

A Comprehensive Synopsis of American Music from the Civil War and Reconstruction Era: Ragtime



SYNOPSIS OF AMERICAN MUSIC FROM THE CIVIL WAR AND RECONSTRUCTION ERA, RAGTIME, CAKEWALK TO BLUES AND BLACK VAUDEVILLE.

PART 2 by Larry Smith

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Amidst the turmoil and upheaval of the American Civil War and Reconstruction Era, a vibrant and innovative musical genre emerged: ragtime. With its infectious syncopated rhythms, captivating melodies, and exuberant energy, ragtime captivated audiences and laid the foundation for future musical developments, including jazz and blues.

This comprehensive article delves into the rich history, influences, characteristics, and lasting impact of ragtime, providing a comprehensive overview of one of the most significant musical genres in American history.

Historical Context

The Civil War (1861-1865) and the subsequent Reconstruction Era (1865-1877) were periods of intense social, political, and economic upheaval in the United States. The war pitted the Northern states against the Southern states, primarily over the issue of slavery. The Reconstruction Era witnessed the reunification of the country, the abolition of slavery, and the granting of citizenship rights to African Americans.

In this tumultuous environment, ragtime emerged as a unique expression of the changing social landscape. It blended elements from African American spirituals, European classical music, and popular dance forms, creating a sound that was both familiar and refreshingly new.

Influences

Ragtime's diverse influences are evident in its characteristic sound and style. Here are some of the key influences:

- **African American Spirituals:** Ragtime's syncopated rhythms, call-and-response structure, and improvisational elements draw heavily from African American spirituals.
- **European Classical Music:** Ragtime's complex harmonies, melodic structures, and written arrangements reflect the influence of European classical music.
- **Popular Dance Forms:** Ragtime's lively rhythms and syncopated melodies were influenced by popular dance forms of the time, such as the cakewalk and the quadrille.

Characteristics

Ragtime is characterized by its distinct sound and style, which sets it apart from other musical genres. Here are some of its key characteristics:

- **Syncopated Rhythm:** Ragtime's most defining feature is its syncopated rhythm, which creates a sense of tension and release. The strong beats are often shifted to off-beats, creating a rhythmic complexity that is both exhilarating and danceable.
- **Ragged Melody:** Ragtime's melodies are often described as "ragged," featuring irregular rhythms and unexpected notes. This jaggedness adds a sense of energy and vitality to the music.
- **Written Arrangements:** Unlike many other musical genres of the time, ragtime music was typically written down in sheet music. This allowed for more complex arrangements and the dissemination of ragtime far beyond its original context.
- **Piano-Centric:** Ragtime was primarily played on the piano, which provided the perfect instrument for its complex rhythms and melodies.

Key Figures

Several key figures played a pivotal role in the development and popularization of ragtime:

- **Scott Joplin:** Often referred to as the "King of Ragtime," Joplin was one of the most influential and prolific ragtime composers. His compositions, such as "The Entertainer" and "Maple Leaf Rag," are considered classics of the genre.
- **James Scott:** Another prominent ragtime composer, Scott is known for his energetic and syncopated compositions, such as "Frog Legs Rag"

and "The Ragtime Dance."

