

= Magnetic Rag =

" Magnetic Rag " is a 1914 ragtime piano composition by American composer Scott Joplin . It is significant for being the last rag which Joplin published in his lifetime , three years before his death in 1917 . It is also unique in form and in some of the musical techniques employed in the composition .

= = Background = =

" Magnetic Rag " was written by an ailing Joplin near the end of his career , when interest in ragtime was waning . He was suffering from the latter stages of syphilis , the disease from which he died only three years later . Possibly as a result of Joplin 's mood at this time , the piece expresses a melancholy almost entirely unheard in his earlier works .

= = Form = =

While many of Joplin 's piano rags fit the classic rag scheme , " Magnetic Rag " is unique in its form of AABBCDDAA . Due to its novelty at the time , the form has been described as " progressive " . It has been suggested that Joplin was trying to merge ragtime elements with the classical sonata form . The form is cyclic : that is , the opening melody is revisited at the end of the piece . Cyclic form is rare among Joplin 's rags .

Joplin 's usage of Italian tempo indications in " Magnetic Rag " has been interpreted as his intention to give the piece a serious aspect in a similar manner to Treemonisha and " Scott Joplin 's New Rag " . " Magnetic Rag " begins with the instruction " Allegretto ma non troppo " (moderately fast , but not too much) and continues in the D strain with " Tempo l'istesso " (tempo remains the same) , a warning against slowing down for the minor @-@ mode section . As well , Joplin employed in " Magnetic Rag " the classic " common time " 4 / 4 time signature instead of the more usual 2 / 4 time of rag tunes . Simultaneously , Joplin doubled all the note values , effectively making the unusual 4 / 4 time signature have no practical effect on the way the piece sounded or the way it was performed . His publishing it in 4 / 4 was simply a way to connect the rag with classical and popular piano works of prior fame . Since Joplin published " Magnetic Rag " himself , it has been suggested that the composition fully reflected his wishes and contained no compromises .

Joplin produced " Magnetic Rag " during what several musicologists consider to be his experimental period . It was at this time that Joplin attempted to write rags that were not confined to the standard " oom @-@ pah " left @-@ hand beat and that incorporated several other novelties .

Like the classic rag , " Magnetic Rag " begins with a four @-@ bar introduction . Since it is featured at both the beginning and end of the piece , the melody of the A strain is possibly the most recognizable melody in the piece . Much of this melody is in the mode of B @-@ flat major , the main key of the entire piece ; however , during bars 11 and 12 , the mode shifts to G minor . This shift demonstrates one of Joplin 's late @-@ life techniques : establishing a foreign key within the framework of a strain .

The second , third , and fourth strains are what made " Magnetic Rag " unique among Joplin 's rags . The B strain is written entirely in G minor . The darkening tone generated by the minor scale stands out among Joplin 's rags , and is revisited in the D strain . In contrast to the minor themes in the B strain , the third section is upbeat but with bittersweet harmonies , returning once again to the scale of B @-@ flat major . Here , for the first time , the piece departs from the standard left @-@ hand pattern that characterizes most ragtime . This section of the piece has been compared to the style of twelve bar blues . The C strain also represents the only known time when Joplin departs from the standard sixteen @-@ bar form , being instead 24 bars in length with an uneven 14- and 10 @-@ bar division . Its first 12 measures parallel the 12 @-@ bar blues form and the next two measures extend the subdominant as a transition into the last ten bars .

Of all the strains in the piece , the final D strain is perhaps the most interesting . It is written in B @-@ flat minor . When Joplin used minor keys in the previous sections , he used the relative key of

G minor (i.e. , relative to the main key of B @-@ flat major) . However , in this fourth section , he instead used the parallel key . This strain also features sections where the right hand and left hand play notes in unison , and in which the standard 2 / 4 time left @-@ hand beat is noticeably absent . Most of Joplin 's rags end with the last strain , but " Magnetic Rag " ends with a coda . This " smiling little coda " expresses some of the tonalities and rhythms heard throughout the piece .

= = Legacy = =

" Magnetic Rag " is widely understood to present a one @-@ of @-@ a @-@ kind combination of moods , especially for ragtime , and has been described as a melancholic and " haunting " rag .

With the Brahmsian darkness of . . . " Magnetic Rag , " the last piece he completed , Joplin had pushed the music far beyond the boisterous beerhall ambience that characterized , for many listeners and players , the rag idiom . This was music on a large scale that was now being squeezed into the narrow confines of rag form ? so much so , that the music often burst at the seams .

Some music historians evaluate " Magnetic Rag " , as well as other works from Joplin 's late period , as being indicative of his unstable mental condition which resulted from the effects of syphilis . One of these is Martin Williams :

Joplin 's " last period " is a strange collection of contradictions . Some of his rags reach more toward concert music than did any Jazz up to Lennie Tristano 's , while others seem to revert to his 1900 style . Profoundly ambitious passages lie side by side with meaningless , mechanical ditties . It is not hard to find in these compositions a reflection of approaching derangement ? he lost his mind in 1916 .

In This Is Ragtime , Terry Waldo criticizes this view :

To see Joplin 's late rags as a " strange collection of contradictions " . . . misses the point " Magnetic Rag " does indeed include parts reminiscent of Joplin 's 1900 style , but they serve to set up the " profound " parts . Here is a terrifying mixture of the familiar and the agonizing unknown . It is in fact more profound for being able to bring these opposites into focus . The music is heavy with the weight of Joplin 's approaching schizoid nightmare ? but that is not a weakness .

In his biography of Scott Joplin , James Haskins writes :

Early in 1914 he completed what many consider his finest rag , " Magnetic Rag , " which he published himself that same year . It has about it a gentle quality like " The Entertainer , " and its distinctive form and range of moods suggest to some musicologists a breakthrough to a Chopinesque form of ragtime , albeit a breakthrough that came too late .

Near the end of his life , Scott Joplin was taking ragtime in a new direction by adding emphasis on form and tonality , and attempting to combine the characteristics of classical Western music and traditional ragtime . This is an entirely different direction than the one that jazz would take .

Jazz , seeking one theme as a center for improvisation , tended to weaken the sense of form that it inherited from ragtime Joplin 's efforts obviously strengthen this sense of form . One has only to hear the blazing return of the first theme of Magnetic Rag ? the restoration of major tonality , the momentum of the renewed beat ? to recognize the power of recapitulation in ragtime .

In the album notes to Scott Joplin : Piano Rags , Joshua Rifkin describes the " Magnetic Rag " as a " valedictory work " with Joplin paying " tribute " to a " transplanted Middle @-@ European dance music " and the European masters whom he tried to emulate . Rifkin speculates that the composition 's short coda also " seems like a farewell , as if he knew how brief and bleak was the time still allotted him . " In 1979 Alan Rich in the New York Magazine wrote that by giving artists like Rifkin the opportunity to put Joplin 's music on record Nonesuch Records " created , almost alone , the Scott Joplin revival . "