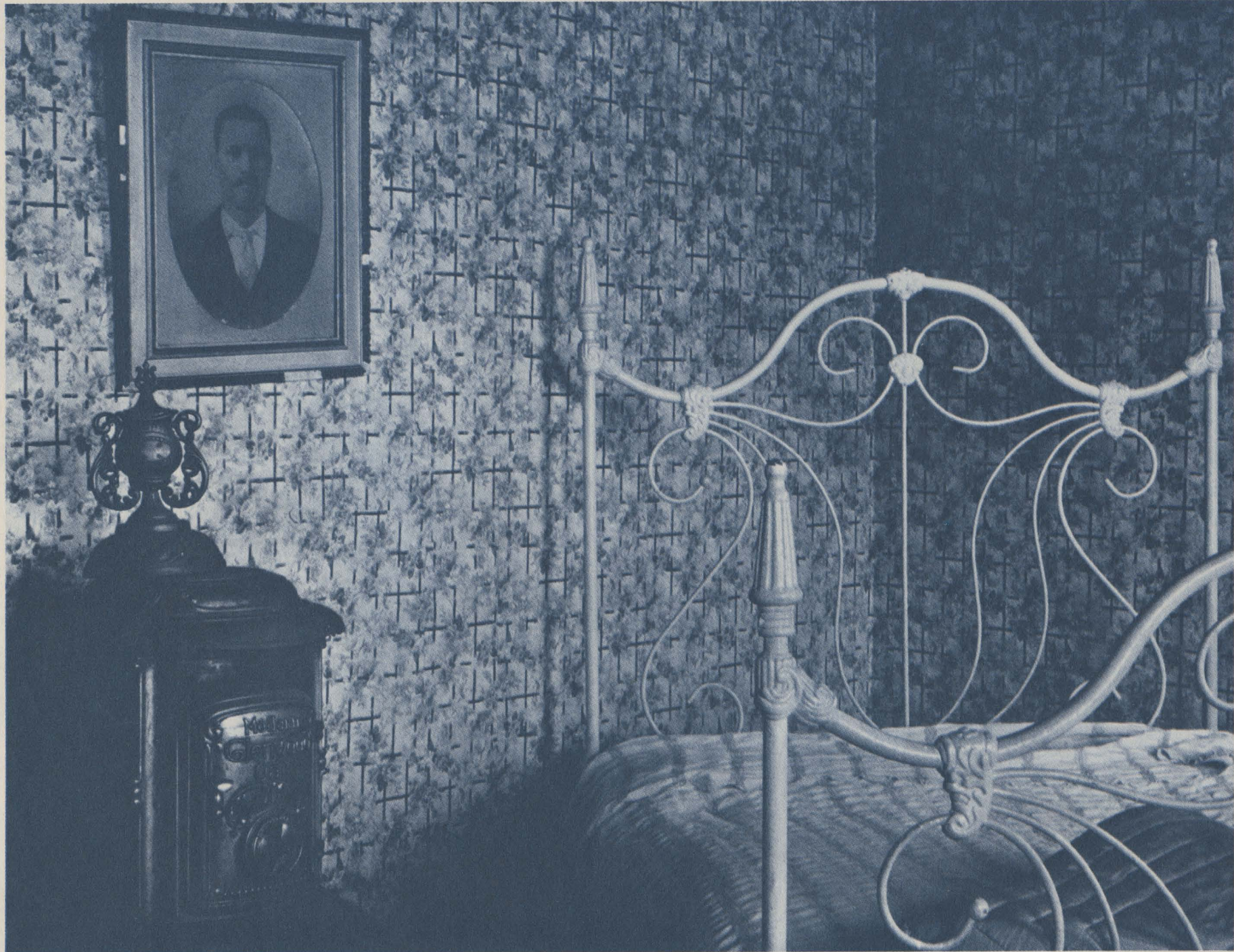


FOLKWAYS RECORDS RBF 40

Those Ragtime Banjos

COMPILED AND ANNOTATED BY DAVID A. JASEN



PHOTOGRAPH BY WALKER EVANS, TRURO, MASSACHUSETTS, 1931

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

FOLKWAYS RECORDS RBF 40

Archival Property
Smithsonian Institution
Office of the Assistant Secretary
for Public Service

SIDE ONE

1. Chatterbox Rag—Fred Van Eps w/Orch.
2. Florida Rag—Vess L. Ossman w/Orch.
3. Buffalo Rag—Vess L. Ossman w/Orch.
4. Persian Lamb Rag—Vess L. Ossman w/Piano
5. Teasin' the Cat—Van Eps Trio
6. Grace and Beauty—Fred Van Eps & Frank Banta
7. Ross' Dog Trot—Black Face Eddie Ross w/Orch.
8. Ross' Reel—Black Face Eddie Ross w/Orch.

