I don’t mean to say that he was plagiarizing, I mean he was making a reference for people who noticed it. Those things give me a lot of pleasure. That may sound superficial, but it’s true. I was very pleased when I mentioned to Rochberg the fact that in his Ricordanza for cello and piano he had used a transposition of a passage from Chopin’s Nocturne, op. 55, no. 2, in E-flat (sings), there’s a passage towards the end of that, and he transposes it and uses it in this piece, and George said, “only you would notice that.” Now, it’s not true that only I would notice that, but only a pianist who knew that nocturne would notice it, that’s certainly true.

Anyway, falling in love with the Nach Bach, I learned it, and I played it in a little place in Sweden, and I sent the program to Rochberg, whom I didn’t know. The program was all in Swedish, and had a million little circles over the vowels, and I wrote to him, “I hope you will enjoy this program rich in umlauts.” He was quite delighted. That’s how we established contact. I don’t believe we had ever spoken before. Then he offered – Nach Bach had been premiered by the harpsichordist for whom he had written it, but it hadn’t been premiered on the piano. So he offered me to do the premiere. I started a Town Hall recital with it, and the critic, a Mr. [Donal] Henahan, as he said in his review, arrived too late to hear it. No comment on that. So, that’s how I met him. When did he write the Partita Variations? (Bill searches for the date in a CD performed by Lowenthal) You see, I was trying to remember if I played the Partita Variations… I had heard the Partita Variations played by Etsuko Tazaki, and I mention her in the notes, actually (1976) yes, that’s right. So the Carnival Music is earlier, yes, and he wrote the Carnival Music for me...

WM: Hold on a moment, I have another question about Nach Bach. Because that was written in 1966, if you hadn’t known him before that, this might not be something that you’re closely aware of, but his son had died the year before.

JL: Well, of course, well, that’s the whole story

WM: Well, there’s been a fair amount of conjecture about how that was the catalytic event...

JL: Yes, right. I write about that quite endlessly in my notes, by the way...
WM: So his change from atonality to tonality…

JL: He did not change from atonality to tonality!

WM: Well, that’s just it. It never quite made sense to me what I’ve read about a “shift” from one to the other.

JL: No, it was a shift from convention to freedom. The convention was the orthodox of the twelve-tone composers. Rochberg never denied his twelve-tone compositions; on the contrary, he loved them. He wanted me very much to record the Sonata Fantasia. I played it. He had me do a concert all of his music. I played besides Nach Bach, the Carnival Music and the Partita Variations, I definitely did the Sonata Fantasia (from music), and I did his early variations, which are completely tonal, and which are sort of Faure-ish, but less radical. They’re published. He wanted me very much to do the Sonata Fantasia, which is a very intense twelve-tone piece, very “Rochbergian” in temperament. I thought (I didn’t say it to him), that it was a work which had anybody else composed it he would have despised, and I thought it was a very good work. But, I didn’t really feel like doing it. That was not the Rochberg that interested me. Now, what he turned to was not tonality versus atonality, but freedom to do whatever he wanted. It started, of course, with quotes from other composers. The first piece that he wrote is Contra Mortem et Tempus.

WM: Ah, that was before Nach Bach, but following the death of Paul Rochberg.

JL: Yes, that was the first reaction to his son’s death. It’s a collage of quotations, but the quotations are, as I recall, and perhaps I may be mistaken because I haven’t listened to it in a long, long time, they’re atonal, and they’re so that to the unsophisticated listener, it sounds like another atonal piece. But then, he moved to Music of the Magic Theater, in which there are long stretches of Mozart. Now, I don’t remember at what point he wrote Nach Bach, and I have a booklet of all of his works…

WM: These had to have been written in pretty close succession, over the course of a year or so.

JL: Yes, and then he wrote his Third Symphony, which I heard at Juilliard, which had an entire mass by Schutz in it, or a cantata perhaps by Schutz, and long quotations from the Missa Solemnis, as well as quotes from Mahler here and there. That was sort of the high point of the tide of quotations. But then he started doing pastiche, and of course, there’s a lot of that in the Partita Variations, a pastiche of Chopin, the Nocturne before the Arabesque. I play that piece for people, and they’re so puzzled by it, for it’s obviously Chopin, but…And then, you see, the point is always context (plays) and so forth. Now, this is completely atonal after all, so you can’t possibly say he doesn’t write atonal music. That’s actually from the Nach Bach, he goes back to the Nach Bach and uses it, and he does things like that in a number of pieces. Do you know the Quintet, the Piano Quintet? (No) I haven’t recorded that. It was written for me and the Concord Quartet, and it was recorded by Alan Marks. I did it at a memorial concert for him. He has lots of references to his own music in that.
Some of his later compositions, like the Ricordanza for piano and cello, are entirely tonal. That one has large quotes from Beethoven C Major cello sonata, as well as Chopin and a few other things, but it’s mainly Beethoven. He never said, “I won’t write atonally,” he said, “I will write anything I want to.” The using of other material, other people’s material, he supported aesthetically by Borges’ story Pierre Menard, Author of the ‘Quixote’… Pierre Menard is a fantastical French decadent writer who decides to rewrite two chapters of Don Quixote, but in rewriting them, he’s not going to change anything. He’s going to keep every punctuation intact, but he’s going to give a different meaning to every word, the meaning dependent on the difference between himself and the state of mind in which he’s writing it, and Cervantes. And that was Rochberg’s justification for himself, that he was giving new meaning to the music that he was… After all, there’s nothing new about that. (Plays from Rochberg’s ________, and Milhaud’s Saudades do Brasil) Do you know these pieces? (No…) That’s less typical than (plays again from Saudades do Brasil) …taking a very simple rhythm, and putting it in a bitonal setting, that’s Milhaud. That’s different from what Rochberg did, but it has a similar attitude. In other words, it’s giving a different meaning to something that comes from another idea.

WM: OK, so this is sort of what ends up happening in Carnival Music, right?

JL: Yes, it happens in all of his music. It’s in every one. The only one of the movements in Carnival Music where that doesn’t happen is the third, but of course the fourth has both Brahms and Bach in it, and the first has the zither music of The Third Man.

WM: What’s that?

JL: Have you ever seen The Third Man? (No) Well, go see it, it’s worth seeing, you have to see it. (Plays the zither theme, and then from Carnival Music.) Presser didn’t want to publish it because they thought they’d be sued, but eventually they did. Anton Saras, I think…That’s all in my notes.

That’s a movie you should see, and the use of music is so startling. Graham Green, who wrote the script, was against the ending as they did it, and the director was for it, but as he said, “neither of us realized the impact that the music would have”; the music just takes over the meaning of the film. It’s very exciting.

WM: One more thing before we get to Carnival Music. You had told me before that you were aware of Rochberg’s activities as a jazz pianist. It sort of isn’t in keeping with his style of composition, but if he was a jazz pianist during the war years and the fifties…

JL: He was born in 1918…

WM: The bigger question that I’m interested in is this: what kind of jazz?

JL: Well, you see, I can sort of answer that, because he demonstrated in the blues, and that was…(goes to piano) He wanted something very brutal. I don’t do it. I found that I couldn’t do what he wanted, and in this recording, I made no attempt to. (Hammers out
basic blues patterns, borderline blues-boogie.) That’s the music that he demonstrated to me, in the *Blues* movement.

WM: OK, so he wasn’t particularly a stride pianist, or coming out of the Harlem tradition…

**JL:** I can’t tell you that.

WM: That still tells me sort of more what he would have been playing…Was he playing in a combo or some kind of ensemble?

**JL:** I doubt it, but I have no idea.

WM: I wish I knew who would actually know that.

**JL:** Nobody you would easily find. Gene Rochberg I’ve spoken to just recently, because I’m about to play the *Carnival Music* in Philadelphia and I invited her to the concert. She sounds fine, but I don’t think she is, and she says she’s not. She’s ninety-four… You might get in touch with his daughter; I don’t know if you’re interested. She’s a MacArthur grantee in Assyrian studies…

[PAUSE]

WM: So how did *Carnival Music* end up being commissioned or dedicated to you?

**JL:** I didn’t commission it. He wrote it for me. He had decided to write a piece for me.

WM: Were you aware of that before I was done?

**JL:** I don’t remember; probably, but I don’t remember.

WM: OK, so there was no real communication between the two of you about the content of the work?

**JL:** No. Absolutely not.

WM: OK. One of the things I’m trying to get to the bottom of is, why a rag? Actually, let me take one small step back. I have conflicting reports – was this written in 1969 or ’71?

**JL:** What does it say in the music?

WM: The musical score is dated 1971; Oxford lists it as 1969. These two years are of some importance.

**JL:** 1971 sounds more correct to me. I did the premiere at the 92nd St. Y. I have somewhere the date of that concert. It might be easier for you to find that on the internet than for me to start going through old programs. Oh no, I did the premiere in Philadelphia at the
Academy of Music. Actually, I’m not sure; I think I did it in Philadelphia… In any case, I played the Schumann Carnival in the program, and he liked that idea very much. He did not have the Schumann Carnival idea in mind, but he was very pleased. Many years later, when they were already in a retirement home, which had been given a very fine piano, I gave a recital at the retirement home, doing the same two pieces, the Rochberg and the Schumann. He was very pleased, actually.

