

# The Piano Roll Artistry Of CHARLEY STRAIGHT





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## SIDE ONE

Total Time: 23:30

1. My Baby's Rag (Straight)
2. Red Hot Mama (Rose)
3. Knice and Knifty (Straight)
4. Mow 'Em Down (Straight)
5. Cradle Rock (Frankl & Kornheiser)
6. Out Steppin' (Straight)
7. Eve Wasn't Modest (Von Tilzer & McCarron)
8. Try Me (Straight)
9. S'More (Straight)

## SIDE TWO

Total Time: 24:29

1. Rag-A-Bit (Straight)
2. Doctor Brown (Irvin)
3. Chickie
4. Black Jack Rag (Straight)
5. Tiddle-De-Winks (Morris)
6. Give Me The Sultan's Harem (Silver-Gerber)
7. Itsit (Straight)
8. You're In Style (Van Alstyne-Brown-Kahn)
9. Mitinice (Straight)

Programming and Annotation: David A. Jasen  
Remastering: Carl Seltzer

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43 W. 61st ST., N.Y.C., 10023 N.Y., U.S.A.

# The Piano Roll Artistry Of CHARLEY STRAIGHT

COMPILED AND ANNOTATED BY DAVID A. JASEN

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

FOLKWAYS RECORDS RBF 44



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Charley Straight spent his whole life in Chicago. He was born there on January 16, 1891 and died there on September 21, 1940. In between, he was responsible for lots of good music, as composer, arranger, performer, orchestra leader, accompanist, and musical director of the Imperial Player Roll Company.

After graduating from Wendell Philips High School, Charley entered the world of vaudeville in 1909 as the partner of singing-comedian Gene Greene. With Charley accompanying on piano, Gene sang their own original songs which made up their act. Their first hit, was also the first song recorded by Gene, KING OF THE BUNGALOOS (see Ragtime Entertainment, RBF-22). What put it over was Gene's funny growl-voice and the fact that it was the first ragtime song featuring nonsense syllables with those syllables vocally taking the place of the pianistic syncopations. They made a series of what are now very rare recordings for Pathe and then Gene went on to record for Victor, Emerson and Columbia.

After the team broke up, Charley joined Imperial, supervised their entire popular song program as well as arranged and played on his own rolls. In a most unusual move, at the same time he was musical director for Imperial, he also arranged and performed for rival QRS. And what he recorded for both of them at first were his own Novelty rags. Just prior to that, he adopted the pseudonym of Billy King for the Rudolph Wurlitzer company's Rolla Artis label, where he performed his own Novelty rags as well as a few pop songs. This album includes two selections from the extremely rare Rolla Artis catalog.

In 1919, he hired Roy Bargy to edit the song rolls for Imperial and to perform his own Novelty rags. And while he names Bargy as co-composer for two Novelty rags (RUFENREDDY and KNICE &



KNIFTY), we now know that Charley composed both of them alone. The remaining mystery is why he later included Bargy as co-composer when Straight's own rolls predated their first meeting!

From 1920, Straight's own orchestra took up most of his time, and although he made rolls for QRS sporadically, his professional life consisted of arranging, performing at the piano and conducting his own orchestra. They recorded for Paramount and Brunswick. But, his was not a studio orchestra but a working one featured at the top hotels and nightclubs in Chicago. His career came to an abrupt end when he was killed in an automobile accident.

#### SIDE ONE

MY BABY'S RAG is one of the more recent discoveries. This great Novelty rag which, like so many of Charley's other original rags, appears only on piano roll, is a gentle take-off on Tony Jackson's famous song, Pretty Baby. It only appeared on the Rolla Artis label "as played by Billie King."

RED HOT MAMA was composed by Fred Rose in 1924. Rose wrote a series of fabulous syncopated fox-trots during the early twenties. This contemporary roll arrangement was among the last made by Charley and shows dramatically that he was even more skillful as time went on.

