

Scott Joplin

The Entertainer



Bridget Mermikides takes us back to the soundtrack of the 1973 Oscar-winning movie *The Sting* and arranges this iconic 1902 piano rag by the king of ragtime, Scott Joplin.

ABILITY RATING

Moderate/Advanced



Info

Key A major **Tempo** 65bpm **CD** TRACK 18

Will improve your...

✓ Syncopation ✓ Bass muting ✓ Fretting hand fluency

One of the most extraordinary and seminal figures in the history of American music is the multi-instrumentalist, teacher and composer, Scott Joplin (≈1868-1917). Although some dispute remains over his birthdate and place, it's likely he was born in Texas in 1868 (or 1867) where he was raised in a family of railway labourers. He first encountered music from his father (a freed slave and violinist), and his mother (a singer and banjo player). A dedicated music student, Joplin gathered musical training wherever he could, and with the family's limited time and funds, he received tuition on guitar, mandolin, piano

and singing. From the age of 11 to 16 he took lessons from a local music professor Julius Weiss – a German-born Jew. Weiss (who, due to his background was a recipient of severe race attacks) saw promise in the young Joplin and developed the boy's knowledge of folk, classical and operatic music, as well as his appreciation of the artistic and entertainment potential of music.

Joplin developed a career as a touring musician and teacher on a range of instruments, and his involvement with the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago saw him caught up in the ragtime movement. Ragtime – a hybrid of the march style and Western harmony popularised by de Sousa and the syncopations and rhythmic sophistications of African music – was a fundamental building block to the emergence of jazz. Joplin (who died aged just 48 with dementia from syphilis) was to become in his short career an eminent figure in the ragtime style. He composed its first and most influential hit, *Maple Leaf Rag*, plus 43 other solo ragtime pieces, a ragtime ballet, and two ragtime operas, earning him the moniker 'The King of Ragtime'. This marriage of a proto-jazz style to these 'high art' forms would act as model and inspiration for the likes of Ellington, Gershwin, Miles Davis and countless other jazz artists.


Perhaps his most famous work is *The Entertainer*, a classic piano rag written in 1902, and brought back to popular consciousness by the 1973 film, *The Sting*. The film is set in the 1930s and Joplin's music,

which captures the mood perfectly, created a resurgence in the popularity of his highly infectious musical style.

The *Entertainer* was first sold as piano sheet music, then as piano roll (essentially an instruction set for player pianos, not unlike the concept of MIDI) and first recorded on wax cylinder in 1928 on mandolin and guitar. So, although a challenge to adapt the piano

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music to guitar, Joplin's playing and recording history makes it a somewhat natural choice.

Ragtime is characterised by a 'striding' bass pattern, harmonic ideas from 'classical' music and the syncopations of African music. Within these constraints, Joplin wrote with such elegance and finesse that he drew a deeper sense of emotion than seemed possible within this 'entertaining' genre. 

NEXT MONTH Bridget arranges a piece from Puccini's *La Rondine*, *Sogno Di Doretta*

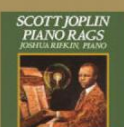
TECHNIQUE FOCUS

Posture

Posture and holding the guitar correctly are important for optimum positioning of both hands in classical guitar playing. The traditional method is sitting on the front edge of an upright chair with the left foot on a footstool (for right-handed players), the guitar sits on the left thigh with the head of the instrument tilting upwards. For long hours of playing, many people prefer to have both feet on the floor keeping the pelvis level, and popular alternatives to the footstool are the Gitano guitar rest and the ErgoPlay guitar support. My personal preference is the Gitano guitar rest combined with a low footstool.



Scott Joplin: multi-gifted musician and composer



TRACK RECORD This has been recorded countless times to great virtuosity, but there is a relaxed character, and great sonic quality to Joshua Rifkin's *Scott Joplin Piano Rags* (Nonesuch 1970). Although *The Entertainer* is not included, there are piano roll recordings of Joplin playing his own work from 1916. These have been digitised and made available on MIDI and are fascinating to check out.

PLAYING TIPS

CD TRACK 18

After an easy four-bar introduction the first theme begins. The upbeat semiquaver notes B and B# at the end of bar 4 are fingered on the third and second string because I like the slight over ringing effect this can give. But if you prefer, these notes could both be played on the third string with a slur. The

motif at bar 5 has open-string bass notes A and E that will need to be muted with the thumb (see video). Follow the picking-hand fingering and practise the sliding 6ths (bars 6-7) slowly at first for accuracy and always allow the fretting-hand thumb to shift with the rest of the hand.

♩ = 66

System 1 (Measures 1-4): Treble clef staff shows a sequence of eighth notes. Guitar staff shows fret numbers: 7-9-10-7-9-0 in bar 1; 4-6-7-4-6-7 in bar 2; 2-4-5-2-4-2-1 in bar 3; and 12-9-9-0-5 in bar 4. Chords: A, A/E, A7/G, D, A/C#.

System 2 (Measures 5-8): Treble clef staff shows a sequence of eighth notes. Guitar staff shows fret numbers: 5-2-5-2-5-0 in bar 5; 5-7-8-9-5-7-9-4-7 in bar 6; 9-6-7-9-4-7 in bar 7; and 5-2-0-5 in bar 8. Chords: A, A/E, A7/G, D, A/C#, E, E7, A, A/C#.

