

Jelly Roll Morton Piano Classics, 1923-24

King Porter Stomp / New Orleans Joys / Grandpa's Spells

Kansas City Stomp / Wolverine Blues / The Pearls / Thirty-Fifth Street Blues / Mamanita / Frog-I-More Rag / London Blues / Tia Juana / Shreveport Stomp
Mamanita / Jelly Roll Blues / Big Foot Ham / Bucktown Blues / Tom Cat Blues / Stratford Hunch / Perfect Rag



JELLY ROLL MORTON IN HIS STORYVILLE DAYS, 1926

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

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88
983

MUSIC LP

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SIDE ONE Total Time — 29:10

1. King Porter Stomp
2. New Orleans Joys
3. Grandpa's Spells
4. Kansas City Stomp
5. Wolverine Blues
6. The Pearls
7. Thirty-Fifth Street Blues
8. Mamanita
9. Frog-I-More Rag
10. London Blues

SIDE TWO Total Time — 26:29

1. Tia Juana
2. Shreveport Stomp
3. Mamanita
4. Jelly Roll Blues
5. Big Foot Ham
6. Bucktown Blues
7. Tom Cat Blues
8. Stratford Hunch
9. Perfect Rag

CREDITS

Compiled & Annotated: David A. Jasen
Remastering: Carl Seltzer

For further documentation, may we suggest the
discography MR. JELLY LORD by Laurie Wright,
Storyville Pub., Chigwell, England.

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COMPILED AND ANNOTATED BY DAVID A. JASEN

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

FOLKWAYS RECORDS RF 47

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MUSIC LP

Ferdinand Joseph LaMenthe, better known as Jelly Roll Morton, or as he signed his name and as it appeared on the labels of his first piano solo recordings, Ferd (Jelly Roll) Morton, said he was born in Gulfport, Louisiana on September 20, 1885. Recently, it is thought that he was born in New Orleans on October 20, 1890. There is no question, however, that he died in Los Angeles, California on July 10, 1941.

Jelly Roll was a unique figure in American music. Everything he did was sparked with originality and almost everything with controversy. He created a style of playing which could encompass other individual jazzmen's styles and yet retain his own conception. He could also take a published piano rag, pop tune or blues and transform it into "Jelly Roll" style. As both a composer and performer, he created more diverse moods in his works than anyone else. He also used unexpected rhythmic patterns to sustain audience interest. He had sixths in the left hand provided uncommon voicings. He had definite ideas about his music and was the most articulate jazzman of his time. There was nothing he did, either as composer or performer, which he could not explain. Nothing was caphazard or accidental. Every musical device he used was well thought out and deliberately done.

I am uncomfortable with the recent birthdate, because we know that Jelly Roll first played in the parlors of the finest Storyville houses in 1902. He could hardly have done so at the age of twelve! Also, we know that he went to the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904. Again, it would hardly be possible to go there by himself at the age of fourteen. Besides, he called Joe Oliver a contemporary and we know that Oliver was born in 1885. As a child, Jelly Roll went to St. Joseph's Catholic School in New Orleans and there learned the piano. By 1902, he became one of the top "professors" in the district known as Storyville, earning a minimum of one hundred dollars a night. And this was before the income tax! After St. Louis, he travelled around the country, having a good time, picking up local musical styles, playing pool, hustling for women, singing, appearing in vaudeville as part of a comedy team and playing piano. He went to Chicago in the early teens where he led his own band. In 1915, he moved to San Francisco where he attended the Exposition. He ran a nightclub in Los Angeles, moved on to Vancouver, Alaska, Wyoming, Denver, frequented bars in Tia Juana and San Diego and returned to Chicago in 1923 where he made his first records. He became staff arranger and composer for the Melrose Brothers Music Company.

This album deals with his now classic piano solo recordings of 1923 and 1924. They are issued here complete and in the order in which he recorded them. All but three of the nineteen recordings are of his compositions. His piano sound is distinctive and quite unlike any other pianist. For his idea was not to sound like a solo pianist, but to sound like a jazz

band; his extraordinary left hand not only kept a steady rhythm, like a tuba or string bass, but also incorporated the counterpoint of a trombone. His right hand alternated between the clear cut melody line as played by the trumpet, and the embellishments and flourishes of the clarinet. In a live performance, to complete the resemblance to a band, he usually had a drumstick placed in his inner left shoe to beat against his bench or chair while playing.

