

RF 30

The Syncopated Impressions of Billy Mayerl

PROGRAMMED AND NOTES BY DAVID A. JASEN



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M468
S992
1976

MUSIC LP

FOLKWAYS RF 30

SIDE ONE

1. Jazz Master
2. Jazz Mistress
3. Virginia Creeper
4. Eskimo Shivers
5. Jazzaristrix
6. All of a Twist
7. Marigold
8. Hollyhock

SIDE TWO

1. Puppet Suite — Punch
2. Puppet Suite — Judy
3. Puppet Suite — Golliwog
4. Loose Elbows
5. Antiquary
6. Jack in the Box
7. Sleepy Piano
8. Mignonette

CREDITS

Programmed and Notes by DAVID A. JASEN

Mastered by NICK PERLS

Documentation: RECORDED RAGTIME,
1897-1958, by David A. Jasen,
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Hamden, Conn. 06514).

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

COVER PHOTO BY WILLARD VAN DYKE

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

FOLKWAYS RF 30

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THE SYNCOPATED IMPRESSIONS OF BILLY MAYERL

Compiled and Annotated by David A. Jasen

Novelty piano ragtime was the product of American pianists with classical music training who originally arranged popular songs and played them on piano rolls during the late teens of this century. The creator of the Novelty rag was Zez Confrey who wrote, among many others, *KITTEN ON THE KEYS*, which established the Novelty rag as popular music. It was the first million-selling Novelty rag. From the end of the first world war, learning to play the piano became a "must" and practically every home had a keyboard instrument. Although the Novelty rag demanded an incredible technique and an advanced harmonic and rhythmic sense, the piano-playing public avidly bought sheet music, piano rolls, and recordings of this exciting and demanding music.

Perhaps the finest performer of Novelty piano ragtime and certainly one of its most original composers neither made piano rolls nor was he an American. Billy Mayerl was British, having been born in London, England on May 31, 1902, the son of an impoverished violinist. A child prodigy, he was playing the piano so well by the time he was five years old that his parents had him take formal lessons. He won a scholarship to Trinity College of Music in London where he studied with Agnes Maude Winter. At twelve years old, he gave his first concert, appearing at the Queen's Hall. While attending school during the days, Billy played evenings in movie houses, accompanying the silent films. His first real job as pianist with an orchestra took place in 1920 when he worked a hotel in the key city where ocean-liners carrying tourists landed, Southampton. Not too long after Billy started work there, an American saxophone-playing band leader, Bert Ralton, arrived aboard one of those liners and as it was too late to travel to London, stayed the night at the hotel where Billy was playing. Ralton had been asked to lead his band at the famed, ultra-posh Savoy Hotel. As luck would have it, Ralton needed a pianist for this job, his regular one not being able to travel to England. After listening to Mayerl, Ralton immediately hired him. It was there, first as band pianist and then as solo pianist with the Savoy Havana Band, where Billy became famous. His fame dramatically increased when the band performed on radio over the BBC and included Mayerl solo interpretations of popular songs. During the five years he was with this organization, Billy gathered even further honors, as when he was asked to be the first to perform in

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England the "Rhapsody in Blue." Gershwin came over for the rehearsals and a friendship sprung up between the two. The concert, again at the Queen's Hall, proved to be an unqualified success.

The world of the theatre captured him from 1923 onward, as pianist, then orchestra director, and finally as composer. He was associated with such shows as "You'd Be Surprised," "Shake Your Feet," "White Birds," "The Co-Optimists," "Twenty to One," "Over She Goes," "Runaway Love," and "Sporting Love." He also starred in all of the major music halls either as soloist or with other pianists during the twenties.

In 1927 he started what was to become the most famous and successful undertaking of its kind, the Billy Mayerl School of Music, with branches all over the world. He had his own magazine and taught many thousands of pupils by the correspondence method. This included not only instruction booklets, but recordings as well, where he personally demonstrated the various exercises and effects to be gained.

He had a predilection for flowers and a good many of his compositions reflect this. His most successful number which became his theme song was "Marigold." Others of his compositions with flowered titles include, "Autumn Crocus," "Honeysuckle," "Mistletoe," "Sweet William," "Virginia Creeper," "White Heather," and "Wistaria."

In addition, he also liked to write what he called piano suites - several compositions under the same over-all title: "Four Aces (Ace of Clubs, Ace of Hearts, Ace of Diamonds, and Ace of Spades)," "Aquarium Suite," "Puppets Suite," "Piano Exaggerations," and "Three Miniatures in Syncopation." Of course, he wrote many "syncopated impressions" as he called his Novelty rags. Patterned after the Confrey successes, Mayerl found his own bag of tricks and this album celebrates the best of them, all performed by him with impeccable style.

"Jazz Master" sets the tone of the entire album beautifully. It is a magnificent example of Novelty ragtime at its most complex, filled with original phrases, harmonies and rhythmical devices, yet containing rich and beautiful melodies.

From the second world war, Billy Mayerl worked for the Light Music Unit of the BBC, broadcasting, recording and composing. He died of a heart attack on March 25, 1959, in London.

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