

= Bethena =

" Bethena , A Concert Waltz " ( copyright registered March 6 , 1905 ) is a composition by Scott Joplin . It was the first Joplin work since his wife Freddie 's death on September 10 , 1904 of pneumonia , ten weeks after their wedding . At the time the composer had significant financial problems ; the work did not sell successfully at the time of publication and was soon neglected and forgotten . It was rediscovered as a result of the Joplin revival in the 1970s and has received acclaim from Joplin 's biographers and other critics . The piece combines two different styles of music , the classical waltz and the rag , and has been seen as demonstrating Joplin 's excellence as a classical composer . The work has been described as " an enchantingly beautiful piece that is among the greatest of Ragtime Waltzes " , a " masterpiece " , and " Joplin 's finest waltz " .

= = Background and composition = =

Joplin 's principal claim to fame was the publication in 1899 of the Maple Leaf Rag , which became a best @-@ selling instrumental hit , and provided the composer with a steady income for the rest of his life from the royalties . Despite this success early on in his career ( he was named as the " King of Ragtime " by numerous contemporaries ) , he had continued financial problems and never repeated the success of the Maple Leaf Rag . In the fall of 1903 , Joplin lost a large amount of money on the national tour of his first opera , A Guest of Honor , when the box office receipts were stolen by an unidentified associate . Joplin 's belongings , including the score for the opera , were confiscated for non @-@ payment of his boarding @-@ house bills . The opera is now considered lost , as no copy was registered with the Copyright Office , and none has been found since . Subsequently , Joplin was short of money and is thought to have been actively seeking commissions .

After divorce from his first wife Belle ? a " disastrous " relationship underscored by the loss of their infant daughter ? Joplin married his 19 @-@ year @-@ old second wife Freddie in June 1904 . He had dedicated to her his rag The Chrysanthemum which was published in that year . She died on 10 September 1904 of pneumonia ten weeks after their wedding . Joplin 's whereabouts are unknown from that point until early 1905 , when he returned to St. Louis , Missouri where some of Joplin 's known associates , such as pianist Louis Chauvin and musician Joe Jordan , still lived . On 6 March , Joplin registered the copyright of Bethena , A Concert Waltz , and dedicated the work to the otherwise little @-@ known " Mr. and Mrs. Dan E. Davenport of St. Louis Mo " . The copyright date is significant because not all Joplin works were registered for copyright purposes and there is a lack of detail about many aspects of Joplin 's life , including when many of the pieces were composed .

Biographer Edward Berlin speculated that this dedication was unusual because the Davenports were not able to help Joplin professionally by showcasing his work or commissioning more , but was a recognition of the personal support that they had given him through the difficult time after Freddie 's death . The origin of the name " Bethena " is a mystery , and the identity of the woman featured on the cover of the work 's original publication is unknown . It has been claimed that the image is of Freddie from her wedding day , although positive identification is made more difficult because the photograph on the cover of the piece does not show the subject 's race clearly .

The work was published by the " T. Bahnsen Piano Manufacturing Company , St. Louis " , a firm which only published two other Joplin compositions . Berlin speculates that at this point in his career , despite the fame brought by the Maple Leaf Rag , Joplin was unable to arrange favorable terms with publishers ; for example Joplin announced in July 1905 the completion of the song " You Stand Good with Me , Babe " which was never published , and no copies of the song have ever been found . Bethena was released at a difficult time for Joplin , both emotionally and financially ; most of the compositions released in the two and a half years since the death of Freddie had been by little @-@ known and insignificant publishers , were largely unnoticed at the time of publication and , except for Bethena , were not " quality Joplin " . Joplin 's finances remained in an unsatisfactory state and he wrote several works for hire .

= = Form = =

#### Introduction A BB A CC DD EE A Coda

Bethena has five musical strains in five different keys ; G major , B @-@ flat major , F major , B minor , and D major respectively . The sections are linked by " transitional passages " which enable the work to change key between the strains by means of a chromatic interlude or modulation . Each of the themes is written with the instruction " Cantabile " , which means " songlike and flowing in style " .

The piece is notated in 3 / 4 time with the main theme repeated three times in the work as well as in the introduction and the coda . The " sadly poignant " , " graceful , wistful " and tenderly nostalgic mood is partly dictated by this main theme , which starts with the melody note A harmonised against a G major chord thus creating a dissonance . In the next measure the theme is set against a different harmony before Joplin creates variations . There are variants of the theme in the " haunting " B minor key of the D strain and in the E strain 's D major key which " brightens the mood " .