WM: I think you did that in Music Academy [of the West] in 2003 as well, the Rochberg and the Schumann.

JL: I don’t remember doing the Schumann Carnival with it, but I could have.

WM: Oh, I think you named all of us [piano performance students] the members of Carnival, and each one of us represented an individual character.

JL: Oh, yes, I did do that. My goodness.

WM: OK, so that was the date question, but it appears that Carnival Music fell into your hands as a fully formed work. So, why a rag? Did he have any clarity to offer on why he chose to write the last movement as a rag?

JL: I never asked him because it was obvious that he related to that music. It was music surely from his past that he wanted in Rochbergian fashion, to give, and this is now me speaking, to give new Borgesian meaning by juxtaposing it with other things. And not only with the Toccata, the last movement, but also with the different moods and modes of the different movements. For me, and the Carnival Music, which I’m even fonder of today than when I first met it, (it’s a wonderful piece) to me it represents a classical descent into miasma in the fourth movement with Bach and Brahms, dimly perceived, and then out into the open with the joyful rag. The use of an interval, which then turns into the Brahms Capriccio and the Bach Sinfonia, in Sfumato, that to me represents a metaphysical perception similar to what Liszt did, and I think I talked about this in my notes. When I told him about the Liszt Third Concerto, I told him that it's pre-Rochberg, because Liszt does the same thing. He takes two motives from different pieces of his own and relates them in a very interesting way, and I also, for me the second movement of the Tchaikovsky Trio is another pre-Rochberg movement with its different genre and forms. But that’s all I can say. I understand that you would have liked that I had this discussion with him, but I didn’t, and it wasn’t what I was expecting, you see, I can say that, because I was going off of Nach Bach. I guess that was the only piece of his that I had played.

WM: Well, this sounds sort of like Stravinsky writing Piano-Rag-Music for Rubinstein, when Rubinstein was expecting Petrushka. But at least you played it!

JL: I just heard another version of that story, but let’s not get into it.

I don’t remember the year of the University of Pennsylvania program in which I played a concert of all Rochberg. I think it was later, but I’m not sure. There is something right now that’s on my mind, and I don’t know if I’m making a mistake in even telling you
about it, because it’s not related to your concerns at all. I had heard the *Partita Variations* played by Etsuko Tazaki if that’s her name, she’s around, she commissioned the piece, and I was very excited by that. That was in the ‘70s. I wanted to learn it. In ‘81, I think, I got a call from what was then the Hebrew...something...which is now called the Kaufman Center...it’s where I did this... Lydia Contos, who is still there, I think, called me. I had done different things for them. She said, ‘we have a heritage series’ (‘heritage’ meant Jewish heritage); she said, “could you do a program of music by Jewish composers?” I said, “No. No.” Then I said, “I’ll think about it, but I don’t want to do it.” I paced up and down the hallway, and thought, “Who is the Jewish Bach? Who is the Jewish Beethoven? Who is the Jewish Liszt?? To ask the question was to answer it, you see. The Jewish Bach, of course, is Mendelssohn; the Jewish Beethoven is Rochberg of the *Partita Variations*, which I wanted to learn and play. You might say that Jewish Liszt was Alkan, but Alkan was forbidden territory to me because of Raymond Lewenthal, with whom I was constantly confused. But, there was a piece that I played, Liszt’s *Fantasy on the Hugenots of Meyerbeer*. The *Hugenots* was an opera in which, as a contemporary said, ‘Catholics and Protestants kill each other while a Jew writes the music.’ Perfect for my program. I filled it in with Milhaud – I love the *Saudades do Brasil* of which I played a little bit just now – and I wanted to do Schoenberg but they said, ‘no, no, it’s enough,’ so I did Gershwin. So the program was the *Variations Sérieuses*, the *Partita Variations*, three *Saudades do Brasil*, three Gershwin *Preludes* and the Liszt-Meyerbeer. (That’s a nice program.) Yes. And I called them up and said, “I have a program for you, but if want to make some point about what Jewish composers make, this makes the point that there is no such thing. It’s completely eclectic.” Fine. So I did the program, and nobody even noticed that it was completely by Jewish composers. However, a woman named Joan Peyser...does that name mean anything to you? (Rings a bell, but no...) She was editor of the Musical Quarterly who wrote scandal biographies of Bernstein and Boulez, and she chased Boulez all around the world trying to get him to admit that he was gay... Anyhow, I knew her, and I saw her at a party, and she asked what I was doing, and I told her about this concert. She got very excited, and said, “I’d like to write a piece for the Sunday Times about it.” Now, I’d like to make this story short, because it’s not connected to your paper, but... She called Rochberg, and...Bear in mind, that this was at a time, that I had shown in every way my deep commitment to Rochberg, and I had played various things of his, you see...She called me up and read to me what he said. It was a kind of insane anti-Semitic outburst. He was so furious to be put in a program of Jewish composers, and altogether so angry at Jews altogether, it was truly offensive. I thought, I can’t discuss this with him, because if I do, I can never talk with him again. So I didn’t discuss it with him. But she then called me up one day, and said she’d written the piece, but she’d given it to the Times, and they said, “Your piece is so strong that we either have to put it on the front page, or bury it, and we’re going to bury it.” She was furious, but she didn’t send me the article, and I didn’t read it for another twenty-five years when it was published. And when I read it, I saw what it was that the Times had gotten excited about. She treated me very nicely, you see, but for me this was a gig, an opportunity to play a recital, that’s all. It was not a project of mine at all. It was as if the French Embassy had called me and asked me to give...Well, I’m Jewish and not French, but it was hardly more than that, you see. But she, after the Rochberg thing, she called two other composers, and presented it, I think – I can’t really tell – as my project, and got their reactions, in a television style, positive-and-negative. The positive was
Elie Siegmeister, and the negative was Morton Gould, who actually said that what I was doing was the other side of Hitler. Those were Mr. Gould’s words. Now, when I read this article, everybody was dead. Gould was dead, and Siegmeister was dead, and you see it made me very angry. It made me very, very angry. I knew all of these people; Gould was always very nice to me. It left a very bad feeling. Well, a year or so ago, I told the story to somebody, and he said, “Would you be interested in doing a program like that again?” I said, “I’d love to.” He had a series, and I made a similar program: Mendelssohn Variations Serieuses, injecting two of the rejected variations, Alkan – I can now do Alkan because Raymond has been dead for twenty-five years – Alkan’s Super flumina Babylonis—that is actually a real Jewish piece – not the Partita Variations, but Carnival Music. The second half: six Saudades do Brasil instead of two, no Gershwin, and the Meyerbeer. I’ve done it a few times, and I’m doing it in Philadelphia in a couple of weeks. I’m either not mentioning the Jewish aspect when I’m playing, or I’m highly downplaying this. I don’t want to discuss this, and I don’t want people’s stupid reactions. If I discuss it with Ursula, for example, I immediately get this, “Well, women composers, that’s a different story, because when you’re playing a program by women composers, it’s obvious that you’re playing the music not because you like it but because they’re women.” That is very obvious, because nobody choosing an ideal program would choose Fanny Mendelssohn and… But If I play Mendelssohn and Liszt and Milhaud and Rochberg, it’s kind of a wonderful program and people love it. They’re very startled by the fact that, except for the Mendelssohn, nothing is familiar to them, and yet it’s all very pleasing. So that was a little parenthesis on this story.

So after that, I don’t remember the exact year, but I played the Quintet. I would have loved to play the Quintet again, but the Concord had a managerial connection that put them with Alan Marks, so they recorded it with him. I don’t know if they performed it with him or not, but as I was saying, when we did the memorial concert for him at Carnegie Hall, Weill Hall, I got together with two members of the Concord and some other people, and we played it again. It’s a little too long, I have to say. I thought it was George at his most self-indulgent, but it’s wonderful, you know.

WM: I have one more Carnival Music question, which really isn’t about the piece. William Bolcom, in his bio, lists George Rochberg as a teacher. I very briefly spoke to Bolcom about this, and he downplayed very much both Rochberg’s influence as a teacher, and even the time the two spent with each other. But he insinuated that it was his interest and activity in ragtime in ’67 and ‘68 which made Rochberg interested in the form, which goes against the earlier jazz-influence idea. I need to speak further with Bolcom about this, but I didn’t know if you were aware of any interaction between them.

JL: I never heard Rochberg say a good word about any composer other than himself. I don’t mean that he spoke badly about Bolcom, but once when I was with him in Dartmouth, a woman stopped him and asked, “Could you tell me how the two most important composers in America today are both teaching at the University of Pennsylvania?” and he said, “I’m sorry, I don’t know who the other one is.” Of course, that was meant humorously, but it was also meant seriously. He had brought Crumb to the university, but he didn’t like the fact that Crumb had become so famous. George wrote a lot; I don’t know if you’ve looked at his writings. He wrote very interestingly, but with a
very extreme point of view. He was a very intense man with very strong, prejudiced opinions.

WM: Yet his music was so diverse!