KNICE AND KNIFTY was copyrighted and published by Sam Fox Publishing Company in 1922 with Roy Bargy as co-composer. But, this Imperial roll was released in early 1918, a year and a half before Charley met Bargy, with sole composer credit given to Charley. It is, in any event, a major Novelty rag and one which definitely inspired Roy Bargy in his own ragtime compositions (see ROY BARGY: PIANO SYNCOPATIONS, RBF-35).

MOW 'EM DOWN was a collaboration with Rube Bennett which Charley issued only on a piano roll in June, 1918.

CRADLE ROCK was the unusual rag co-composed by Abe Frankl and Phil Kornheiser. It was published by Leo Feist in 1916. Not so unusual was the choice of publisher, as Kornheiser



was Feist's professional manager. This weird rag was the only one publicly credited to Kornheiser. Charley's performance magnificently details this rag to the fullest.

OUT STEPPIN' appears to have been Charley's first original rag done for Imperial. It started their 51,000 series in May, 1917.

EVE WASN'T MODEST TILL SHE ATE THAT APPLE was the great humorous song of 1917 composed by Albert Von Tilzer and written by Charles McCarron. Charley's exciting interpretation fully exploits the gaiety inherent in the song.

TRY ME is another Novelty rag composed especially for piano roll consumption. Never published or copyrighted, this delightful rag sparkles in this, its only performance.

S'MORE is yet another in Charley's original piano roll rags series. An outstanding example to end this first side.

## SIDE TWO

RAG-A-BIT was issued in March, 1918. The second section is a neat variation of the first section of his earlier rag Rufenreddy. The third section is the main theme of Jelly Roll Morton's Wolverine Blues. Which came first, I wonder?

DOCTOR BROWN was Fred Irvin's rag of 1914. The first section is ear-catching with the feeling that two melodies are being played at once. A great early syncopated fox-trot.

CHICKIE is a pop tune written in the mid-twenties and here given a super arrangement by Charley Straight. His modulation makes you think you're listening to an entirely new piece. One of his last roll performances.

BLACK JACK RAG was issued in November, 1917 in this one and only performance. Filled with his favorite compositional as well as performance devices, it is very appealing to the listener. But, try and play it!



TIDDLE-DE-WINKS was created in 1916 by the clever syncopated one-step composer, Melville Morris. This is one of Charley's first piano roll performances, done for the now rare Rolla Artis label. Another weird yet effective syncopated instrumental.

GIVE ME THE SULTAN'S HAREM was composed by Abner Silver with words by Alex Gerber in 1919. One of Tin Pan Alley's attempts at creating a Far-Eastern atmosphere. A great comic number given a superb arrangement.

ITSIT was another original rag that Charley created for the player piano in 1917. Yet another variation of his basic Novelty rag conception, formulated and articulated in his first two rags, Knice and Knifty and Rufenreddy.

YOU'RE IN STYLE WHEN YOU'RE WEARING A SMILE was Egbert Van Alstyne's 1918 World War One patriotic effort. His lyricists were Al Brown and Gus Kahn. Charley certainly rags it up with sensational results. You'll certainly be wearing a smile after hearing this one.

MITINICE is just what it says it is. The first section is an excellent example of taking a cliché run and extending it in a most creative way. Charley's melodic sense was as original as was his rhythmic sense. A highlight, and at the same time, a summing up of the piano roll artistry of Charley Straight.

#### CREDITS

Programming and Annotation: David A. Jasen

Remastering: Carl Seltzer

We should like to thank Ed Sprankle for recording his rare piano roll of TIDDLE-DE-WINKS and to David A. Jasen, Joel Markowitz and Trebor Jay Tichenor for the use of their extremely scarce rolls. For further documentation, may we suggest the book RAGS AND RAGTIME, A MUSICAL HISTORY, by Jasen & Tichenor, Continuum Books, New York City.



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

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RBF 44 A

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RBF 44 B

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