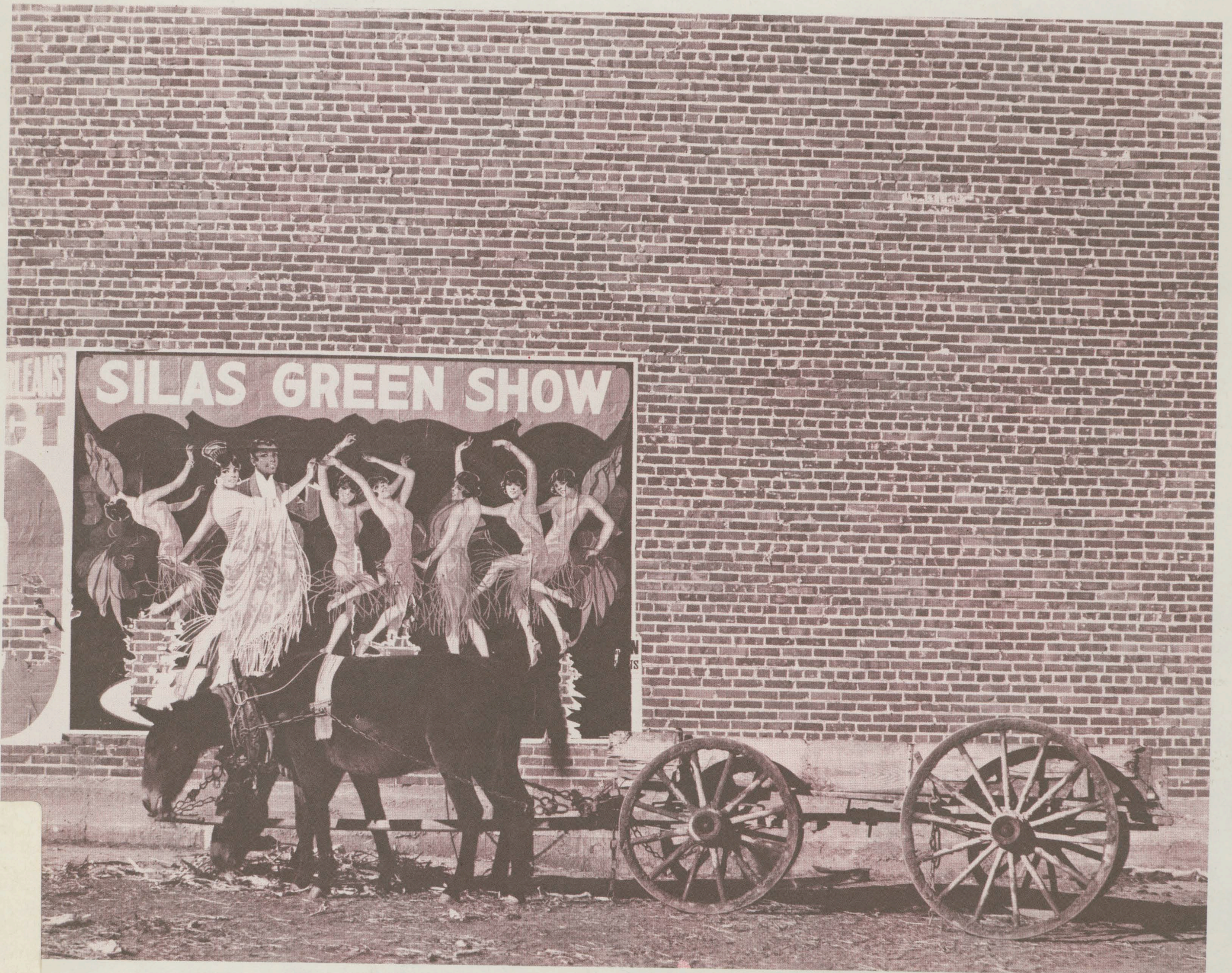


RF RECORDS 33

# Early Ragtime Piano

COMPILED AND ANNOTATED BY DAVID A. JASEN

1913-1930



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1977

MUSIC LP

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SIDE 1

1915 RAG  
(Harry Austin Tierney-1913)  
THE TRAMP RAG  
(Joe Batten)  
DELIRIOUS RAG  
(Willie Eckstein, Harry Thomas)  
BREAKIN' THE PIANO  
(Billy James)  
MONKEY BLUES  
(Max Darewski)  
FINE FEATHERS  
(Larry Briers)  
SPRING FEELIN'  
(David Thorne)  
YOU'VE GOT TO BE MODERNISTIC  
(James P. Johnson)