JL: Yes, that’s right. Diversity and intensity. Always intensity. See, on my record, I played fourteen Bagatelles by Paul Chihara, and for me, it’s quite interesting to make the comparison, because in certain ways, Chihara does the same things Rochberg does, but the temperament, and also he does them out of a trauma, Chihara… Chihara had been interned as a boy, as a Japanese-American, and this was sort of the central experience of his life. This plays the same role in Chihara’s music as the death of Paul Rochberg played in Rochberg’s music. But, they’re such different temperaments. I mean, obviously they’re different musicians and so forth, but Chihara does everything through indirection and through very subtle, putting in a Japanese tune here and there and he quotes… There’s a very nice bagatelle in which he quotes around Schumann’s Happy Farmer, and there are other things, there’s Tristan, and… you know. It’s so different from Rochberg, because Rochberg is all like that (motions a tight grasp). Whether it’s joyful or it’s… I have a former student who did his thesis on Rochberg – was that a doctoral thesis? I’m not sure – who perceives Carnival Music as an intensely dark work, and what was happening in his life – was he particularly unhappy? This means nothing to me at all. I have no idea what he means by it. The work has different moods; certainly in its totality it doesn’t seem dark to me at all, but intense it certainly is. If that is what you mean by dark, for him (goes to piano, demonstrates beginning of Fanfares, first movement of Carnival Music), that to him is dark. For me it’s not. I can’t say it’s happy, but it doesn’t seem to me dark. It seems to me energy, fierce, fierce energy.

WM: Well, to begin with, it hasn’t yet been put in context.

JL: That’s right. I do think that even sophisticated people have an exaggerated idea, or a false idea of a composer’s state of mind to his music. Not that there is no relation; everybody likes to say that the composer of op. 10, no. 3 [of Beethoven] is writing the Heiligenstadt testimony in which he says he’s going to commit suicide. I don’t deny that, but taken in totality, that’s one of Beethoven’s most joyful, most comical sonatas. The last movement, after all, is as much of a whimsical joke as anything he ever wrote. Interestingly enough, op. 70, the “Ghost” Trio, it has exactly the same form, and even the same mode. The second movement, the spooky second movement, and then…it’s later, but it’s very, very similar. What I’m saying is that you can’t hear in the slow movement of op. 10, no. 3 the mood of a composer who was thinking of committing suicide, but rather a composer uses what he has. He wants to write a tragic movement, so he looks in himself for understanding of tragedy, and writes it.

WM: Well, even a terrible day is not going to be a single emotion as its entire content.

JL: So I don’t understand this, ‘it’s a dark piece.’
WM: OK, so one last question: do you ever feel that he was writing for the audience? Do you ever feel that he was writing his music to either bring an audience in, or…perhaps did he ever cater to an audience?

JL: I don’t like the question. No music is written except for an audience. That’s obvious. You don’t write it in order to burn it, you write it for an audience. That’s obvious. If not for an audience today, an audience some time else. If you mean, was he motivated by commercial considerations? Absolutely not! Less than Beethoven, less than Mozart, less even than Brahms. Absolutely not!

WM: I figured as much, but I had to ask.

JL: If you think that because he wrote tonal music, which every asshole who writes was decrying this stupid man writing tonal music – today, how can you do it!? – that was not written to be commercial.

WM: It was partly why I was interested in the discrepancy between 1969 and 1971, because 1970 was the year ragtime became very commercially lucrative. Still, no other piece of his I could even suggest such a thing.

JL: He was doubtless writing it in ’69, and ’71 was when I performed it. That’s doubtless the explanation of the dates, and the fact that other people were writing ragtime at the time is a perfect illustration of the phenomenon that things come in waves and everybody’s doing the same thing. That’s after all the general story with George Rochberg. He was doing things just a little bit earlier than Luciano Berio and various other people, and I think that’s why his music has to some degree faded and…well, I don’t want to say faded, but faded from awareness, because so many other people did similar things. Today, who would make a fuss about tonal music? It’s when poor Charles Wuorinen writes his music that people say, “ah, this old fashioned music – why do we have to listen to it?” Charles lives across the street from me, you know…
The following is a transcript of an interview with Carter Pann conducted by the author via telephone, on July 9, 2014. This transcript has been approved by the composer.

**CP:** Hello?

**WM:** Hi, Dr. Pann? Bill McNally – Pleased to meet you.

**CP:** Yeah, Bill, likewise…Thanks for calling me – I just finished up what I was doing and was just waiting for you.

**WM:** Perfect. Well, shall we dig right in? Maybe I could give you a minute’s worth of background.

**CP:** Please.

**WM:** The dissertation is about understanding why composers of a more modern era write in the same genre, in various archaic genres, the same way composers write in a neo-baroque style – why they went back to baroque forms and brought them forward.

So, to that end, I’m examining, obviously, ragtime, and some specific pieces. From classic ragtime I’m looking at *Maple Leaf Rag* and Joseph Lamb’s *Top Liner Rag*, and among more contemporary pieces I have *Upstate*, I have *Graceful Ghost*, of course, Albright’s *Nightmare Fantasy Rag*, and then I have a couple of slightly more unusual ones. There’s a movement of George Rochberg’s *Carnival Music* called “Toccata-Rag,” and then a piece by Eugene Kurtz just called “Rag.”

**CP:** OK. I can tell you already that I’m honored to be in this group. (laughs)

**WM:** Well, first of all, you write wonderful music. You really do. [Thank you.] I’ve been digesting as much of it as I can, and I can’t tell you how much I’ve been enjoying it. You’re also one of the only classical composers I’ve been able to find who is writing anything near a ragtime genre in your generation.

**CP:** Well, you know, there’s a friend of mine who, a very serious composer, who writes straight-up ragtime, and it’s not the only thing he’s written, but he’s written more rags than me. His name is Gregory Hutter. I don’t know if you’ve run across him.

**WM:** No, not at all, but I’ll look into him.

**CP:** Gregory Hutter. He’s currently on the faculty of DePaul in Chicago. I think he’s a year or two younger than me. Greg Hutter and I both studied with Bill Bolcom, and Greg came to Michigan a couple of years after me, and he decided – in fact, he wrote a book of rags and one of his rags is dedicated to me; I think he dedicated a rag to Bill, and a bunch of other stuff. Anyhow, he has three volumes of four rags each. It depends on, well, you
can check him out. He’ll send them to you immediately. You may not dig them, but he’s got them.

WM: Well, I’ll certainly take a look! I’m always interested to find more [contemporary composers of ragtime]. Alright, about you! I guess this is where we can dig into the “interview proper.” How and when did you first discover ragtime? By any chance, did your grandmother have anything to do with it?

CP: As a little kid, I was immediately attracted to Scott Joplin. It came from that. In fact, I remember seeing *The Sting* when I was really little – probably before I should have seen it. You know, Scott Joplin’s all over that score. So, I picked up Joshua Rifkin’s album, you know, straight-up performances of Joplin’s rags. I really, really admired them. You know, I was nine years old, and I was really … I listened to them over and over – it was almost like lying on the carpet and listening to the Beatles, if it had been 1964. So I did that with Joplin. I also did that with Sousa, and these were really early, formative pieces for me. I didn’t think that down the line I was going to be a composer, and that some of the pieces I wrote would be rags. I just wanted to play them.  

As I grew older and stopped hating the piano, and started loving it, because my hands were getting bigger, these were some of the first pieces I played. *The Entertainer*, *Maple Leaf Rag* – a pretty standard foray into Joplin.

WM: I have to say that I find it interesting that Rifkin was your pianist of entry, which I guess was common enough at the time.

CP: Well, I knew…I heard some Fats Waller playing *Pineapple Rag*, and there’s a Chicago artist named, something, Ramsey, and I heard him play. But my folks – you know, it wasn’t me going out and buying records; it was my parents. They just found all the Joplin rags in one place, and it was Joshua Rifkin.

WM: My thought was that it [Rifkin’s recording] was a very classical take on them, very different from what Max Morath was playing, or even what Bolcom and Albright were playing.

CP: Yeah, Bolcom and Albright’s recordings – they’re looser – and I like them. It’s just that at nine years old, I had the sheet music, and Josh Rifkin played almost to the letter, that music. It was kind of like listening to “urtext Joplin.” I wasn’t sophisticated enough at nine years old to determine what was the cooler style of playing it or not.

WM: So it was about the music, not the performer.

CP: That’s right. Totally. And so it was through Joplin – I didn’t encounter Bill Bolcom until the early ‘90’s, and I didn’t know Albright until about that same time. This is when I was at Eastman, where they both were not. I encountered Bolcom and Albright in performance while I was at Eastman, I think by one of the grad students who was playing Bolcom’s cabaret songs, and kind of the rags, and I thought ‘this is cool,’ and I - oh my gosh, I can do this; I don’t have to just be a modernist composer. So, it was really just exposure at that point.
WM: What you just said about being a modernist composer – it’s almost the same conclusion that George Rochberg came to in 1965.

CP: Yeah, actually, he’s a great example. I didn’t really understand that there was even a conflict to push against there. I was just getting my feet wet trying to write really good music, and it just happened to be the kind of music I was surrounded by. That was – those were my Eastman teachers, and maybe Steve Reich. These were people I admired.

WM: OK, so if you were at Eastman in the early ‘90s, if I recall, you had a couple of orchestral works from around that time, two sets of two pieces each. (I don’t have the names of these right in front of me, but…)

CP: Oh yeah, I think you’re talking about the Naxos recording. (Yes) That’s early orchestral writing for me. And so at Eastman, I made a real conscious breakthrough. This was near the end of my time there. I had been needing to write music, and I was good at writing in antiquated styles. So, I didn’t feel any guilt or any real push. I think I have to be thankful, because I realize that there was no push; it was all within ourselves, this conflict. I went pretty early on in a direction that I could sail pretty quickly.