System 3 (Measures 9-12): Treble clef staff shows a sequence of eighth notes. Guitar staff shows fret numbers: 2-5-2-5-2-5 in bar 9; 2-5-4-3 in bar 10; 4-2-5-9-7-10-7 in bar 11; and 7-9-7-0-2-4 in bar 12. Chords: A, A/E, A7/G, D, Cdim, B7, E7.

System 4 (Measures 13-16): Treble clef staff shows a sequence of eighth notes. Guitar staff shows fret numbers: 2-5-2-5-2-5 in bar 13; 5-7-8-9-5-7-9-4-7 in bar 14; 9-6-7-9-4-7 in bar 15; and 5-2-10-7 in bar 16. Chords: A, A/E, A7/G, D, A/C#, A/E, E, E7, A, A/C#.

System 5 (Measures 17-20): Treble clef staff shows a sequence of eighth notes. Guitar staff shows fret numbers: 9-7-9-7-10-7-10 in bar 17; 9-10-7-9-10-7-10 in bar 18; 9-5-7-9-4-7 in bar 19; and 5-2-0-5 in bar 20. Chords: A, A7/G, A/F#, Dm6/F, A/E, E, E7, A.

System 6 (Measures 21-24): Treble clef staff shows a sequence of eighth notes. Guitar staff shows fret numbers: 5-2-5-2-5-0 in bar 21; 5-7-8-9-5-7-9-4-7 in bar 22; 9-6-7-9-4-7 in bar 23; and 5-2-0-5 in bar 24. Chords: A, A/E, A7/G, D, A/C#, E, E7, A, A/C#.

System 7 (Measures 25-28): Treble clef staff shows a sequence of eighth notes. Guitar staff shows fret numbers: 2-5-2-5-2-5 in bar 25; 5-7-8-9-5-7-9-4-7 in bar 26; 9-6-7-9-4-7 in bar 27; and 5-2-10-7 in bar 28. Chords: A, A/E, A7/G, D, A/C#, E, E7, A, A/C#.

System 8 (Measures 29-32): Treble clef staff shows a sequence of eighth notes. Guitar staff shows fret numbers: 9-7-9-7-10-7-10 in bar 29; 9-10-7-9-10-7-10 in bar 30; 9-5-7-9-4-7 in bar 31; and 5-2-0-5 in bar 32. Chords: A, A7/G, A/F#, Dm6/F, A/E, E, E7, A.

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This piece has four main themes so work carefully on one at a time. The second theme continues in A and begins with characterful syncopation and ascending chromatic 3rds. Then bars 3-4 get busy for the fretting hand

so follow the indicated fingering carefully and slowly. Three bars before the end of this theme is an ascending and descending A major arpeggio with a repeating E in the bass – use of the open first string helps make this fluent.



The sheet music is divided into five systems, each with a treble clef staff and a guitar-specific staff below it. The guitar staff includes fret numbers and chord diagrams. The music is in A major (three sharps: F#, C#, G#).

System 1 (Bars 36-53): Starts with a double bar line at bar 36. Chords: A, A/E, A, A/E, D, D/A, D, Dm/A. Fingering: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.

System 2 (Bars 40-56): Chords: A/C#, A/E, A, A/E, A, A/E, A/C#, Cdim, E/B, B9, B. Fingering: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.

System 3 (Bars 44-60): Chords: E, A, A/E, A, A/E, D, D/A, D, Dm/A. Fingering: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.

System 4 (Bars 48-64): Chords: A/C#, A, D, D#dim, A/E, B7, E7. Fingering: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.

System 5 (Bars 52-68): Chords: A, A, A/E, A7/G, D, A/C#. Fingering: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.

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There is a recurrence of the first theme, which appears here for the last time and is this time unrepeatd. Practising with a slow metronome is invaluable for determining how good your time is (it can be a cruel mistress!) Always aim to keep the syncopation and subdivisions relaxed and rhythmic.

71

A/E E E7 A A/C# A A/E A/E A7/G D Cdim

75

B7 E7 A A/E A7/G D A/C#

79

A/E E E7 A A/C# A A7/G A/F# Dm6/F

83

A/E E E7 D G

85 101

a p i p i p m

87 103

Bm Em Em/G Em D/F# Bm

i m i p m a

PLAYING TIPS

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The third section moves into D major with a new, beautifully nostalgic call and response between the upper part and bass line. Hold the melody note B in the second bar so it rings over the answering bass line and follow the picking-hand

fingering. Watch out for the big jump up to the C# major barre chord in the 7th bar and also the slightly stretchy B₇ chord three bars before the end of the section. The next four-bar interlude serves as a link to the final theme.

Chords: C#7, F#m, A7, D, G

Measures 91-107

Chords: Bm, Em, Em/G, Em, D/F#, Bb7

Measures 95-111

Chords: D/A, A, A7, D, D, D#dim

Measures 99-116

Chords: A/E, B7, E7, A, D6, D6/F#

Measures 118-121

PLAYING TIPS

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The final theme has new motif, again with lovely call and response phrases that move through simple D, A and E major harmony. The last four bars of this section are more technically challenging, particularly for the fretting hand

so work one bar at a time and be vigilant with the precision of the fingering. Going slowly, gradually building up the tempo is the path to a successful performance of what is a pretty challenging but immensely rewarding piece.

Chords: D6, D6/F#, A, A/C#, A, A/E, E, E/D

122
138

Chords: E9, E9/G#, D#dim7, A/E, D6, D9/F#

126
142

Chords: D6, D9/F#, A, A/C#, A, A/E, D, Bm, Bm/C#, D

130
146

Chords: A/E, D#dim7, A/E, B7/F#, B7, E, E/G#, A

134
150