SIDE 2

FROG - I - MORE RAG  
(Jelly Roll Morton) - 1918  
KING PORTER STOMP  
(Jelly Roll Morton)  
DUSTING THE KEYS  
(Edward B. Claypoole)  
TRY IT AND PLAY IT  
(Phil Ohman)  
PIANOLA  
(Frank Westphal)  
CHIMES  
(Pastalley & Viladomat)  
DOING THE DOMINOES  
(Ronald Courlay)  
DANCING SHADOWS  
(Ernie Golden) - 1927

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**Early** 1913-1930  
**Ragtime Piano**

COMPILED AND ANNOTATED BY DAVID A. JASEN

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

COVER PHOTO BY WALKER EVANS  
Mule Team and Poster, Alabama, 1936  
Collection of the Library of Congress

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## EARLY PIANO RAGTIME

Compiled and Annotated by David A. Jasen

The history of piano ragtime on records begins with the recordings of Mike Bernard in 1912. This comparative late start (flat discs having been regularly produced since 1897) is accounted for by the major performers not wanting to record. They didn't want to record for two main reasons: the recording industry was not sufficiently large enough to pay the high salaries accorded the top pianists and because the primitive equipment used in making records could not reproduce the full range of the piano at all clearly.

This selection of early examples of recorded ragtime on the piano covers the years 1913-1930 (Mike Bernard's first recording at the end of 1912 can be found on RAGTIME PIANO INTERPRETATIONS, RBF-24). Altogether there were several kinds of pianists who were playing and recording ragtime during this time period. During the teens, vaudeville performers and accompanists were to be found occasionally in the studios. In the early twenties, the vaudeville virtuosi began recording and by the mid-twenties, the great jazz pianists had also joined forces to spread their inimitable talents through recorded sound.

Since communication was almost non-existent from one part of the country to another, disc recordings were the best means of letting people know what sounds were being heard in the various places where entertainment was a specialty. On this album, the gamut of the best recording pianists are featured. These authentic performances offer more than a hint of what it was like in the days when night clubbing (sometimes called cabarets), vaudeville and the District gave the world ragtime in its many guises.

### SIDE ONE

1915 RAG was, surprisingly, written by Harry Austen Tierney in 1913. He was a fine vaudeville entertainer, part of a Trio, who also wrote scores to musical comedies. Mike Bernard (who can also be heard on RBF-23 and 24), was the house pianist and star of the most famous variety theatre in the New York City area, the famous Tony Pastor's Music Hall. He was known for his dazzling technique and showmanship. This recording, as well as the others, gives us a sense of the ragtime age as it was happening. The Age of Ragtime was a long one and the sounds are naturally varied as are the performers.

THE TRAMP RAG was composed and played by Joe Batten, not one normally associated with ragtime. Rather, he spent a long life as music director in several English recording companies. In fact, he was a recording pioneer. This recording is probably the first English piano rag recording. In those early days, Joe usually accompanied singers and instrumentalists, and this is an extremely rare solo.

DELIRIOUS RAG was written by two extremely talented Canadians, Willie Eckstein & Harry Thomas. It is Harry Thomas who made this, the Victor Talking Machine Company's first piano ragtime disc, in 1916. Like his collaborator,

Harry spent many years as a silent movie pianist. It is surprising to find this such a simply written piece, when both composers were virtuosi as performers. However, it takes great technique to play it so smoothly and this Harry does beautifully.

BREAKIN' THE PIANO was composed by Philadelphian Billy James (1895-1965). While he was better known as a composer of popular tunes, especially during the twenties, this early Novelty rag is truly a most delightful novelty. For, Billy deliberately fills his rag with breaks, thereby making a pun with his title. For, a break—usually used as a device among jazz musicians—musically interrupts the flow of the tune. This very early example of piano ragtime on record contains the earliest examples of the various novelty breaks used in a rag. And it is a tribute to Billy's ingenuity that he doesn't resort to repeating his breaks but manages to be creative throughout the composition. Pianist Vee Lawnhurst made a terrific reputation for herself a few years later in radio where she both played many piano solos on her own and on other programs, and duets with such outstanding female pianists as Constance Mering and Muriel Pollock (herself a fine ragtime composer).

MONKEY BLUES, composed and performed by Englishman Max Darewski, is a very early example of English piano ragtime, having been written in 1918. He came from a musical family and his brother Herman was a famous publisher in London's Tin Pan Alley. Max married the famous actress Ruby Miller and died tragically young, at the age of thirty-three. A prolific composer, this is believed to be his only rag.

FINE FEATHERS is a rare novelty rag written by Larry Briers (1893-1946), another fine vaudeville pianist. Performer Willie Eckstein does his usual exceptional job. This is its only recording, made early in 1924.