WM: OK. There were some really specific things in those pieces that caught my ear, like in the Burleske from the Baroque Suite, and I know that was a couple of years later, there’s that one quote of La Valse in there that just sticks out like the sun. But there were also some more subtle ones, like in the Protofino movement, the Forlane from Ravel’s Tombeau de Couperin. I’ve been enjoying so much how you incorporate the ideas of earlier composers as well as direct quotes, but I wonder if you ever had any pushback from your composition teachers on doing that instead of trying to promote a new compositional agenda.

CP: Well, Bill Bolcom was the closest to that pushback. He said to me once – he saw a quote in the Baroque Suite that’s not there anymore, but it was from Petrushka, it was from where C major and F-sharp major crash in an arpeggio, and I put it in the Baroque Suite where La Valse was. It just sort of happened, and then we go back to baroque. And he listened to me, and said that this is a weird moment because, more than any other quotes, you lose yourself here. This is…all of a sudden it’s no longer you the way you use your quotes; we’re going to be derailed more than any other place from you in this piece. He made a couple of comments about that, and it resonated with me, so it didn’t stop me from quoting in pieces to come, but it made me think. No other teachers or composers cared enough to push an agenda different from what I was already doing. I think they realized that I was really facile in copying styles, and I think that they thought that if I continued in composing – which is rare in itself – if I just stuck with it, I would find some more original voice. So what happened was, I stopped quoting eventually, and then my sort of own thing marinated into a more original harmonic palette that I have today. I look back at those old pieces, and they really are, almost like studies. I think I was given the time to marinate… I mean, I was twenty-four when those orchestral pieces came out, twenty-five, something like that. I think these teachers just looked and said, OK, this kid’s just going – let him go, and then maybe something will happen if he sticks with it.
WM: You’ll have to forgive me a little bit; I’ve never taken composition lessons of any kind, except, like, a group lesson when I was ten, so, I guess I don’t know what goes on in a composition lesson.

CP: It can be anywhere from extremely hands-on to like visiting your shrink. It’s weird – it’s not like you walk in and sit at an instrument and then just, OK, let’s go. Every comp teacher has a different M.O., and you really just hope for students that are completely self-propelled. Then you can really work with them, you don’t have to ratchet up their motivation or inspiration. Which is good and fine, and you have to be able to do that, but …you understand what I’m talking about.

WM: That is any instrumentalist too, I guess.

CP: I believe so, you’re right. But I think there’s a difference because I’ve taken enough piano lessons where you walk in and you basically have a set repertoire that you’ve been working on. I mean, that’s not really the case with a composition major. They can be working on a piece, but if something strikes them that week, they can switch gears and work on something totally different. And, sometimes no work gets done, and yet, no work is not necessarily a bad thing. It’s just a subtly different set of values in those lessons.

WM: Then, since you became familiar with Bolcom and Albright while you were at Eastman, what made you actually want to go work with them as composition teachers? Was it their music?

CP: I had fallen in love with Bill Albright’s Chichester Mass; I think I knew his Pianoagogo, I heard it at Eastman, and I fell in love with Bill Bolcom’s Orfeo Serenade, that chamber piece for Orpheus, and also his Violin Concerto and Fifth Symphony, that Argo recording, just absolutely fell in love with it, and thought nothing of steaming full ahead to University of Michigan. I think it’s because I was feeling a little stifled by the Rouse-Schwantner school of composition. Because, you know, at the end of my undergrad, I was writing these antiquated works. Even the Piano Concerto is sort of in an Eastman style. There are no quotes in it, well, there’s a Tchaikovsky quote in it, but that’s it, so I was ready for something a little looser, more facilely creative composition, and that’s coming from Bolcom and Albright. These guys do not sound like they’re shackled in any school of composition.

WM: Absolutely not. I’ll give you an example on Albright that just blew me away this past week. I had known that he had written an organ piece called Juba, and knowing that here’s what had been called the predecessor of ragtime, rhythmically speaking…Well, I went and got the CD of Juba, and it was about the furthest thing I could have ever expected. Are you familiar with the work?

CP: No…What is it; what does it do?

WM: It’s primarily tone clusters – it’s way out there.
CP: It doesn’t surprise me. Albright can take a concept down the wormhole, and just go for it. I would not describe that as a predecessor of ragtime.

WM: Not what Albright did, of course…

CP: Oh, I know what you mean. He’s known as a vector of new ragtime, and this piece is the furthest thing from it.

WM: Yes, but then “patting juba,” just as a rhythmic form, is what scholars have said is a North African version of patting the body which inspired ragtime rhythm. Now that may be just remote speculation but…

CP: And you said tone clusters…

WM: It was such a disparity. I listened to it three times in a row and didn’t find anything in common.

CP: That’s also Albright’s fashion, you know. He’s kind of a charlatan. If you’ve ever met him, he’s a bit of a [__word unclear__].

WM: Unfortunately I never did. That’s a huge regret to me.

CP: He could be a clown in certain ways, but a very, very serious man. But it was that looseness, you know, that was really attractive to me at that point.

WM: I can see. In your own pieces I can understand that.

Well, let me try to come back to ragtime a little bit. What makes a piece a rag?

CP: I think, a vibe. I think it comes down to a vibe, because there are really slow pieces, and there are really frenetic, energetic pieces.

WM: I’ll tell you why I’m asking. You had said earlier that you had only written five rags (The Bills, The Cheesegrater, Upstate and Soiree Macabre). I had been looking at Soiree Macabre, and comparing it to La Branle and Pasta to Go! and I’m seeing a similarity there. Why is one a rag to you, and the other not?

CP: Oh, from The 12 Sides?

WM: Yeah – well, I’m not sure where Pasta to Go! is from, but…

CP: Oh, that! Yeah, that’s an old rag. You know, I’m sorry I told you I have five rags, because I have several versions of these as well; they pop up in other places. Pasta to Go! is sort of a rag, and the left hand there’s sort of a stride. La Branle from 12 Sides is kind of raggy, but I don’t call it a rag. I [describe] other features which I wouldn’t normally describe as ragtime, the sort of right hand syncopation over quite a square left hand.
WM: OK, but you don’t call Soiree a rag either, at least in the score. What makes it a rag to you?

CP: Well, by the second system, it steps up a frame, and that vibe is there, and it’s a dark, f minor rag, because of the dance in the right hand over the square left hand. Not everything that’s a waltz is called a waltz. You know, Chopin’s Barcarolle is really just a big nocturne, but he doesn’t call it that.

But it’s primarily a vibe, and then you’ve got those materials: a very square left hand, and then the treble can dance in syncopation over it. Some are interruptions, and...you listen to enough Bolcom rags, and they’re not very square. The Cheesegrater Rag that I wrote is not very square, and neither is the one I call Bolcom.

WM: No. Actually, in The Cheesegrater, I found some really interesting ties in that. Particularly, the last four measures reminded me so much of a work by Irwin Schulhoff. He had done a Toccata on Zez Confrey’s Kitten on the Keys, but there’s a section near the end that’s not only sonically similar, but pianistically it’s the same - those same fourths and fifths, novelty gestures in threes coming together.

CP: What’s the composer’s name again?

WM: Irwin Schulhoff

CP: That is a coincidence.

WM: That’s cool. It’s not like there are a lot of recordings of this out there. He was a student of Schoenberg’s, I think. He was a Second Viennese School composer who balked at classical music, and then balked at Second Viennese School writing. He said he hated jazz, so he wrote jazz etudes. Kind of an odd fellow…

CP: Have you looked at any Kapustin?

WM: Of course, I had seen some of that as well. I had definitely seen some ties. I definitely saw some Kapustin in there as well. Specifically in The Cheesegrater, the octave gestures in the left hand.

CP: You know, I really need to spend more time with Kapustin. I have a student, a composer, who absolutely adores that music and will come in and play some of it for me. You know, Bill, it’s funny…I wish I had more time…I wish I had as much time to listen to music as it takes to write it. You choose your battles, and it’s enough of a battle to keep all of this stuff down.

WM: That was always my weakness as a conservatory student. I would much rather be sitting at a piano and reading something else rather than practicing my one recital program.

CP: Oh yeah. You’re an omnivore.

WM: It’s story time. All of this music is story time.
CP: Yeah. Hey, you’ve written music, right? Have you written any compositions of your own?

WM: I’ve actually written a handful of rags. Did I ever send any of those to you?

CP: Would you have sent me PDFs?

WM: Probably

CP: Then I downloaded them. I don’t know if you work on Finale or Sibelius, so…

WM: I work on Sibelius, but they were just PDFs. I think that they’re weird PDFs. I think that they’re on 11x17 print, which means that the page numbers are probably out of order.

CP: Are they especially difficult?

WM: A couple of them are, and they tend to quote rather heavily; at least, one does, one of them does quite a lot. I did a Second Hungarian Rhapsody cadenza where the left hand is in five, and the right hand is in four. You know, fun tinkerings like that, but it’s always been for the fun of writing some of these out.

Do you think that the term “ragtime” is more accessible than “stride” or “Novelty”? At least to listeners?

