

RBF 35

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# Roy Bargy: Piano Syncopations

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Compiled and annotated by David A. Jasen





RBF 35



SIDE 1

1. PIANOFLAGE — PIANO ROLL
2. PIANOFLAGE
3. KNICE & KNIFTY
4. JUSTIN-TYME
5. SUNSHINE CAPERS
6. RUFENREDDY
7. JIM JAMS
8. JIM JAMS — PIANO ROLL

SIDE 2

Piano Rolls

1. OMEOMY
2. SWEET AND TENDER
3. A BLUE STREAK
4. SLIPOVA
5. DITTO
6. KNICE & KNIFTY
7. SUNSHINE CAPERS
8. JUSTIN-TYME
9. BEHAVE YOURSELF

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

COVER PHOTO: BRONZE FIGURE OF TWO GIRLS IN  
PARTY DRESSES WITH HEAD AND ARMS OF  
CARVED IVORY, SIGNED SEVIN, 1920

RBF 35



# **Roy Bargy Piano Syncopations**

**Compiled and Annotated by David A. Jasen**

**RBF-35**

Roy Frederick Bargy was born in Newaygo, Michigan on July 31, 1894 but grew up in Toledo, Ohio. When he was five years old, he started taking piano lessons which lasted until he was seventeen. Aspiring to the concert stage, he soon realized that unless he could study in Europe he wouldn't be able to break into the tight classical music world in this country. The musical Establishment until after the second world war didn't permit American artists access to the concert halls and operatic stages unless they had extensive training abroad. In a word, they were snobs. Rebuffed from his chosen career, Roy hung around the District in Toledo listening to such black pianists as Johnny Walters and Luckey Roberts. Like many another teenage prodigy, he soon got jobs playing piano and organ after school at the local movie houses. For school dances, he organized his own orchestra.

His first professional break came in 1919 when he auditioned for manager Charley Straight at the Imperial Player Rolls company. He began by recording his own Novelty rags and arranging popular songs. This long-playing album contains all of his ragtime compositions as he played them on rolls and records. He was chosen by Imperial to challenge QRS's new Novelty rag star, Zez Confrey (see "Zez Confrey, Creator of the Novelty Rag," RBF-28), who had a similar background in the classics and who a year earlier began to create Novelty



rag. While Roy was hired to compete with Confrey, he was in no way imitating him. He established an entirely new set of ragtime ideas, and while his rags didn't meet with the fantastic popularity Confrey's did, they were equal in inventiveness.

In 1920, while working for Imperial, Straight introduced Roy to Edgar Benson, a booking agent who had formed a band to record for the Victor Talking Machine Company. Benson was impressed with Roy's musicianship and hired him as pianist, arranger and musical director of the dance orchestra. The Victor recordings established Roy as a triple-threat talent and provided him with the means to secure his services in similar capacities for such distinguished dance bands as those led by composer-saxophonist Isham Jones and then finally began a twelve-year association with the greatest dance orchestra, Paul Whiteman's, in 1928. Roy spent a couple of years with Lanny Ross on radio and then became Jimmy Durante's musical director in 1943. Both Jimmy and Roy retired in 1963 with Roy spending most of his time playing golf, a sport also enjoyed by Zez Confrey. Roy died at his home in Vista, California on January 16, 1974.

#### SIDE ONE

PIANOFLAGE is Roy's finest rag and his fifth excursion in the idiom. It is our good fortune to be able to hear it performed by the composer on a hand-played roll as well as on a disc recording. The listener can make his own comparison between the different modes of presentations. Roy only made six piano solos on disc, all of which are included here. A distinctive Barge device was the extensive use of the "break" - a musical interruption of the melody - incorporating it as part of his melodic line. Famous ragtime artist and jazzman, Jelly Roll Morton (see "Early Ragtime Piano," RBF-33), specifically pointed out the advantages of using



breaks as a performance device. Roy uses it as a compositional device, integrating it as part of the melodic conception. And, for freshness, he always uses new and rhythmically different breaks throughout, never boring the listener with the same breaks. As a performer, Roy executes his breaks cleanly.

KNICE AND KNIFTY was written in collaboration with Charley Straight. Straight, in addition to being an outstanding roll arranger and performer, was himself an orchestra leader during the twenties and a prolific composer of pop songs. This is a most complex rag.

JUSTIN-TYME was one of eight rags published by Sam Fox Publishing Company during 1921-22. It is curious that Roy made the piano rolls during 1919-20, before copyrighting them, and then recording them for Victor Talking Machine Company in 1922 and 1924!

