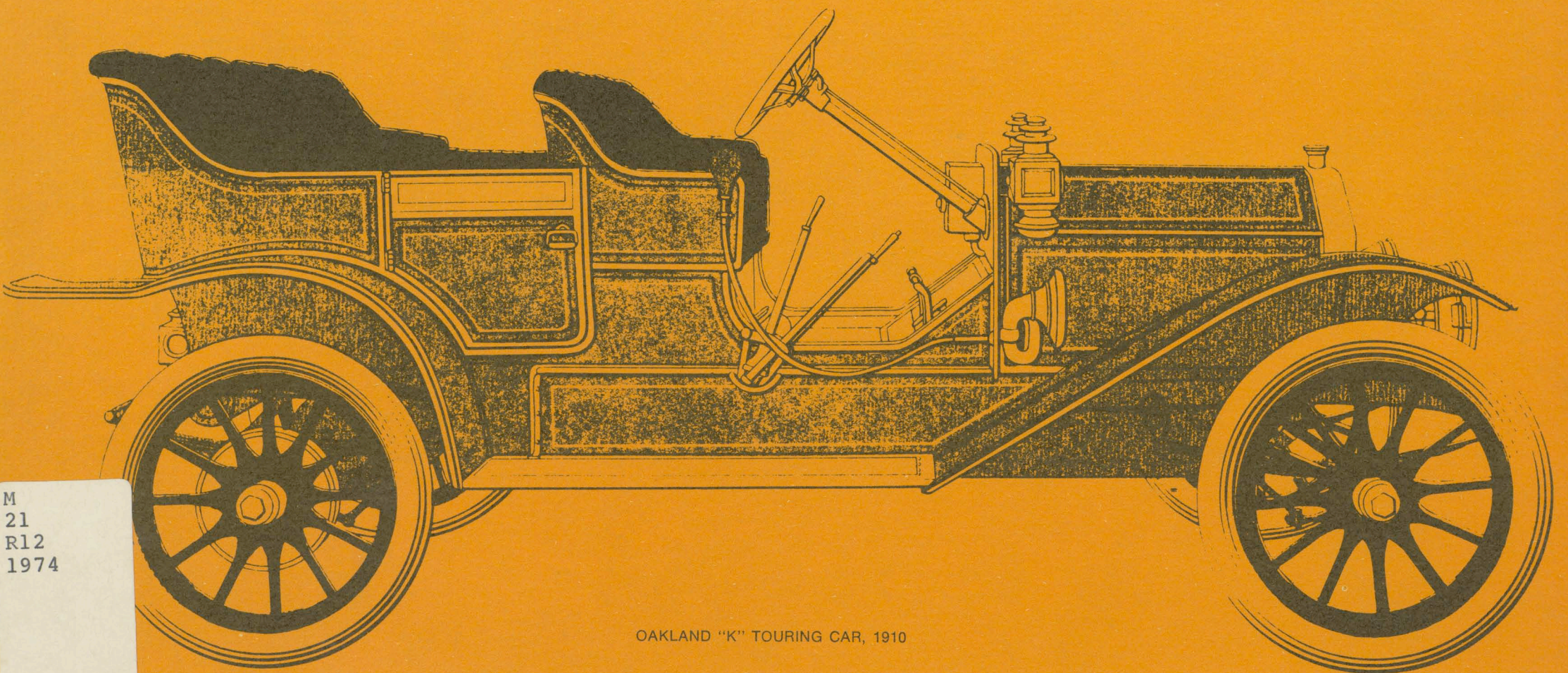


FOLKWAYS RECORDS RF 24

Ragtime Piano Interpretations

COMPILED AND ANNOTATED BY DAVID A. JASEN



OAKLAND "K" TOURING CAR, 1910

M
21
R12
1974

MUSIC LP

SIDE 1

1. **Everybody Two-Step (Wallie Herzer)**
Mike Bernard
2. **Rufenreddy (Bargy-Straight)**
Henry Lange
3. **You Tell 'Em Ivories (Zez Confrey)**
Harold Willoughby
4. **Canadian Capers (Henry Cohen)**
Jimmy O'Keefe
5. **Nickel in the Slot (Zez Confrey)**
Willie Eckstein
6. **Try & Play It (Phil Ohman)**
Arthur Schutt
7. **Slipova (Roy Bargy)**
Frank Banta & Cliff Hess
8. **Coaxing the Piano (Zez Confrey)**
Willie Eckstein