CP: I think ragtime is a term that is just written above all of those to be a larger category. Stride is really just a pianistic term, and ragtime doesn’t have to be. It encompasses more, and even non-learned musicians when they hear ragtime used as a term. Novelty is too wide. I mean, there’s a novelty in almost everything I’ve written. At least, I hope there is.

WM: I mean, novelty like in the Zez Confrey idea. I mean, explicitly “novelty piano” style, which I guess is probably not a well-known term any more.

CP: Yeah, novelty and stride; there are other terms, too. “Ragtime” has turned into a term kind of like “march.” It’s that encompassing. It’s a category.

WM: I certainly never used to be, but I very much see that.

CP: Even if you say this to a lay musician, and all they think about is Joplin, a least that’s something that they can hang on to.

I am so glad that this genre is back and “legal,” because…I was discussing this with a friend, another composer who said, ‘Schönberg and the ‘breakdown tonalists’ left such a gash in music that we’re really all still recovering from it, trying to heal from it and get back to tonality. Interesting way to see it.

WM: That leads me to another question I have. While some of your pieces, such as Four Factories or the Grand Etude-Fantasy from The 12 Sides are highly dissonant works which are
challenging to most listeners not versed in modern music or, what did you call it, ‘the abrasion of
tonality’. Most of our compositions appear to take diatonicism as your primary tonal language.
Can you frame a little bit your relationship with diatonic tonality?

CP: Yeah, actually, I don’t…The way I see diatonicism is incredibly different from
common practice treatment. In a way that I only prioritize voice leading, and yet I use this
tertian system. Sure, you can hear functionality and all that. But in the later works of mine,
there’s a piece you can go online and listen to on youtube, and check out The Dutch
Stonewall. That’s a big two piano concerto on youtube. You can watch the score go by with
a great recording. It’s six movements, and if you get through all six movements, I’m hoping
you’ll walk away with, ‘well, this guy is a supreme voice-leader.’ That’s the priority. So if
that’s the priority, I don’t have to treat the diatonic system like a tonic-dominant system.

WM: I gathered that from one piece in particular called Orion. There are very few accidentals
through it – are you familiar with the Ligeti etude called White on White?

CP: No; is this from book three?

WM: Yes, it’s the first piece from book three; it’s the same idea in that it’s diatonic, but not
triadically based. You seem to have a familiarity with that kind of diatonicism.

CP: Well then there’s three within a system. Actually, a lot of composers are modal
composers: they have a collection of pitches and they treat them as a diatonic system. Look
at Messaien. When we say diatonicism, we’re used to hearing triads. Messaien – we say
“modal” for someone like that.

I listen to Orion and I hear Debussy. I don’t go forward with it; I go way back. It’s
like Debussy phrases for me.

WM: I could see that as well. In White on White, there are two parts to the piece, and the first
part could probably pass as a Debussy etude in a way. There are some more precise pianistic
gestures as well, so that’s its own thing, but, at least harmonically speaking, I can very much see
that.

CP: I think I banged through all of the Ligeti etudes, and I think I have to go back and
catch them all, because I have to teach them and so every now and then I have to see…this
is Blanc on Blanc…is that what he calls it? (Yes) So I have to re-memorize myself…(sic)

WM: That’s a neat piece. I think I have a recording of that on my website, if you want to just
give it a listen at some point. (You played it?) Yes, I played it. I learned it because I couldn’t
learn Desordre. That kicked me. (You and just about every other pianist.) Yeah, I think I can
safely say that that’s the only piece I ever just gave up. I don’t think I’ve ever just given up
learning a piece, except for that.

CP: Wow, have you ever played Petrushka?
WM: I had a funny relationship with that. I memorized the whole score in a couple of weeks, and then for some reason I had other obligations, other things to play, and I just never came back to it. I knew so many other pianists running around on the competition circuit that…You know, I think the piece is wonderful, but I just didn’t feel a need to contribute.

CP: Yeah, you know, it’s a devilishly difficult piece…

WM: Sure, but your own Grand Etude-Fantasy, that has some of the Desordre kinds of really, really frustrating gestures rhythmically.

CP: Yeah, learning Etude-Fantasy, just like learning Desordre, you have to program yourself. You have to program your muscle memory.

WM: Yeah. I’ve been blown away by what Joel Hastings is doing. That’s unbelievable work.

CP: Hastings is incredible. Actually, his recording of the 12 Sides is just miraculous to me.

WM: I’m really looking forward to hearing the whole thing straight through.

CP: It’s coming out in August. I think it’s already out on iTunes.

WM: If it’s on iTunes, it’s not yet on the online Naxos library system. I will be keeping my eyes peeled for that.

CP: Joel just sent me a visual placard of it; it was on the front of the Naxos website, but it may mean that it’s an upcoming release, and it’s not yet out on iTunes yet. But yeah, he’s good.

WM: Yeah, and speaking of which, this is a little off-topic, but I just have to say hello from Ryan McCullough.

CP: Oh, Ryan – how do you know him?

WM: We were at Tanglewood together a few years ago. That was it. (Cool. Was this last summer?) No, it was in 2010. We had the shared experience of working with Mark Morris, which was really quite something.

CP: I was in Tanglewood in 1996, but it was only as a visitor. I wasn’t like a fellow. I was visiting a composer-friend of mine, Kevin Beavers – actually Kevin’s got a couple of rags – but he lives in Germany now, and he’s a yogi. But the Berkshires are dreamy.

WM: A lot of music to digest there.

CP: Ryan’s a monster.

WM: Yeah, and so reserved and nonchalant about it too.
CP: Yeah, he’s like, Christopher Taylor. If you know Kit, Chris’s pianism is like, from Mars. And he’s one of those reserved, you would never know he’s a human piano if you just met him on the street. (Yep.)

Oh, man, Bill, I have to check out your website and listen to you play. I feel embarrassed that I haven’t.

WM: Nah. You have to understand, did I ever tell you how I found you? (What’s this story?) As much a backdoor route as I could have. I had been having difficulty finding out about the background of William Albright, especially anything he did pre-Juilliard Prep. I came across you mentioned in a memorial service to him.

CP: Oh, yeah, I brought in a little blurb on him.

WM: It wasn’t even that; it was a little press release saying that you had played your piece. 

CP: Oh yeah, the piece that’s dedicated to him in the title. That was a month after his death, and that was just thrown together. I’m surprised that anything showed up.

WM: It’s just text, buried in the rough. So, I can’t tell you how glad I am to have come across that.

CP: That’s random, but sometimes that’s just how these things happen.

WM: Did you write those two rags before he passed away, or after?

CP: No, those were written before. Those were written, actually let me think. I worked on those with him the school year before he passed. He died in September of 1998. I worked on those with him in the spring of ’98, I think. Or was it ’97?

WM: OK, the notes say that The Bills were written in September of ’97.

CP: OK, then, it was September ’97, and he passed in September ’98. That sounds more like it, and so these pieces were not published then, but I had titled them “Albright” and “Bolcom,” and had decided after his death to call them The Bills, and the “Albright” is a memoriam. For publication I gave them subtitles. So they were written in September of ’97, and “Bolcom” was written in October or November, I don’t know. But I worked on the “Albright” movement about a year before his death.

WM: Did you work on those with them, or was it just something that you happened to be working on at the time?

CP: I worked on the Albright movement with Albright, and I did the Bolcom movement on my own. So, the “Bolcom” movement – I can’t remember if I was working on that at the same time. The one thing that Albright told me about writing that movement that has his name is that I was originally going very far harmonically in a very short period of time,
and he just wanted to hear c-sharp minor. Just keep it rooted; it doesn’t have to go
everywhere all the time. Just keep it based in c-sharp minor with maybe a dominant
section, and then I have a sub-dominant section kind of rises, and kind of does what a C
section of a rag does, in classic rags.

WM: Like Solace, right? (Yeah, like Solace in F major.) Yeah, I meant to ask you specifically
about that one. In your notes, it says that it’s serious elegance points to Scott Joplin’s concert
waltz Bethina. Why Bethina? The Solace reference seems so clear to me, but I don’t see Bethina
as much.

CP: Gosh, that’s really astute, because both Solace and Bethena strike me – maybe they
kind of go together in a category. I don’t see Bethena as a salon waltz, even though maybe it
is. (No, it’s too beautiful for that; it’s really a wonderful piece.) You know, it’s funny. Solace is
one of the very first rags of his that I learned, and then later on I spent more time on
Bethena. I played Bethena very seriously, so I think that was just my personal take. I mean,
the Albright has more of the vibe of Bethena to me, even though it’s not a waltz, than
Solace. Solace you can’t really tell that it’s a rag, and Albright is very much a rag. Solace is
like a song; there’s no real stride going. (It’s a habanera. The left hand is a habanera.) Exactly.
That’s a good way to call me out. I hadn’t thought of that.

WM: No, no – I see very much how Solace and Bethena are connected, but I also see what you
were trying to point out about the work.

CP: You know, Albright loved Bethena. I remember playing around with that in my
lessons with him, so I wouldn’t put it past the fact that I mentioned that because of that,
because that’s also a contributor. I think it probably has more to do with that than it does
with the style of the piece. We come to conclusions on a very personal level, even a want.
Don’t let this throw you off – I know it won’t – but enough about that…

WM: No, it’s valuable in sort of a different way…I’ve been trying to tie all of this together in
terms of how this music relates to our current day audiences, so I guess I ought to make this not
general but about you, and ask whether you ever had an audience in mind as you wrote these
pieces.