In the early days of acoustic recording, it was unheard of for any pianist, whether he be playing ragtime, jazz or just plain pop music, to have had 19 selections issued on discs within a one year period. It was further unheard of that sixteen of them would be compositions by one person. Even further, that one session alone should produce nine issuable recordings!

Surely, this is a record, or should I say, a feat no one else managed even to come near. And yet, this is just what Jelly Roll achieved. And this, at a time when recording engineers were discouraging the use of the piano as a solo recording instrument.

The Melrose Brothers, Lester and Walter, along with Marty Bloom, ran their music shop in addition to a small publishing business. They not only issued song sheets, but published orchestrations for dance and jazz bands. The brothers arranged these and other recording sessions for Jelly Roll, who was under contract to them to compose and orchestrate. It is therefore not surprising to find that all of the tunes Jelly Roll recorded were published by the Melrose Bros.

The majority of these piano solos were made for the Gennett record company whose main studio was located in Richmond, Indiana, about eighty-four miles from Chicago. This company, throughout the twenties, recorded every major jazzman and jazz band with the exception of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band. All of their jazz recordings on the Gennett label are today top

wants by every collector, and are accordingly rare and very expensive when obtainable. The Jelly Roll piano solos were the start of his legendary status and confirm the enthusiasm of jazz historians about his stature in the jazz world.

SIDE ONE

KING PORTER STOMP was the first composition recorded by Jelly Roll on July 17, 1923. It was issued on Gennett 5289 and the matrix number was 11537. Altogether, he made eight recordings of it throughout his life. He claimed to have composed it in 1906, naming it for a friend, pianist Porter King, although it wasn't copyrighted until December 9, 1924 and then as an orchestration. Melrose issued it as a piano solo both as a separate sheet and in their 1927 folio, "Jelly Roll Morton's Famous Series of Blues & Stomps For Piano."

NEW ORLEANS JOYS was the second solo recorded on July 17th. It is a blues (later retitled New Orleans Blues) which incorporated what Jelly called "the Spanish tinge," a habanera rhythm which provided a distinctive and surprising element in the performance. It was issued on Gennett 5486 (matrix number 11538) in June, 1924. To make matters worse, it wasn't copyrighted until April 1, 1925, but as an orchestration.

GRANDPA'S SPELLS was the first tune he recorded the following day on July 18, and the first to be released on disc.

It was issued on Gennett 5218 (11544) and the first advertisement appeared in the October 20, 1923 issue of the Chicago Defender. This is a lovely rag, which Jelly Roll called a "stomp." The piano solo was copyrighted in Morton's own hand on August 20, 1923 and the printed version faithfully follows the manuscript.

KANSAS CITY STOMP was first composed in 1919 and was named after a bar in Tia Juana, Mexico. It is probably his best constructed rag and, as a Jelly Roll composition, best illustrates his concept of a piano sounding like a jazz band

he made a brilliant re-recording of it with his Red Hot Pappers for the Victor Talking Machine Company in 1928). This re-recording was issued as the companion piece to Grandpa's Spells on Gennett 5218 (11545). It was likewise copyrighted at the same time on August 20, 1923, as a piano solo in Morton's own hand.

WOLVERINE BLUES was a beautiful song which was published by the Melrose Brothers Music Company on May 10, 1923, before Jelly Roll made his first re-recording of it - which occurred on July 18 and released on Gennett 5289 (11546). The lyrics were written by John and Ben Spikes. Melrose also published it as a piano solo and reprinted it in that 1927 folio.

THE PEARLS was apparently written for a waitress at the Kansas City Bar in Tia Juana. She must have been lovely. He described the piece as consisting of several sections and that each one matched the other and contributed to the "total effect of a beautiful pearl necklace." It appeared on Gennett 5323 (11547) and was the last of the six pieces recorded in the two-day session.

THIRTY-FIFTH STREET BLUES was written by Charles Levy and recorded by Jelly Roll at the Marsh Laboratories in Chicago in April, 1924. Jelly Roll was working as a demonstrator for the Rialto Music House, which had three stores in Chicago and one in Gary, Indiana, and they set him up to record a few numbers. This recording was issued by Paramount records on 12216 (8071).

MAMANTTA, a Jelly Roll original with that Spanish Tinge, was the companion piece on Paramount 12216 (8072), but was never copyrighted or published during his life. He recorded it again two months later in that marathon session for Gennett, which we'll hear on Side Two.

