

Reviewed by W. K. McNeil

This is one of those books destined to receive strong reactions from reviewers because it deals with an almost virgin area of scholarly study. Favorable reviews, based on the obvious fact that the volume fills a void, are likely to be too uncritical while negative readings will undoubtedly result from expecting too much of the book. Both extremes, however, are unfair and unrealistic because The Art of Ragtime is a pioneer musicological analysis of ragtime and as such contains strengths and weaknesses of the type usually found in groundbreaking works. It will be useful (and at the same time justify my receiving a review copy) to list some of these virtues and flaws.

On the positive side is the inclusion of one of the best and most extensive definitions of ragtime available to popular audience. According to Schafer and Riedel it is a formational, as opposed to improvisational, music that in its classic form consists of "an organization of folk melodies and musical techniques into a brief and fairly simple quadrille-like structure, written down and designed to be played as written on the piano." (p.5) The music exists in several forms, including folk ragtime, classic ragtime, popular-commercial adaptations, and rag influences in other types of music such as blues, jazz, and classical music. All of these aspects of ragtime are dealt with to varying extents in this book, but the authors focus mainly on classic ragtime--the music of Scott Joplin (1868-1917), James Scott (1886-1938), and Joseph Lamb (1887-1960) and their followers--since it represents "the ultimate coherent organization of ragtime style." (p.13)

Another of the book's virtues is that it clears up several common misconceptions about ragtime. One of the most persistent of these fallacies is that ragtime is simply unremitting syncopation, and therefore a limited form of music. As Schafer and Riedel point out, such a definition fails to provide a thorough description, but in their reaction they go too far and make what will undoubtedly be a controversial suggestion: that syncopation is not even a basic characteristic of the style. A second stereotype dispensed with is the view that ragtime is nothing more than an ancestor of jazz, in other words a proto-jazz having no significance apart from its descendant form. This false concept is
undoubtedly responsible for poor (no, awful) performances of ragtime by jazz pianists such as, for example, John "Knocky" Larker's renditions of the work of Scott Joplin and James Scott (titled in L. L.'s 71-72 and 76-77 respectively). The same kind of reasoning is also responsible for statements such as the assertion of Hilfrid Kellers that "rags are an alternative to the blues." (quoted on p. 13).

Most of these errors arise, the authors state, because ragtime is often viewed exclusively as a genre. It is, however, also a style and, Schaefer and Riedel maintain, typical of black music in that style preceded form. In other words the music existed before any examples of it were written down. This argument is a bit thin, though, for it can be said of any music derived from folk sources. Nevertheless, Schaefer and Riedel are correct in calling attention to the genre-style distinction. In an important style, ragtime influenced other forms of American music including jazz, popular music, and even classical music through such composers as the Connecticut part-time musician Charles Ives.

By far the best part of the book is Chapter III "Classic Ragtime" which is a musicological analysis of the structure and form of the works of "ragtime's dominant triad" -- Scott Joplin, James Scott, and Joseph Lamb. That this section excells all others is hardly surprising since the main interest and enthusiasm of the authors lies here and, in fact, the application of musicological methods to ragtime was their major motive in writing the book. Among the matters clarified here are the use of syncopation in classic rags, the bass role in syncopation, the utilization of "wrong" musical devices, and the varying contributions of Joplin, Scott, and Lamb to the overall form. Schaefer and Riedel divide classic rags into two structural types based on the order of presentation of melodic strains: linear and rounded. The former "consists of the presentation of up to four new strains within the bisectinal rag structure, one following another and its corresponding repetitions" while the rounded rag "the first section of the rag is followed by one or two new strains and the return quote of either its first or second strain or the first strain of the second section." (p. 59)

Even though their main love is classic ragtime, Schaefer and Riedel do not make the mistake, as folklorists often do, of neglecting those aspects of their subject that do not particularly appeal to them. They have the good sense to recognize that there is more to the ragtime story than the musical genius of Joplin, Scott, and Lamb and acknowledge that the music rose to popularity as the result of an interplay between several folk and popular traditions. Realistically the authors concede that "in terms of wide influence, pseudo-ragtime and popular rag songs are more important than masterworks by Joplin, Scott, and Lamb." (p. 111)
"minor" material consisted of two types of phenomena: (1) ragtime songs ("coon" songs and Indian intermezzi) and (2) piano ragtime converted into ensemble music. Although in one sense this hack work cheapened and debased and eventually helped kill ragtime it also aided in bringing the music into the mainstream of American life. Furthermore, these items had definite lasting influence on later popular music, particularly jazz.

Some other positive features of the book should also be mentioned. Among these are the numerous musical examples illustrating the connections between ragtime and other forms of music. These are especially useful in Schafer and Riedel's discussion of the relationship of ragtime to jazz piano styles. To demonstrate how later musicians adapted ragtime the reader is provided the original score of Scott Joplin's "Original Rags" (1899) as well as a transcription of Ferdinand "Jelly Roll" Morton's 1925 recording of it. Also included here is the original score of Carey Morgan's (of "Fiddlin' Cider Through a Straw" fame) "Trilby Rag" (1915), a number that had special appeal to Charles "Cow Cow" Davenport who recorded two different interpretations of which the one titled "Atlanta Rag" (which, incidentally, is incorrectly ascribed an early 1920's recording date (p. 175) but was actually recorded in April, 1925) is transcribed here. In May, 1925 Davenport recorded another version, this under the title "Texas Shout."