CP: Well, yeah. This is 1997, you mean The Bills?

WM: Really, any of these rags…

CP: When you’re writing in this genre, you’ve got the audience in the bag. So I’m not
really concerning myself with who this is for; I mean, I know that my rags will probably be
played on classical concerts, but these days, classical concerts can encompass an incredibly
wide range of repertoire.

I don’t think I’ve ever given the audience…I mean, it’s very important for me and
it’s a priority, but I have to craft. I have very well-crafted music, and I trust that the
audience will show up for that. You know what I mean? I can’t concern myself too much
with that.
WM: OK, so not the style, not the language, but straight-up the quality.

CP: *Exactly.* Like, if I’m writing a habanera, it’s gotta be… This is why William Bolcom was such an inspiration for me. Because this guy speaks so many genres so well. But so did Stravinsky. It’s not like… (Yes, but Stravinsky was more literal.) You’re right, but Stravinsky’s stamp was on everything. The difference is that Bill removes himself when he’s tapping any genre, and yet you still hear Bill. That’s the thing. It’s a real subtlety here. Hard to put into words. It’s just like Picasso. Look at early Picasso – Picasso could paint like Monet, Picasso could paint realism as good as any of them. It’s like a pianist – the greatest pianist in the world can play Beethoven and Boulez, and they can do it very well. You may not want to gravitate towards one or the other, but I’m talking about the finest pianists in the world.

Why gravitate towards the B composers? I look at the greatest composers in the world as my inspiration, and I’m not up there yet – I’m not as good as them, but I can see what they’re doing. (Forgive me for being blunt, but don’t sell yourself short.) I look to them as models, and I haven’t stopped looking. You have to be humble when you’re working on the art. It sometimes takes months, so how can I not be? I’m going to have humility for these guys to my death. The great guys.

WM: That’s a good point. I can learn three years’ worth of repertoire, and at some point I have to come back to Beethoven 110 again, or something like that.

CP: Exactly. It’s the deepest, infinite well. We’re lucky to be in it.

WM: For listeners that aren’t immersed in the well, you know, they like music, but they aren’t familiar with enough music to understand some of this stuff, even intuitively, do you think, well let me stick with *Upstate* because that’s the one I’m writing on, after all, do you see that as being immediately accessible as something like *The Entertainer*? Assuming somebody hasn’t heard either, or for an imaginary listener that has never heard a rag.

CP: I would hope there’s some attraction to it. I’m attracted to attractive music, and I want this to flow like they want to move to it, they want to dance to it – maybe not dance to the whole piece… something that sings. It’s a song with a rhythm under it. So yeah, I would hope. If this was somebody’s first rag, it would strike them as anything (No, not as being the same thing but…) …as attractive. (Yeah, and viscerally understandable.) I think that’s what ragtime has going for it. You know, classic ragtime is quite square, and that’s pretty easy to understand, I mean even learned musicians gravitate toward it, to that kind of square phrasing, over which a good composer will pull a few snappers, but it’s square. There’s a comfort level there. I’m not losing an audience out of the gate. I know that already.

WM: That’s a good point. Classic ragtime is incredibly formally square as well as harmonically – you know, sixteen measure strains divided into a double period.

CP: So the real challenge there is to forget that you’re listening to something so square.
WM: Did you deliberately make your phrase structures not sixteen measures to get out of that a little bit?

CP: Yeah, that’s one way. You know, we live in the twenty-first century. We can take a really square genre and just change the phrase length; we can have a different time signature every bar, and yet it can still sound grounded in classic ragtime. It’s the facility of the composer to achieve this. That’s a freedom we have today. We had it back then, too, but classic rag is like common practice, early ragtime, turn-of-the-century ragtime.

Hey, Bill, I’m throwing laundry into the dryer right now, and then I’m going to stop rambling.

WM: You can’t imagine how helpful what you’re calling this rambling is. The transcript might not include every word, but…

CP: I’m glad you were able to find a way to record…I hope it wasn’t too much of a pain.

WM: No, this ought to be fine. I have two different devices recording, so if one fails, I have the other.

CP: Hey, Bill, let me call your attention to another youtube clip that you’re going to want to hear. In addition to *The Dutch Stonewall*, you should look up my Triple Trombone Concerto, and look at the first movement; that’s the *Upstate Rag* (Really!) for three trombones and string orchestra. (Holey moley! Thank you!) Yeah, and you’ll see what the composer does with the tempo for a movement like this. It’s very different from the piano solo.

WM: Yeah, I noticed you have a metronome mark of 96 on this, which seems maybe a little slow, even.

CP: Yeah, you can putz around with it, I mean, if it feels right, and needs to go a little brighter, than do it. And in fact, if you listen to Triple Trombone Concerto, that may give you license to pick it up.

WM: Yeah, I’ll see. I’ve learned the piece, and I’ll send you a recording of it sometime. But thank you so, so much for your time. This has been incredibly illuminating.

CP: Oh, Bill, this is a total pleasure. I’m glad you connected with me. Again, I’m – I feel honored to be in this group, this little cache of composers. And if you think of anything else that you need me to answer, or you’ve listened to these things on youtube and you pop something else up, just let me know.

WM: Will do. It will take me a little bit of time to digest everything that we’ve talked about, and I’ll probably have some follow-up questions, but…

CP: Well, I’m in Taos, New Mexico. I’ve got to find some internet so that I can go to your site. I just have || Talk about rustic!
WM: If it’s to escape so that you can do your own writing, that’s great.

CP: It is, yeah. I’m working on a new string quartet. String Quartet No. 2 for Takaes (really!), and they have no idea what’s going to hit them.

WM: Oh, boy! Do you have a premiere date for that?

CP: Well, I think it’s going to hover around April 15, either in Santa Barbara, or in Denver, I mean Boulder.

WM: I’ll have to follow up on that. I’ll really look forward to hearing that.

CP: Well, once I get a recording, well, I’m sure you and I will still be in contact. I would love to show you that.

WM: Well, that sounds great.

CP: Hey, Bill, thank you!

WM: Thank you!

CP: Have a great one, alright?


CP: Bye.
Appendix C

The following charts derive from a series of surveys completed by ragtime audience members. They fall into three categories: ragtime festivals, with a generally dedicated audience with fairly extensive familiarity; classical performances, in which the audience had experience with a broad variety of composed music; and music appreciation classes, in which familiarity to non-contemporary, classical music was limited for most of the students.

The festival surveys were taken at the following locations on the following dates:
- **Scott Joplin Ragtime Festival**, Sedalia MO, distributed and collected June 5-8, 2013.
- **Scott Joplin House**, St. Louis, MO, distributed and collected June 12, 2013.

The classical performance surveys were taken at the following locations on the following dates:
- **The Bohemians**, Kosciuszko Foundation, New York, NY, distributed and collected October 7, 2013; two surveys arrived later by mail.
- **Faculty Recital**, Lefrak Hall, Queens College, Flushing, NY, distributed and collected October 23, 2013.

The music appreciation class surveys were taken at the following locations on the following dates, in conjunction with a lecture-recital of relevant ragtime music presented by this author:
- **Class of Cathy Callis**, Aaron Copland School of Music, Queens College, distributed and collected October 20, 2013.
- **Class of Wendy Powers**, Aaron Copland School of Music, Queens College, distributed and collected October 21, 2013.
- **Class of Cathy Callis**, Aaron Copland School of Music, Queens College, distributed and collected October 21, 2013.

Though not all surveys returned were fully completed, the following list references the number of surveys returned at each venue:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Surveys Completed</th>
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<tr>
<td>Blind Boone Ragtime &amp; Early Jazz Festival</td>
<td>47</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scott Joplin House</td>
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<td><strong>Total Festival Responses</strong></td>
<td><strong>150</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bohemians</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Recital (Queens College)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Classical Concert Responses</strong></td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class of Cathy Callis</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class of Wendy Powers</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class of Cathy Callis</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Music Appreciation Class Responses</strong></td>
<td><strong>83</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL RESPONSES</strong></td>
<td><strong>252</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following three questionnaires correspond to the festivals, classical concerts, and music appreciation classes, respectively.
Ragtime Questionnaire

THIS IS NOT THE OFFICIAL [SCOTT JOPLIN] FESTIVAL QUESTIONNAIRE. This survey is for the purpose of dissertation research of William McNally. All are welcome and encouraged to complete this survey!

1. From the following list of composers and musicians, please mark your level of appeal, 1 being least appealing, 3 being indifferent and 5 being very appealing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer/Musician</th>
<th>1 (Strongly dislike)</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3 (Indifferent)</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5 (Strongly like)</th>
<th>Not familiar with this artist</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ludwig van Beethoven</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Frederic Chopin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sergei Rachmaninoff</td>
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<td>Bela Bartok</td>
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<td>John Cage</td>
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<tr>
<td>Philip Glass</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Williams</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elvis Presley</td>
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<td>The Beatles</td>
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<td>Led Zeppelin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tupak Shakur</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

2. Where did you first hear ragtime? What was the piece? ______________________
   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________

241
3. Who are some of your favorite performers of ragtime? What aspects in their performing do you value? _________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

4. Have you ever heard a live performance of ragtime not at a ragtime-only event? If so, please describe. YES _____ NO _____
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

5. If possible, please list a couple of your favorite rags (or ragtime composers) composed AFTER 1950. __________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

6. How about three favorite rags written BEFORE 1950? ______________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

7. Which statement do you more closely agree with?
   a. _____ Ragtime is a musical style frozen in time, wholly representative of the era of its birth.
   b. _____ Ragtime is a dynamically evolving style, different now than it was then, but still great.