SIDE TWO

1. Get Goin'—Pete Mandell w/Savoy Orpheans
2. The Ghost of the Banjo—Roy Smeck & Art Kahn
3. Banjoviality—Len Fillis & Sid Bright
4. Butterfingers—Len Fillis & Sid Bright
5. Symphonola—Harry Reser & Henry Lange
6. Banjomania—Phil Russel w/Piano
7. Banjokes—Roy Smeck & Art Kahn
8. That Banjo Rag—Dick Roberts & Red Roundtree

© 1979 FOLKWAYS RECORDS & SERVICE CORP.
43 W. 61st ST., N.Y.C., 10023 N.Y., U.S.A.

Those Ragtime Banjos

COMPILED AND ANNOTATED BY DAVID A. JASEN

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

FOLKWAYS RECORDS RBF 40

THOSE RAGTIME BANJOS

Compiled and Annotated by DAVID A. JASEN

While ragtime was written for the piano, the earliest recordings featured military concert bands and five-string banjoists playing the rags. The banjoists were usually accompanied by the military bands and sometimes by a pianist. Recording virtuosi were made famous by their records, went into vaudeville and toured around the country. The two greatest five-string banjoists during ragtime's first two decades were Vess L. Ossman (1868-1923) and Fred Van Eps (1878-1960). Both were pioneers recording on cylinders and on flat discs. While they each made many records, it is on their ragtime recordings that they demonstrate fully their remarkable techniques and musicianship. For, they did their own arranging for their own benefits - showing off their incredible skills. They recorded both the popular and the obscure rags of their time, investing them with their own particular feelings.

As we come into the twenties, the five-stringed instrument gives way to the four-string tenor and plectrum banjos, which were used mainly as rhythm backing in the jazz and dance orchestras. The absolute ruler of the four-string tenor banjo was Harry Reser (1896-1965), who was the first to show that the tenor was capable of being a solo instrument. He was not only the acknowledged leader among solo banjoists, but he composed rags for the banjo which compared favorably to the Novelty piano rags being composed at the same time. That there were others who carried on this tradition of recording ragtime on the banjo can be heard on the rest of this album. What started out to herald the new instrumental popular music remained to champion it and further create additional pieces in the repertoire. The banjo originals serve to illustrate their composers' brilliant performances.

SIDE ONE

CHATTERBOX RAG was written by popular rag writer George

Botsford (1874-1949), whose famous Black and White Rag can be heard on RBF-22 and RBF-38 in two different interpretations. This late 1910 rag had only been recorded this once by virtuoso Fred Van Eps in early 1911. It is an imaginative rag whose Trio section artfully blends ideas from sections A and B.

FLORIDA RAG by George L. Lowry, was published in 1905. This recording was performed by Vess L. Ossman in February, 1907. It was so popular that Fred Van Eps was asked to make a recording of it five and a half years later!

BUFFALO RAG was the fifth rag (out of six) published by St. Louis ragtime champion Tom Turpin (1873-1922). This late-1905 recording was made just one year after publication. It demonstrates the considerable technique of premiere banjoist Ossman, as his arrangement follows the piano score relatively faithfully.

PERSIAN LAMB RAG was songwriter Percy Wenrich's (1880-1952) major contribution to ragtime in 1908. That it is far more song-like than the other rags on this album is not to be wondered. Wenrich was the composer of such all-time favorites as "Put On Your Old Gray Bonnet," "Moonlight Bay," and "When You Wore a Tulip," among many others. His ragtime output was considerable, but most of it was dreadful hack work, knocked out for a fast buck, as he was the first to admit. However, he did write several first-rate rags, two of which can be heard on EARLY BAND RAGTIME (RBF-38). However far he traveled, Wenrich never forgot the music he heard as a boy in his hometown of Joplin, Missouri. In this A section, he used an old fiddle tune called Whiskers. The pianist accompanying Ossman was famed composer-publisher Theodore Morse (1873-1924).

TEASIN' THE CAT came from the prolific pen of composer-publisher Charles Leslie Johnson (1876-1950) in 1916. The contemporary recording featured Fred Van Eps on banjo, Frank Banta on piano, and Nathan Glantz on alto saxophone.

GRACE AND BEAUTY was composed in 1909 by James Scott (1886-1938) and recorded for the first time by Fred Van Eps and Frank Banta (1897-1968) in September, 1923. One of Scott's most lyrical rags, this recording gives us a chance to hear Banta in the

dual role of soloist as well as accompanist.