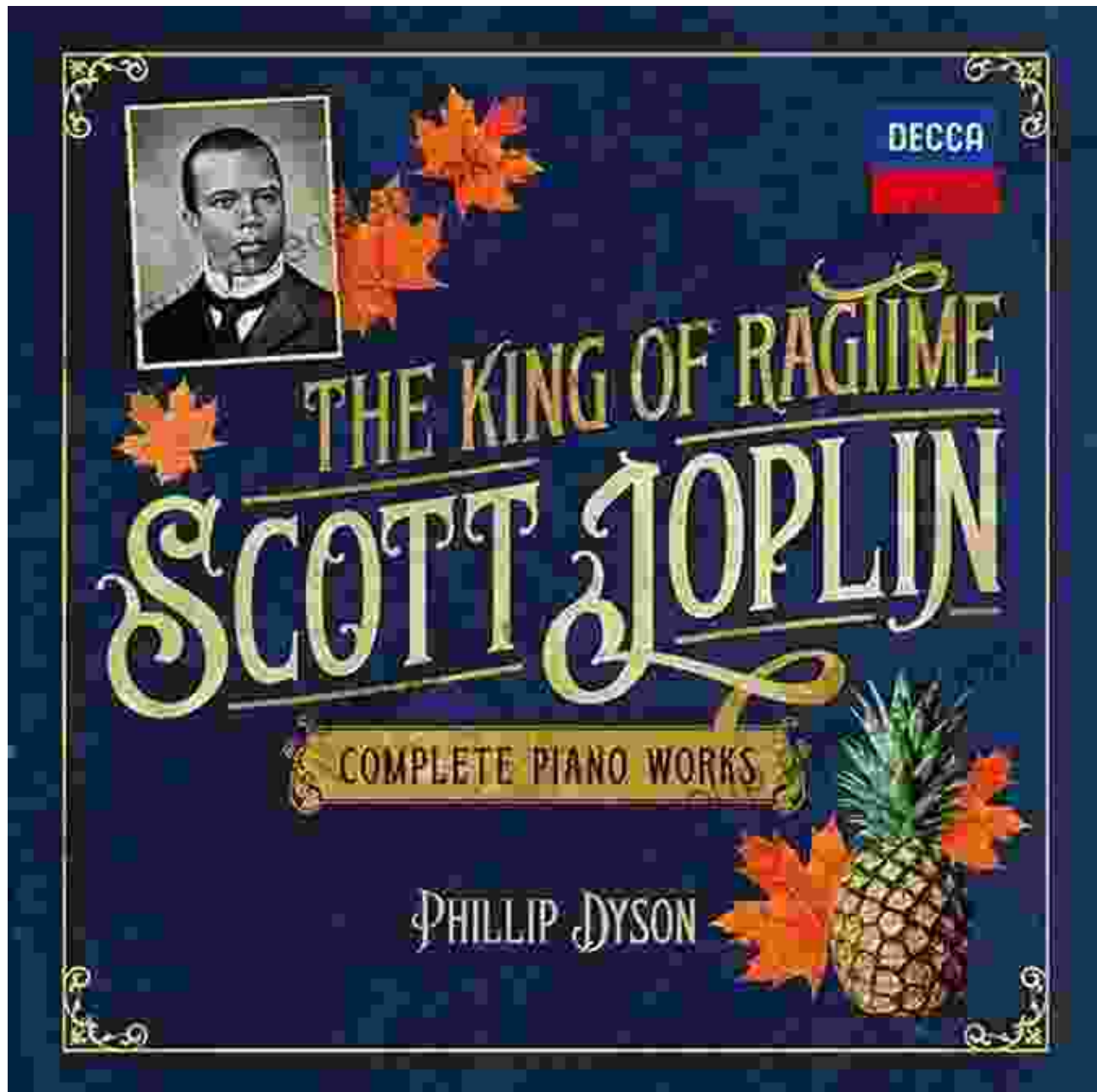
Impact and Legacy

Ragtime had a profound impact on American music and beyond:

- **Jazz:** Ragtime's syncopated rhythms and improvisational elements were essential precursors to the development of jazz.
- **Blues:** Ragtime's influence is also evident in the development of blues music, particularly in the use of syncopated rhythms and the "blue notes" that characterize the genre.
- **Popular Culture:** Ragtime's popularity extended beyond the concert halls and into popular culture. It was featured in vaudeville shows, silent films, and early recordings, contributing to its widespread appeal.

Ragtime emerged from the transformative period of the Civil War and Reconstruction Era as a vibrant and innovative musical genre. Its syncopated rhythms, captivating melodies, and energetic spirit captivated audiences and left an enduring mark on American music. Ragtime's legacy can be heard in the rhythms of jazz and blues, the melodies of popular music, and the energy of countless dance floors. It stands as a testament to the power of music to transcend boundaries and unite people.

Image Gallery



Scott Joplin, the 'King of Ragtime'



James Scott, a prominent ragtime composer

THE ENTERTAINER

SCOTT JOPLIN
1899-1917

The image displays five systems of sheet music for the piano piece 'The Entertainer' by Scott Joplin. Each system consists of a grand staff with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. The music is written in a key signature of one flat (B-flat major) and a 2/4 time signature. The notation includes various rhythmic patterns, such as eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. A prominent watermark, 'genre-dee-book.com', is repeated diagonally across the entire page, overlapping the musical notation.

Sheet music for 'The Entertainer' by Scott Joplin



Cover of a ragtime record

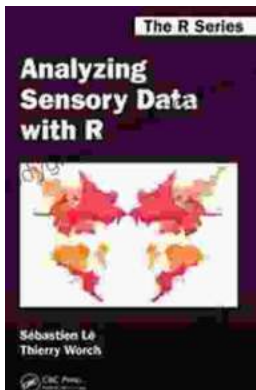


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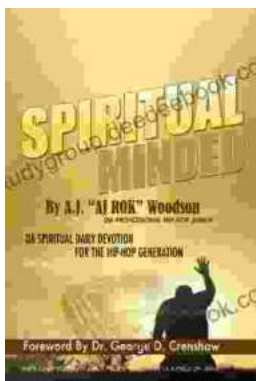
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