SIDE 2

1. **Kitten on the Keys (Zez Confrey)**
Harry Perrella & Raymond Turner
2. **My Pet (Zez Confrey)**
Sidney Williams
3. **Doll Dance (Nacio Herb Brown)**
Jimmy Andrews
4. **Calico Rag (Nat Johnson)**
Vera Guilaroff
5. **The Match Parade (Wehle)**
Raie da Costa
6. **Rag Doll (Nacio Herb Brown)**
Edna Fischer
7. **Dizzy Fingers (Zez Confrey)**
Muriel Pollock & Vee Lawnhurst
8. **Chopsticks (Arthur de Lulli)**
Pauline Alpert

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BY DAVID A. JASEN

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

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This album is devoted to the artistry and creativity of some outstanding performers of the ragtime. While ragtime, as a form of music, necessarily makes the composition of prime importance, in the recording of it the performer and its performance assumes greater interest. "Playing" any kind of music usually means reading the notes in a desultory fashion. This is something that is done at home, during practice sessions. "Performing" a piece requires an understanding of the music, not just the ability to "get through it". It further demands a personal interpretation by the performer derived from his understanding of the composition. In ragtime performance, the performer's ideal is to combine the piece's flavor while establishing and maintaining his own musical identity throughout. Each artist on this album has a distinctive style of playing. Each has his own set of tricks to sustain interest in the performance.

On this album, we hear not only imaginative solo performances, but in three instances, highly creative duo renderings. Two piano teams have always been popular, but because of the dual problems of complexity of form and creating a musical identity, ragtime has seldom lent itself to duo pianistry.

The Novelty rag, by far the most intricate of all the types of rags, strangely attracted women performers. Far from being dainty, these lady virtuosos happily capture the intense joy and power of ragtime.

It is no coincidence that several of these compositions were written by Zez Confrey. For

Mr. Confrey was the most prolific composer of Novelty rags as well as setting their standard as the pioneer of this type of rag in 1919. His professional career began by recording his interpretations of popular fox-trots onto piano rolls. He became so adept at performing these rhythmically simple numbers while achieving a rich harmonious sound, that he conceived the idea of combining these musical tricks of rhythmic devices with unusual harmonies into what was called the Novelty Rag. In this, ragtime's last development while placed under the popular music category, melody took a back seat. One can think of these technically involved rags as syncopated poems.

RECORDINGS

Side One

MIKE BERNARD (1881-1936) was born and bred in New York City. Growing up in the eighteen eighties and nineties coincided with the growth of Tony Pastor's Music Hall located next door to Tammany Hall on 14th Street. Pastor had built a reputation of having only the best entertainers on his bills. As resident pianist and music leader for Pastor, Mike Bernard was in the position of knowing all of the headliners and accompanying their acts. Winning the Police Gazette's ragtime piano contest in 1900 established him beyond question as New York's premier ragtime pianist - at least as far as show business was concerned. Consequently, he was famous in his own right as a virtuoso performer. And when Columbia

Graphophone Company wanted to record some rag-time piano music, it was only natural that they asked Mike Bernard. On December 2, 1912, he recorded Wallie Herzer's popular rag, EVERYBODY TWO-STEP, and became the first solo pianist to record rags.

HENRY LANGE (1895-) was born in Toledo, Ohio where he took classical piano lessons. As a composer of Novelty rags, he was very much under the classical influence as the titles of his rags indicate: Symphonola, Chopiano, and Classicana. As a pianist, he was heavily influenced by both the piano roll sounds and the black saloon and party piano styles of the Chicago school as illustrated by the Roy Baryg-Charlie Straight composition, RUFENREDDY. This was its first recording.

HAROLD WILLOUGHBY was an Englishman who, as far as can be determined, was completely unknown. YOU TELL 'EM IVORIES is one of two solos he recorded and we can hear the enthusiasm and vitality in his playing. The drum accompaniment adds just the right touch for a sympathetic blend. Great care had been taken for this highly unusual performance with charming hesitations and the attention to neighboring notes. Rarely, if ever, has this fine Confrey composition been performed in quite such a distinctive manner.

JIMMY O'KEEFE (1892-1942) born in St. Louis, Missouri became a recording manager following the first world war and then went to Hollywood where he headed a music department for a motion picture studio until his death. CANADIAN CAPERS was written by San Francisco pianist Sid Le Protti. It was part of a much longer work and was one of his specialties. Henry Cohen happened to hear Le Protti in a saloon during the early teens of this century and by requesting him to play his number over and over again during a period of several weeks - and by judiciously tipping him a couple of dollars each time it was requested - Cohen managed to jot down that portion of the piece he wanted. In 1915, it was published with words supplied by Gus Chandler and Bert White.