ROSS' DOG TROT and ROSS' REEL were composed and performed by Black Face Eddie Ross, a four-string banjoist in vaudeville. The role of the banjoist was changing and in these two recordings from August, 1921, we can hear the dramatic changes taking place. From the highly articulate pickings of Ossman and Van Eps on their five-string banjos, to Ross' fancy strummings, the orchestra plays melody and harmony. The Reel features a cross between strumming and playing melody, but melody surrounded by harmonic chords, not finger-picking. The early twenties saw the new four-string tenor banjo as a rhythm accompanist in the dance and jazz bands. Ross' combination of chording melodies and a variety of rhythmic strumming comes during this change in banjos - from the five-string to the four-string - and its use in recordings and in the outside music world of dance bands.

SIDE TWO

GET GOIN' was written by American tenor banjoist, Pete Mandell, who spent the greatest part of his career in London, England. He was the featured banjoist with the famed Savoy Orpheans and recorded extensively throughout the twenties. Here, in the March, 1926 recording, he is soloist backed by the Orpheans in a spirited rendition.

THE GHOST OF THE BANJO was composed by Roy Smeck (1900 -), and recorded by him in mid-1927. His pianist was fine bandleader Art Kahn, swapping choruses and showing off a fine Novelty ragtime approach.

BANJOVIALITY is a fine Novelty banjo rag written and performed by Englishmen Len Fillis on banjo and Sid Bright on piano. Theirs is a 1927 composition and recording.

BUTTERFINGERS is another joint composition and performance by Len Fillis and Sid Bright. This is an excellent example of how they caught onto the American Novelty approach in England and put their own originality to the genre.

SYMPHONOLA was written by Henry Lange, a fine pianist with Paul Whiteman's Orchestra was maker of piano rolls for Melodee.

Here he accompanies master banjoist, Harry Reser, in this marvelous 1923 recording.

BANJOMANIA came from the gifted pen of Pete Mandell. This time, the prolific Mandell was forced to use a pseudonym in this recording of his rag. The label reads "Phil Russell" in this 1926 disc. It makes no difference as this crisp rendering illustrates again his superior technique.

BANJOKES was a great companion piece to THE GHOST OF THE BANJO in 1927 by Roy Smeck. The pianist is again Art Kahn, demonstrating a host of novelty licks and runs.

THAT BANJO RAG was composed by Dick Roberts, half of the team, The Banjo Kings. It was composed for this recording in 1951. The Banjo Kings consisted of Dick Roberts, tenor banjo and Luther "Red" Roundtree, plectrum banjo. They were accompanied by Vic Davis, piano; George Bruns, string bass; and Monte Mountjoy, drums. This fabulous rag proves that the art of banjo composing and playing is alive and very well, thank you.

CREDITS:

Programming and Notes: David A. Jasen

Remastering: Carl Seltzer

Documentation: RECORDED RAGTIME, 1897-1958 by David A. Jasen, Archon Books.

FOLKWAYS Records

AND SERVICE CORP., 43 W. 61st ST., N.Y.C. 10023
Long Playing Non-Breakable Micro Groove 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ RPM

THOSE RAGTIME BANJOS

Compiled and Annotated by DAVID A. JASEN

Side 1

RBF 40-A

1. CHATTERBOX RAG - Fred Van Eps w/Orch.
2. FLORIDA RAG - Vess L. Ossman w/Orch.
3. BUFFALO RAG - Vess L. Ossman w/Orch.
4. PERSIAN LAMB RAG - Vess L. Ossman w/Piano
5. TEASIN' THE CAT - Van Eps Trio
6. GRACE AND BEAUTY - Fred Van Eps & Frank Banta
7. ROSS' DOG TROT - Black Face Eddie Ross w/Orch.
8. ROSS' REEL - Black Face Eddie Ross w/Orch.

TOTAL TIME: 21:41

© © 1979 by Folkways Records & Service Corp.

FOLKWAYS Records

AND SERVICE CORP., 43 W. 61st ST., N.Y.C. 10023
Long Playing Non-Breakable Micro Groove 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ RPM

THOSE RAGTIME BANJOS

Compiled and Annotated by DAVID A. JASEN

Side 2

RBF 40-B

1. GET GOIN' - Pete Mandell w/Savoy Orpheans
2. THE GHOST OF THE BANJO - Roy Smeck & Art Kahn
3. BANJOVIALITY - Len Fillis & Sid Bright
4. BUTTERFINGERS - Len Fillis & Sid Bright
5. SYMPHONOLA - Harry Reser & Henry Lange
6. BANJOMANIA - Phil Russell w/Piano
7. BANJOKES - Roy Smeck & Art Kahn
8. THAT BANJO RAG - Dick Roberts & Red Rountree

TOTAL TIME: 21:43

© © 1979 by Folkways Records & Service Corp.