SUNSHINE CAPERS is filled with the liveliness and sprightliness of the best Novelty rags. Its lightheartedness belies the extraordinary difficulty of the piece, full of the novelty breaks in which he delighted.

RUFENREDDY was the first collaboration between Bargy and Straight. Charley made the first roll of it with Roy making two versions on rolls and one disc recording. Another fine disc version was done by another Toledo pianist for the Paul Whiteman orchestra, Henry Lange (see "Ragtime Piano Interpretations," RBF-24).

JIM JAMS is another Bargy gem. An unusual feature here is the left hand in the B section which starts chord-octave, chord-octave instead of the usual octave-chord, octave-chord, thus adding the effect of more syncopation to an already thoroughly syncopated rag. The positioning of the disc performance and then



the piano roll gives us yet another chance to compare the differences in approach.

## SIDE TWO

OMEOMY and two others on this side have never been published or recorded. These roll performances constitute their only form. This masterpiece, and seemingly, Roy's last effort in this genre, illustrates his complete understanding of this most complex rag style. The A section is the musical reverse of the corresponding section in Pianoilage.

SWEET AND TENDER is a recent discovery, as it was published by Will Rossiter in 1923 (the rest of the Bargy published rags was done by Sam Fox during 1921 and 1922). An interesting fact is that despite its being published last, this was the first rag roll done by Roy for Imperial in September, 1919. A first disc recording of this rag was done in 1977 (!) and is to be found on Dave Jasen's "Rip-Roar'n' Ragtime" (Folkways FG-3561) and a comparison of Jasen's performance with this roll indicates a substantial change in Bargy's feelings from the time he made his roll and the issuance of it in sheet music form. One difference is immediately apparent as the Introduction as played on this roll shifts the syncopated accents. Then, the A section is treated entirely in the major mode while the sheet music indicates minor harmonies inserted between the major ones. The C section on the roll starts with a tremolo in thirds placing the real melody line inside which changes the voicings and creates quite a different impression. A quite exciting performance.

A BLUE STREAK is another of those rags only available on piano roll. An amazing blend in the A section of the blues with the novelty rag, it features an ascending walking bass consisting of a bottom tonic note walking with the dominant and



tonic together leading to an exciting tremolo in the right hand.

SLIPOVA was an early rag by Roy with a hint of the blues throughout. While Roy's recorded version was never issued, two others have been. Studio pianist Frank Banta and rag writer Cliff Hess recorded it as a duet in 1923 (see "Ragtime Piano Interpretations," RBF-24), and British pianist, Patricia Rossborough made a super recording of it in 1933.

DITTO is the other rag of which this is its only existence. It features nice melodies with built-in breaks and the unusually rich harmonies associated with the Bargo rags.

BEHAVE YOURSELF was part of the eight rags published by Sam Fox but only available on this roll, as Victor rejected its performance on disc. It is a fit companion to these other rags and a joyful ending to this LP of Roy Bargo's piano syncopations as played by the composer.

#### CREDITS

Programmed and Notes by David A. Jasen

Mastered by Carl Seltzer and Keith Miller

Piano rolls recorded on a Willis 1929 Ampico Player Grand.

We wish to thank Mike Montgomery for the use of the piano rolls on this album and to Keith Miller for his generous assistance in making the roll transfers.

Documentation: RAGS AND RAGTIME, by David A. Jasen and Trebor J.

Tichenor, Seabury Press.

SIDE ONE

1. Pianoflage - piano roll
2. Pianoflage
3. Knice & Knifty
4. Justin-Tyme
5. Sunshine Capers
6. Rufenreddy
7. Jim Jams
8. Jim Jams - piano roll

SIDE TWO - Piano Rolls

1. Omeomy
2. Sweet and Tender
3. A Blue Streak
4. Slipova
5. Ditto
6. Knice & Knifty
7. Sunshine Capers
8. Justin-Tyme
9. Behave Yourself



**FOLKWAYS Records**

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**ROY BARGY: PIANO SYNCOPATIONS**

Compiled and annotated by David A. Jasen

SIDE 1

RF 35 A

1. PIANOFLAGE — piano roll
2. PIANOFLAGE
3. KNICE & KNIFTY
4. JUSTIN-TYME
5. SUNSHINE CAPERS
6. RUFENREDDY
7. JIM JAMS
8. JIM JAMS — piano roll



RF 35 B

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**ROY BARGY: PIANO SYNCOPATIONS**

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SIDE 2

RF 35 B

**Piano Rolls**

1. OMEOMY
2. SWEET AND TENDER
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