WILLIE ECKSTEIN (1888-1963) was born in Pointe St. Charles, Canada. A child prodigy,

he toured the world giving classical music concerts when he was seven years old. His amazing musical abilities found the challenge of Novelty rags stimulating and he recorded several. Zez Confrey, like all who followed, wrote out his compositions with careful attention to detail. Consequently, it is quite enough to play them as written. As we hear, Willie adds considerably to these pieces. NICKEL IN THE SLOT was Confrey's answer to the NICKELODEON - an automated player piano machine which was the twenties' answer to the juke box - which frequently broke down. Confrey played it with Paul Whiteman's orchestra during that historic concert at Aeolian Hall on February 12, 1924. COAXING THE PIANO was Confrey's follow-up to his most famous composition, KITTY ON THE KEYS.

FRANK BANTA (1897-1968), like Mike Bernard, was born and grew up in New York City. CLIFF HESS (1894-1959) was born and raised in Cincinnati, Ohio. While Banta was a professional studio pianist accompanying singers and instrumentalists as well as making sole recordings and playing in bands, Hess was mainly a composer of popular songs, although he started his career as pianist on Mississippi riverboats. During 1923, Hess and Banta played and recorded duets. SLIPOVA was composed by Roy Baryg and while he made a piano roll of it, he never recorded it.

ARTHUR SCHUTT (1902-1965) was born in Reading, Pennsylvania and by the time he was twenty-one (at this recording), he had been playing with Paul Specht's band in New York, recording with their band-within-the-band, The Georgians, and had gone to London where this recording was made. TRY AND PLAY IT was written by novelty pianist Phil Ohman (half of the famous recording and performing team of Ohman and Arden) and although he recorded prolifically as a soloist, duetist, and with his orchestra, he never recorded this number. While Schutt is a rather indifferent band pianist, his solo work as evidenced by this performance is outstanding.

Side Two

HARRY PERRELLA and RAYMOND TURNER were

extraordinary pianists who were with Paul Whiteman's orchestra during the middle twenties. This duet of Zez Confrey's million-dollar hit, KITTEN ON THE KEYS, was recorded in London, England while the Whiteman orchestra was on tour. The unusual minor mode incorporated into the arrangement fitted Whiteman's sense of giving a classical feeling to his popular tunes.

SIDNEY WILLIAMS was a black pianist from the midwest who, during the late twenties, recorded a few novelty solos. The majority of them were Confrey compositions and he treated them uncommonly. In MY PET, the first of Confrey's Novelty rags, Williams with great strength and feeling plays this piece in a slow, deliberate manner which allows us to hear all of its complexities in detail without sacrificing the overall flow of the piece.

JIMMY ANDREWS was the pseudonym used by Frank Banta in the later twenties. DOLL DANCE was written by Frank Nacio Herb Brown, an ex-real estate operator who, after this became a hit (the last of ragtime's most popular compositions), turned exclusively to song writing in Hollywood.

VERA GUILAROFF (1910-) was born in Canada and was given piano lessons by Willie Eckstein. Fortunately, she was equal to the task and when she was sixteen years old, recorded CALICO RAG. This 1914 rag by Nat Johnson is given a novelty treatment and especial attention should be paid to the breaks she tosses off during the third theme.

RAIE DA COSTA was another child prodigy who was born in South Africa. She spent most of her professional life in London, England where she made many recordings until her untimely death in 1934. THE MATCH PARADE demonstrates her flair for tuning a rather prosaic novelty rag into a tour de force.

EDNA FISCHER, born in San Jose, California, continued the show business trend set by Mike Bernard. She played in vaudeville and was featured on radio for many years prior to the second world war. Her only solo recording was Nacio Herb Brown's RAG DOLL, continuing his preoccupation with dolls.

MURIEL POLLOCK (1900-) and VEE LAWN-HURST (1905-) had similar careers as staff musicians with a broadcasting company. Muriel started composing at fifteen and went into radio from its beginning. Vee began by making piano rolls. Later she wrote pop songs. DIZZY FINGERS was such a hit that this recording was made ten years after its initial popularity. This smooth version shows the reason for this duo's large following.

PAULINE ALPERT was another born in New York City. Classically trained, she became a composer-pianist of novelties during the thirties making many recordings. Her arrangement of the most popular tune which everyone - pianist and non-pianist alike - knows and can play, CHOPSTICKS, winds up the novelty era with a whirlwind finish.

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MURIEL POLLOCK & VEE LAWNHURST
8. Chopsticks (Arthur de Lulli)
PAULINE ALPERT

CREDITS

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