FRUG-I-MORE RAG was recorded at Marsh sometime during April or May, 1924, but was never issued. The test pressing

was found in Chicago and was finally issued on the Steiner-Davis label #103 in 1944. The matrix number is 534. A piano solo manuscript was copyrighted on May 15, 1918. Retitled as Proogie Moore and with lyrics by the Spikes Brothers, it was copyrighted on April 16, 1923. It was copyrighted once again on June 10, 1926 as Sweetheart O' Mine. It is the first of two compositions which Jelly Roll called a rag, although as we've seen, he mostly referred to his rags as Stomps.

LONDON BLUES, recorded at the Marsh Labs at the same time as the above rag, also had "thrown on it as an alias" the later title of Shoe Shiner's Drag. It was originally copyrighted under the first title on September 26, 1923 and under the latter title on August 15, 1928. This recording was issued by Rialto on their own label without any number, but the matrix was 535.

SIDE TWO

TIA JUANA, by St. Louis pianist-band-leader Gene Rodemich and his trombonist Larry Conley, started the mammoth recording session for Gennett Records on June 9, 1924. This entire side of nine tunes comprises that one-day affair. It was issued on Gennett 5632 (11907-A).

SHREVEPORT STOMP is a marvel of intricate harmonies. It was issued on Gennett 5590 (11908-A). Jelly later made a piano roll of it and then recorded it with his Trio in 1928. It works much better with the clarinet providing the melody in the first section than as a straight piano solo.

MAMANTTA, originally recorded two months earlier for release on Paramount (see Side One), was subtitled "Spanish Fox Trot" on the Gennett issue 5632 (11910-A). These two performances provide us with the dramatic proof of Jelly Roll's genius for improvising and creating new moods using the same basic material. This Gennett performance is much tighter

and forceful, but the third section which he repeats gives us an outstanding example of his ability to change the emotional content. The first time he plays the third section, he creates a smoothness with his left hand and a swinging suspension with his right. The repeat of that section gives us a raggy interpretation which is something completely different.

JELLY ROLL BLUES was the earliest copyrighted work by Jelly Roll Morton. It was published as a piano solo by Will Rossiter in Chicago on September 15, 1915. This, his first of five recordings, was issued on Gennett 5552 (11911-A). It is a two-section blues with composed breaks in the first section.

BIG FOOT HAM seems to be correct and what he called it although fans have been calling it Big Fat Ham for years. This, too, underwent a change of title in 1928 when Johnny Dunn and his Band - with Jelly Roll on piano - re-recorded it as Ham and Eggs. He chose this tune when he made his first band record for Paramount in June, 1923, but didn't copyright it until August 11, 1923. This re-recording came out on Gennett 5552 (11912-A) and was released in November, 1924.

BUCKTOWN BLUES was composed by clarinetist-saxophonist-bandleader Boyd Senter with whom Jelly Roll recorded several times during this year. We can hear that Jelly Roll is uncomfortable with this tune and he tries to adapt it to his style but it doesn't quite work. His improvisations here are a bit labored. His tune was published by Melrose and this performance was issued on Gennett 5515 (11913-A) in August.

TOM CAT BLUES was first copyrighted on April 1, 1925, although this solo was done on June 9, 1924. It appeared on Gennett 5515 (11914). He then made a piano roll for Vocalstyle and in 1926 made another version for QRS as Midnight Mama. It has a structure like a pop tune - that is, a twenty-four measure verse and a sixteen measure chorus.

STRAFFORD HUNCH is one of Jelly Roll's most fascinating pieces, harmonically speaking. He recorded this on Gennett 5590 (11915-A), which was released in December, 1924. Without its introduction, it was copyrighted on January 12, 1926 in an orchestration as Chicago Breakdown and was thus recorded by Sonny Clay's Plantation Orchestra and Louis Armstrong and his Hot Seven.

PERFECT RAG was the last selection recorded on June 9th and the first one to be released later the same month. It appeared on Gennett 5486 (11917). It is a marvelous rag and was certainly composed long before, as its retitling in the 1939 solo Sporting House Rag suggests. It was copyrighted under this latter title on December 20, 1939 in manuscript form. It is a virtuosid display piece and demonstrates Jelly Roll's command of ragtime, showing how he changes the traditional pattern by infusing it with his unique ideas. A Perfect finish to a series of classic performances.