SPRING FEELIN' is performed by its composer, Donald Thorne, an extremely talented keyboard artist from England. A late Novelty rag from 1928, it is nevertheless an original conception. Thorne's inspiration seems mostly to come from Zez Confrey and Rube Bloom.

YOU'VE GOT TO BE MODERNISTIC is James P. Johnson's contribution to both the Novelty rag and the use in popular music of the whole-tone scale. A very nice blend of Stride and the Novelty idiom, James P.'s definitive performance ends this side with a drive and sustained elegance of swing rarely found on disc.

### SIDE TWO

FROG-I-MORE RAG was Jelly Roll Morton's earliest copyrighted rag (May 15, 1918) and exquisitely performed by him in April, 1924. It is a fascinating work with a beautiful Trio, which he later turned into the chorus of his famous song, "Sweetheart O' Mine." Jelly (1885-1941) was truly a unique figure in American Popular Music and outstanding in the sub-genre of Jazz. As a ragtime composer-performer he is simi-

larly incredible. Not only did he have a well thought-out philosophy of music and a musical intuition of a genius, but his use of unusual, atypical harmonies gave an appeal which no one resisted.

KING PORTER STOMP is surely Jelly's most famous rag, as it is periodically revived to great acclaim. Jelly himself recorded it four times during his recording career, an indication that he also thought highly of his rag. This version was recorded in April, 1926, and long unavailable on disc.

DUSTING THE KEYS was written by Baltimorean Edward B. Claypoole (1883-1952) in 1922. Claypoole is perhaps best known for his RAGGING THE SCALE. Here, he runs up and down the scale slightly differently, making this an unusual Novelty rag. Harry Snodgrass was a newly released prisoner when he recorded it. To put him on the "straight and narrow," prison officials got him a recording contract and also a job with a local Kansas City radio station, where he was billed as "The King of the Ivories." J. M. Whitten, who does the introduction on disc, was also his announcer at the radio station.

TRY AND PLAY IT was one of the few Novelty rags composed but never recorded by Phil Ohman (1896-1954). Willy White, who did this magnificent recording, was a superb vaudeville accompanist who usually shunned the recording studios. As one can hear, this was a great loss, as his performing abilities are extraordinary. As in MODERNISTIC, the combined use of the whole-tone scale with syncopated triplets is done cleverly—and so differently.

PIANOLA is by vaudeville star Frank Westphal (1890-1948). Trying to imitate a player piano, it is like BREAKIN' THE PIANO in giving us unusual breaks. Should a section here remind you of Confrey's STUMBLING, I feel it is not accidental. Westphal accompanied one of his ex-wives in vaudeville, Sophie Tucker, appeared as a soloist there, and toured with his own orchestra.

CHIMES is the collaboration of Pastalley and Viladomat which received its only recording by the brilliant Canadian Willie Eckstein in mid-1923. The idea of a piano imitating chimes is an old one which broke out with a rash of compositions during the twenties. In the jazz world, CHIMES BLUES comes immediately to mind.

DOING THE DOMINOES is an unusual composition in ragtime written by the performer, Englishman Ronald Gourlay. It, too, uses the whole-tone progression as well as a beautiful melody—so typical of the late twenties' Novelty rags.

DANCING SHADOWS was written by orchestra leader, Ernie Golden, in 1927. The featured performer on this recording was the sensational South African, Raie Da Costa, advertised as "The Parlophone Girl." A sympathetic studio orchestra provides a fine accompaniment to her outstanding talents.

#### CREDITS

Programmed and Notes by David A. Jasen

Mastered by

Documentation: RECORDED RAGTIME, 1897-1958, by David A. Jasen, Archon Books (995 Sherman Avenue, Hamden, Conn. 06514).

#### SIDE ONE

1. 1915 Rag - Mike Bernard
2. The Tramp Rag - Joe Batten
3. Delirious Rag - Harry Thomas
4. Breakin' the Piano - Vee Lawnhurst
5. Monkey Blues - Max Darewski
6. Fine Feathers - Willie Eckstein
7. Spring Feelin' - Donald Thorne
8. You've Got To Be Modernistic - James P. Johnson

#### SIDE TWO

1. Frog-I-More Rag - Jelly Roll Morton
2. King Porter Stomp - Jelly Roll Morton
3. Dusting the Keys - Harry Snodgrass
4. Try and Play It - Willy White
5. Pianola - Frank Westphal
6. Chimes - Willie Eckstein
7. Doing the Dominoes - Ronald Gourlay
8. Dancing Shadows - Raie Da Costa

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