Among the other complimentary aspects of the present volume are a fourteen page bibliography on ragtime and an introduction that is a veritable guide to future research on the subject. Finally it is essential to point out that The Art of Ragtime is well written and, although Schafer and Riedel will never rival Shakespeare or even James Agee, their work is far more interesting reading than the encyclopedic They All Played Ragtime which is the only other serious volume on ragtime.

No reviewer worth the price of a book says only nice things and as promised earlier some weaknesses of Schafer and Riedel's book will be pointed out. First and foremost is their overemphasis on ragtime as a black music form. No one questions that Scott Joplin and James Scott were masters of the style and indeed played an influential role in developing the music. However, ragtime was also a white music and, in fact, the major practitioners in some midwestern centers such as Indianapolis, were white. The lie is given to the subtitle by statistics alone, for one-third of classic ragtime's "big three" was white while twelve of the fifteen members of what the authors consider "ragtime's second line" were white. Thus, though the music may originated in black folk tradition, at least part of its classic form was derived from non-black American sources. The authors do not minimize the roles of Lamb, Hunter, Johnson, Henrich, et al., but, even with all those white men in the woodpile, still think of ragtime as solely a black musical form.
I]ually irritating is the fact that The Art of Ragtime contains no new biographical information on some of the nebulous figures, or, for that matter, even the more famous personalities of ragtime's past. Admittedly, Schafer and Riedel did not intend this primarily as a history. Yet, was the purpose of the music critic Blesh and the art connoisseur Janis in They'll Play Ragtime but, since almost a decade has elapsed since the earlier work was last revised, it is reasonable to expect a new volume to make use of information uncovered in the interim and perhaps to even provide some new data. Certainly there are plenty of significant figures, particularly among the white ragtimers (William H. Krell and H.A. Fischler to name two) who need to be treated more fully than they have been. However, one will search in vain for such material here for, rather than adding to earlier knowledge, Schafer and Riedel do little more than paraphrase biographical material already available in Blesh and Janis. In this respect, then, it is a less valuable and more disappointing work than the earlier volume.

A confusing aspect of The Art of Ragtime is deciding exactly how the authors categorize ragtime generically. On pages 15, 95, and 100 it is called folk music, but on pages 54 and 142 it is a popular music while page 1 has it as an art form and on page 21 it seems to be simultaneously a folk and an art music. This gives the impression that the authors themselves are uncertain whether ragtime is a folk, popular, or art music, but the confusion can perhaps be explained by the frequent failure of Schafer and Riedel to distinguish between the varied styles of ragtime they are discussing. Perhaps such inconsistency is to be expected in a book co-written by people separated by several hundred miles but the probability does not excuse the action. This seeming uncertainty is especially unfortunate since it will make the book less meaningful to the novice, an important consideration since the authors indicate that one of their main hopes is that their volume will aid a ragtime revival.

Among the other points on which Schafer and Riedel can be faulted is their failure to adequately fulfill their stated objective: "...their aim was to analyze exhaustively ragtime's aesthetic and musical contributions to black and white musical culture." (p. xv) Such a task necessitates considerable attention to the importance of the mass media in the dissemination of the music. In the case of ragtime, piano rolls and recordings were particularly influential but neither of these topics is adequately treated. Indeed, they are almost avoided and surprisingly the book does not even contain a discography or rollography, unless one accepts the very incomplete list of record liner notes as such. With this omission Schafer and Riedel miss a chance to provide a valuable service to the uninitiated prospective ragtime enthusiast who probably will not know about David Jasen's recently published Recorded Ragtime.
Lest the above remarks give the wrong impression it is imperative to note here that the *Art of Ragtime* is a good book that is a pleasure to read because, for once, people who are primarily ragtime enthusiasts, rather than jazz experts, are writing about ragtime. In many ways their volume represents an advance over previous scholarships and it also raises many important issues and questions. However, certain weaknesses, some of which have been discussed here, prevent it from being the great work it might have been. Perhaps, though, slurs and omissions are essential since they provide a reason for, and sometimes an impetus to, other scholars to do further research. If this volume activates such additional investigation then Schafer and Riedel will have accomplished more with one publication than most authors achieve in a lifetime.


Reviewed by Catherine A. Shoupe.

The appearance of Jacqueline Simpson's *The Folklore of Sussex* marks the inauguration of a new series on "The Folklore of the British Isles" under the general editorship of Venetia Neill. In keeping with the definition of the scope of folklore as set forth in S.L. Gowme's 1890 *Handbook of Folk-Lore*, i.e., customs, beliefs and practices, and stories, songs and sayings, the categories of Sussex folklore discussed by Simpson are local legends, traditional beliefs and magical practices, seasonal observances and stock rhymes, sayings and anecdotes. Although not published under the auspices of London's Folklore Society, this work adheres to the pattern of the Society's county folklore collections. No attempt is made to integrate folklore with folk life to present a comprehensive view of the totality of folk culture despite considerable impetus for studies of this kind provided by the Institute for Dialect and Folklore Research at Leeds University and the Museum of English Rural Life at Reading University. Folklore and folk life studies, regretfully, are going their separate ways as far as Society folklorists are concerned.

Folklore is employed in this book in the narrow sense of the word, as survivals of oral tradition and customs. The picture given refers primarily to the 19th century, and the first few years of the 20th century before World War I, and the revolution in modern agriculture and transportation. The author states: "The aim of the present book, therefore, is to give a coherent picture of the