Joplin combines the waltz ' " oom @-@ pa @-@ pah " rhythm and its conventionally accented three quarter notes in the bass , with a syncopated melody in the treble . The main melody line used in the introduction and then repeated regularly throughout , with its alternate unaccented eighth notes and accented quarter notes , is the rhythm of the Cakewalk minus the final note . The Cakewalk was a popular African @-@ American dance which originated in plantation slave communities in nineteenth century America , and ultimately contributed to the musical style Ragtime . The simultaneous sounding of the two independent rhythms , the combination of the waltz in the bass and the syncopation of the main theme in the treble , is an example of a 4 against 3 polyrhythm . There are many subtle variations of this sequence which occur throughout the work .

The left hand follows the standard approach of classical waltzes , with a bass note followed by two mid @-@ range chords , and in addition there are some contrapuntal passages where two melodies move independently but complement each other harmonically . For example the B and C themes are examples of Joplin employing counterpoint in octaves . The B theme in the key of B @-@ flat major is closely related to the main theme presenting its counterpoint with the bass and the treble melody lines moving in opposite directions ( in contrary motion ) , to each other and then exchanging their melodies ( bars 29 @-@ 30 and 31 @-@ 32 ) . This pattern repeats itself during the theme . In the opening phrase ( bars 77 @-@ 81 ) of the " rag @-@ like " C theme in the key of F major , counterpoint is evident with the harmony of the treble moving in contrary motion to the bass line in a similar way to that used in the B section . In the treble , the harmony falls from F to D , while the bass rises from F to G @-@ sharp

= = Critical reception = =

It is not clear what the composition 's reception was at the time , and the piece 's publication by a company which had little previous experience of this endeavour indicate that there was little positive impact on the composer 's financial problems . Joplin wanted to be considered as a serious artist , and spoke of his preference for " classical music " . Compositions such as Bethena , A Concert Waltz and his operas A Guest of Honor and Treemonisha indicate that he was trying to be taken seriously as a composer . Like many of his other works , Bethena was largely forgotten after Joplin 's death from syphilis in 1917 . The slow revival and re @-@ discovery of Ragtime and Joplin started in the 1940s , although it concentrated on the rags such as the Maple Leaf Rag , rather than Bethena .

Joshua Rifkin 's 1970 LP Piano Rags by Scott Joplin played a part in the Joplin revival of that decade , with sales of over 100 @,@ 000 in the first year and subsequently becoming Nonesuch Records ' first disk to sell over 1 million copies . Bethena was one of the pieces performed on the 1972 follow @-@ up , Volume 2 . The Billboard " Best @-@ Selling Classical LPs " chart for 28 September 1974 has the first record at number 5 , with the follow @-@ up " Volume 2 " at number 4 , and a combined set of both volumes at number 3 . Separately both volumes had been on the chart for 64 weeks . In 1979 New York Magazine wrote that by giving artists like Rifkin the opportunity to

put Joplin 's music on disk Nonesuch Records " created , almost alone , the Scott Joplin revival . "

The composition was featured on the soundtrack to the 2008 Hollywood film The Curious Case of Benjamin Button . The performance of the composition by the pianist Randy Kerber was described by one critic on National Public Radio as " letting the inherent wistfulness of the music emerge " , with the piece " perfectly suited " to the movie as it was a " tender and heartfelt remembrance of a love lost " .

Joplin biographer Edward A. Berlin believed that Bethena was " an enchantingly beautiful piece that is among the greatest of ragtime waltzes " because of the repeated main theme in G major , the contrapuntal passages , and the harmonies . Another biographer , Rudi Blesh , wrote that the work was a " masterpiece " , thanks to its rhythmic variations , the beauty of each strain 's melodies and the richly scored harmony , especially when considered in comparison to the unsyncopated light salon style of Binks Waltz published in the same year . In another publication , Blesh described the work as " Joplin 's finest waltz " .

Other critics have praised the piece , with the author of a survey of American music noting that the rhythms of the waltz and ragtime combined to produce an " ingenious and delightful example of such a stylistic accommodation " , showing that the composer was an " adventurous classicist par excellence " because he was able to combine tradition and innovation in a consistently inventive way . Another critic , the arranger of Joplin 's music for solo Guitar , wrote that Bethena displayed Joplin 's characteristic syncopated style in a " seductive " manner even in the waltz 's 3 / 4 time signature .