8. Please check all that apply to you:
   a. _____ Grade school/grammar school music class
   b. _____ 1-4 years of private instrumental instruction (what instrument?__________)
   c. _____ Experience as a performer (currently_____; or in your past____)
   d. _____ Study of music theory
   e. _____ A college degree related to music
   f. _____ I am a professional, full-time performing musician

9. Why did you come to this festival? (…beyond, “I like the music.”) _______________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

10. How young are you? (Please be honest; remember, I don’t know your name.) ________

By completing this survey, you acknowledge that participation is voluntary and that by completing the survey your answers may be used in published materials.

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS SURVEY!

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Ragtime Questionnaire

This survey is not affiliated with The Bohemians. This survey is for the purpose of dissertation research of William McNally. All are welcome and encouraged to complete this survey!

1. From the following list of composers and musicians, please mark your level of appeal, 1 being least appealing, 3 being indifferent and 5 being very appealing.

   Ludwig van Beethoven  Frederic Chopin  Sergei Rachmaninoff  Béla Bartók  John Cage  Philip Glass  John Williams (film)  Elvis Presley  The Beatles  Led Zeppelin  Tupac Shakur

   (Strongly agree) 1
   (Indifferent) 3
   (Strongly disagree) 5

2. Where did you first hear ragtime? What was the piece? ____________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

3. Who are some of your favorite performers of ragtime? What aspects in their performing do you value? ____________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

4. Have you ever heard a live, ragtime-only performance? If so, please describe.
   YES ___ NO____        _____________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
5. If possible, please list a couple of your favorite rags (or ragtime composers) composed AFTER 1950.______________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

6. How about three favorite rags written BEFORE 1950?
____________________________________________________________________
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____________________________________________________________________

7. Which statement do you more closely agree with?
   a. _____ Ragtime is a musical style frozen in time, highly representative of the era of its birth.
   b. _____ Ragtime is a dynamically evolving style, different now than it was then.

8. Please check all that apply to you:
   a. _____ Grade school/grammar school music class
   b. _____ 1-4 years of private instrumental instruction (what instrument? __________)
   c. _____ Experience as a performer (currently_____; or in your past______)
   d. _____ Study of music theory
   e. _____ A college degree related to music
   f. _____ I am a professional, full-time performing musician

9. Was the ragtime theme a particular draw for you to attend this concert?
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

10. How young are you? (Please be honest; remember, I don’t know your name.) _______

By completing this survey, you acknowledge that participation is voluntary and that by completing the survey your answers may be used in published materials.
If you wish to return this survey by mail, please send to:
William McNally • 98-01 67th Ave., Apt. 3T • Rego Park, NY 11374
THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS SURVEY!
Ragtime Questionnaire

This survey is not affiliated with Queens College. This survey is for the purpose of dissertation research of William McNally. All are welcome and encouraged to complete as much of this survey as possible!

1. From the following list of composers and musicians, please mark your level of appeal, 1 being least appealing, 3 being indifferent and 5 being very appealing.

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<tr>
<td>(Indifferent) 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Least appealing) 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not familiar with this artist</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

2. Where did you first hear ragtime? What was the piece? __________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

3. Who are some of your favorite performers of ragtime? What aspects in their performing do you value? ________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

4. Have you ever heard a live, ragtime-only performance? If so, please describe.
   YES ___ NO___
   ________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________
5. If possible, please list a couple of your favorite rags (or ragtime composers) composed AFTER 1950.____________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

6. How about three favorite rags written BEFORE 1950?____________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

7. Which statement do you more closely agree with?
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   b. _____ Ragtime is a dynamically evolving style, different now than it was then.

8. Please check all that apply to you:
   a. _____ Grade school/grammar school music class
   b. _____ 1-4 years of private instrumental instruction (what instrument? _________)
   c. _____ Experience as a performer (currently_____; or in your past_____) 
   d. _____ Study of music theory
   e. _____ College degree related to music (currently pursuing___; completed degree___)
   f. _____ I am a professional, full-time performing musician

9. Was the ragtime theme a particular draw for you to attend this concert?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

10. How young are you? (Please be honest; remember, I don’t know your name.) ________

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If you wish to return this survey by mail, please send to: William McNally • 98-01 67th Ave., Apt. 3T • Rego Park, NY 11374

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS SURVEY!
Correlating to the first question are the following three sets of responses based on survey groups.

**Ragtime Festivals**

- **(Most appealing)** 5
- **4**
- **(Indifferent)** 3
- **2**
- **(Least appealing)** 1
- **Not familiar with this artist**
- **No Response given**

**Classes**

- **(Most appealing)** 5
- **4**
- **(Indifferent)** 3
- **2**
- **(Least appealing)** 1
- **Not familiar with this artist**
- **No Response given**
Correlating to the second question are the following three charts, which directly compare the differences in response between the three survey groups. Of possible interest is the correlation between some of the ways people first encountered ragtime and their respective ages. (See question #10.)
"Where did you first hear ragtime?"

- Movie
- Family or friend musician
- Elementary School/as a child
- Concert
- Radio
- Piano/music lessons
- Recording
- In class today (never heard before)
- TV
- High School
- Computer programs/internet
- Piano roll
- Aerobics tape/Dance class
- Eubie Blake's home
- Joe Lamb's house
- Ice Cream Truck
- Amusement Park
- Public Venue

Totals | Concerts | Classes | Festivals
---|---|---|---
249
"What was the first rag you ever heard?"
(raw numbers)
"What was the first rag you ever heard?" (percentages)

Don't remember (sometimes, "a Joplin piece(?)")
Entertainer
Maple Leaf Rag
12th St. Rag
Crazy Otto
Solace
Cantina Band (Williams)
PineApple Rag
Black and White Rag
Red Rose Rag

0% 5% 10% 15% 20% 25% 30% 35% 40% 45%

Percent equally weighted by group
Concerts Classes Festivals

251
The following two charts correspond to the third question. Here, it was determined that data was only quantifiably meaningful from the festival survey. The classical audience survey listed “William Bolcom” and “William McNally” three times each as well as “Eubie Blake” and “Fats Waller” twice each; pianistic skill and classical approach were cited once each. The music appreciation surveys produced two names remotely connected to ragtime: “Vince Giordano and the Nighthawks” and “George Lewis” were each listed once; the trait “jumpy” was cited once.

"Who are some of your favorite performers of ragtime?"
(Answers are drawn from festival surveys only.)

The following musicians were mentioned between two and four times:

4: Eubie Blake, William Bolcom, Dick Hyman, Johnny Maddox, Butch Thompson
3: JoAnn Castle, Danny Coots, Sue Keller, Terry Parrish, Dalton Ridenhour, Donald Ryan, Bob Seeley, Virginia Tichenor, Dick Wellstood, Ophelia Ragtime Orchestra
2: Anne Barnhart, Frankie Carle, Philip Dyson, Bill Edwards, Frank French, Nora Hulse, Scott Joplin, Carl Sonny Leyland, Frankie (sic.) Livolsi, Benjamin Loeb, Dave Majchrzak, Jim Radloff, John Reed-Torres, John Remmers, Barron Ryan, Patti Simon, Ethan Uslan, Craig Ventresco, Tex Wyndham, Paragon Ragtime Orchestra, "Myself", "My spouse", St. Louis Ragtimers
The fourth question, “Have you ever heard a live performance of ragtime not at a ragtime-only event?” suggests a correlation to listeners’ sensitivity to noticing a style of music to which they are more familiar. 61% of festival audience members reported hearing ragtime beyond the boundaries of festivals and ragtime-only events. In contrast, 16% of classical audience members and 6% of music appreciation students reported hearing ragtime in a non-dedicated setting. The following chart lists where audience members heard ragtime beyond dedicated events.
Question #5 has not been fully aggregated; more than seventy different rags and nearly as many composers were mentioned, though few more than once. However, two works, and - not coincidentally - the composers of those two works, appeared more often than others. These pieces are “Graceful Ghost Rag” and Roberto Clementi; the composers are William Bolcom and David Thomas Roberts, respectively. Also, outside of festival responses (which accounted for only three other names of musicians who have actually written rags), Cantina Band, composed by John Williams for the movie Star Wars: IV. A New Hope, was listed twice.

Question #6 also has not been fully aggregated. Not surprisingly, Scott Joplin was by far the most popular composer in answer to this question, across all survey sites. More interestingly, Maple Leaf Rag was most often listed, followed by Solace and then The Entertainer. Bethena (Joplin's ragtime waltz), and Joseph Lamb's Ragtime Nightingale were also frequently mentioned. Perhaps a more significant aspect of the answers this question elicited was a frequent listing of works which range from not-really-ragtime to absolutely-not-ragtime. A sampling of non-ragtime works listed includes novelty piano works by Zez Confrey and Roy Bargy, pre-ragtime works by Louis Moreau Gottschalk, and blues/jazz works by W.C. Handy and Nick LaRocca of the Original Dixieland Jass Band (sic./archaic).

Question #7, “Which statement do you more closely agree with?” seeks to gather a sense of the optimism of different audiences about the staying power of the ragtime style. Not surprisingly, those with a greater investment in the music expressed a stronger sense that ragtime will continue to grow, evolve and flourish. (Members of the festival audience travel considerable distances and pay to stay in hotels/motels in order to be present. Classical audiences, on the other hand, have a more general investment in the continuance of music from the past, and possibly also acknowledge the continuing work of those involved in composing, performing, and researching music of the past.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Which statement do you more closely agree with?</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="chart.png" alt="" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Festival Audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ragtime is a dynamically evolving style, different now than it was then, but still great.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question #8, “Please check all that apply to you,” has not been aggregated – surveyors commonly marked more than one answer, and surveys with no answers have not been accounted for (it is likely that those with less musical experience would be less likely to answer this question). The data below simply yields a general idea of musical experience corresponding to each survey group.

![Musical Experience Graph](image1)

Answers to Question #9, on why surveyors attended this concert/festival correlate directly with the site in which the survey was administered, and do not yield significant information relevant to this dissertation in aggregation.

Question #10, on surveyed population ages, yielded the following results.

![Average and Median Ages of Survey Populations](image2)

Standard deviations indicated a greater degree of diversity in age from the concert audience, as is indicated by the differences above between average and median ages.


Margis, Alfred. *Cock-Tail*. (France?): 1903.


The St. Louis Ragtimers <http://www.stlragtimers.com/>.


DISCOGRAPHY/VIDEOGRAPHY


“KING OF THE BUNGALOOS by Gene Greene 1911.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fdt8MKx589Q. Victor 5854, 10 inch single sided>

“King Of The Ragtime Banjo (Fred Van Eps & Vess L. Ossman) 1900 – 1923.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_nXVB66TpLw>

“S’more - Comp. - Straight - Ampico Lexington 88n.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bGV01F1nFg8> [S’more, QRS # 100409, piano roll, 1916]
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

Project Title: Ragtime Then and Now: A Cultural Reception History

Principal Investigator: William McNally
Graduate Student
Graduate Center
Music Department: 365 Sth Ave., NY, NY 10016, Rm. 3105
718-208-5414

Faculty Advisor: Philip Lambert
Professor
Baruch College
55 LEX - Newman Vertical Campus, NY, NY 10010
646 312-4056

Site where study is to be conducted: Sedalia, MO (Survey will be presented at various venues around town during the 2013 Scott Joplin International Festival)

Introduction/Purpose: You are invited to participate in a research study. The study is conducted under the direction of William McNally. The purpose of this research study is to understand and track the compositional trends and audience listening habits of ragtime. The results of this study may lend clarity to what interests an audience in different musical styles, and how trends in music rise and fall. Audio recording may be used during this interview for the purpose of quoting precisely.

Procedures: Approximately 15-20 individuals are expected to participate in this study. Each subject will participate in one interview with the possibility of brief follow-up questions. The time commitment of each participant is expected to be an hour or two for the primary interview. Each interview session will take place at a location of mutual convenience. Individuals interviewed will be experts in their field.

Possible Discomforts and Risks:
Regarding interviews, questions will address musical habits of the late 1960's and early 1970's; this may make some interviewees sensitive about their age. However, their positive contributions to the field will be the focus of the interview, and hopefully interviewees will be more flattered to discuss past successes than discouraged about their age. Data to be reviewed that is not public is also not identifiable; this data would be collected from surveys distributed by various ragtime festival organizers, and would mainly list individual audience members' performer preferences.
Benefits: There are no direct benefits. However, participating in the study may increase general knowledge of ragtime and how music is listened to.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you may decide not to participate without prejudice, penalty, or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to leave the study, please contact the principal investigator William McNally to inform them of your decision.

I give permission to the researcher to use my identity (check here) and voice recording (check here) in published materials.

Contact Questions/Persons: If you have any questions about the research now or in the future, you should contact the Principal Investigator, William McNally, (718) 208-5414, pianobill@gmail.com. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact <Keisha Peterson, Baruch’s HRPP administrator (646) 312-2217, Keisha.peterson@baruch.cuny.edu.

Statement of Consent:

“I have read the above description of this research and I understand it. I have been informed of the risks and benefits involved, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. Furthermore, I have been assured that any future questions that I may have will also be answered by the principal investigator of the research study. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study, and will allow a transcript to be made of this interview to be included in the resulting document.

By signing this form I have not waived any of my legal rights to which I would otherwise be entitled.

I will be given a copy of this statement."

William Bolcom (Signature of Subject)

William McNally (Signature of Person Explaining Consent Form)

Printed Name of Investigator (Signature of Investigator)

Date Signed: 4/11/15

Date Signed: March 25, 2015

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CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
Graduate Center
Department of Music

CONSENT TO PARTICPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

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Statement of Consent:

“I have read the above description of this research and I understand it. I have been informed of the risks and benefits involved, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. Furthermore, I have been assured that any future questions that I may have will also be answered by the principal investigator of the research study. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study, and will allow a transcript to be made of this interview to be included in the resulting document.

By signing this form I have not waived any of my legal rights to which I would otherwise be entitled.

I will be given a copy of this statement.”

Jerome Leventhal  
Printed Name of Subject  
Signature of Subject  
4/9/15  
Date Signed

William McNally  
Printed Name of Person Explaining Consent Form  
Signature of Person Explaining Consent Form  
March 25, 2015  
Date Signed

William McNally  
Printed Name of Investigator  
Signature of Investigator  
4/9/15  
Date Signed
CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
Graduate Center
Department of Music

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Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you may decide not to participate without prejudice, penalty, or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to leave the study, please contact the principal investigator William McNally to inform them of your decision.

I give permission to the researcher to use my identity (check here) and voice recording (check here) in published materials.

Contact Questions/Persons: If you have any questions about the research now or in the future, you should contact the Principal Investigator, William McNally, (718) 208-5414, pianobill@gmail.com. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact <Keisha Peterson, Baruch’s HRPP administrator (646) 312-2217, Keisha.petersen@baruch.cuny.edu.

Statement of Consent:

“I have read the above description of this research and I understand it. I have been informed of the risks and benefits involved, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. Furthermore, I have been assured that any future questions that I may have will also be answered by the principal investigator of the research study. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study, and will allow a transcript to be made of this interview to be included in the resulting document.

By signing this form I have not waived any of my legal rights to which I would otherwise be entitled.

I will be given a copy of this statement.”

Carter Pann
Printed Name of Subject
Signature of Subject
Date Signed
March 25, 2015

William McNally
Printed Name of Person Explaining Consent Form
Signature of Person Explaining Consent Form
Date Signed
March 25, 2015

William McNally
Printed Name of Investigator
Signature of Investigator
Date Signed
March 25, 2015
March 26, 2015

Mr. William McNally
98-01 67th Ave.
Apt. 3T
Rego Park, NY 11374

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SCHEDULE A

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2. *Carnival Music* by George Rochberg: *V. Toccata-Rag* (complete); mm 1-2, 18–21, 58–61 and 70–74.
April 16, 2015

William McNally
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Rego Park, NY 11374

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Signed,

Evan Hause
General Manager
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New York, NY 10016
APPENDIX

Permission request by William McNally:

Dear Evan,

I would like to inquire about printing a handful of excerpts from the solo piano rags of William Albright and William Bolcom, as well as two rags in their entirety. This would be for the purposes of my DMA Dissertation entitled RAGTIME THEN AND NOW: Composers and Audiences from the Ragtime Era to the Ragtime Revival. There would be between six and eight copies printed in total, and the final manuscript would be also available via ProQuest. I will not receive any money for this project. The music requested is as follows:

William Albright - Sleepwalker's Shuffle
mm. 58-62

William Albright - The Nightmare Fantasy Rag
COMPLETE (in an Appendix)
mm. 1-5
mm. 12-14
mm. 18-22
mm. 35-38
mm. 136-139
m. 324

William Bolcom - The Gardenia
mm. 69-72

William Bolcom - The Serpent's Kiss
mm. 207-208

William Bolcom - Graceful Ghost Rag
COMPLETE (in an Appendix)
mm. 16-17
mm. 36-39
mm. 84-88

William McNally
www.williammcnally.com
In response to a request to reproduce Eugene Kurtz’s “Rag” from his larger piece *Animations*, the following email was received:

```
Mario SEITE Ed. Lemoine <[redacted]>                      Apr 28 (1 day ago)
to me

Dear Mr McNally,

We exceptionally accept the reproduction of the entire work for a limited quantity of 8 copies maximum.

Sincerely,
Marc Séité
```
In response to a request to reproduce Carter Pann’s *Upstate*, the following email was received:

Thanks Bill :) If you're already in contact with Presser regarding an excerpt of "Albright" I think it won't be a problem for UPSTATE. And here's the thing, now that I think of it you may not even have to deal with them and just go ahead and reprint it. Presser doesn't have UPSTATE yet and I don't think it will be a problem in your document :) Sorry for the flip-flop... I just came to the realization that it prob won't be an issue.

I'd LOVE to see your diiss when it's done!!  Best of luck, Carter