

by Huynh Minh Sieng but worthy of either John Phillip Sousa or A. Alexandrov.

One of the more interesting aspects of the two albums was the way in which Russian patterns in both martial music and unaccompanied choirs have left an obvious imprint on the Vietnamese music presented here. Technically, the recordings on both records are excellent, as should be, since the notes provided with the records indicate that all selections were taken from sessions recorded in studios and previously released in Hanoi.

Obviously, there is no way of knowing from the data provided with the record, or from the records themselves, what impact or spread these particular selections have in Vietnam. Nor, for that matter, can we even know if they are representative. The musical arrangements would suggest otherwise. Granted, field recording in Vietnamese traditional music is not the purpose of Paredon Records, but the problem of representativeness remains.

Each album is accompanied by a pamphlet which contains English translations of all the songs, together with relevant comments by either Irwin Silber or Barbara Dane. As political documents the records are valuable, and as human statements they are of great worth. But as measures of a folkloric process there is at least some doubt.

Black and White Piano Ragtime: 1921-1939. Eubie Blake, James P. Johnson, Fletcher Henderson, Alonzo Yancey, Blind Leroy Garnett, Jimmie Blythe, Jesse Crump, Zez Confrey, Vera Guilaroff, Rube Bloom, Jimmy Andrews, Jean Paques, Willie Eckstein, Ferdinand "Jelly Roll" Morton.

14 selections, instrumental, mono, liner notes by David A. Jasen.

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Reviewed by W. K. McNeil

The material on this album is not traditional, at least in the sense that term is generally understood by folklorists. Ragtime is, as Rudi Blesh says, a music "that came from the people and then got lost" (They All Played Ragtime, p. 5). In other words, it is a type of popular and art music derived from folk sources. Although originally confined to saloons and sporting houses, ragtime received greater exposure in the late 1890's with the success of works by Benjamin R. Harney, William H. Krell, Scott Joplin, and others. Through the first two decades of the twentieth century the new syncopated style was an important influence on popular and folk music and Scott Joplin (1868-1917), the acknowledged master of the form, even tried his hand at composing a ragtime opera. Interestingly the development of the commercial recording industry coincided with the ragtime era and therefore complete documentation of the development of an art form is available. So it would seem, but the facts are otherwise.

Although ragtime is essentially a piano music, early piano ragtime recordings are rare. Generally this is explained away with some statement about the piano's inability to make sound vibrations sufficiently loud to cut deep enough grooves into the wax compound used for making the master disc. In his liner notes to the present album, David Jasen (himself a ragtime pianist)

discards this as "sheer nonsense" and offers more plausible reasons. For one thing, before the twenties recordings didn't pay well. Perhaps more important, most ragtime pianists were in the Midwest and recording companies were in the East. Further, the player piano roll was, at the time, a better money-making venture for the ragtime musician. Finally, many early artists were employed in vaudeville shows that generally toured a large circuit and ragtimers did not want their material to become well known to their audience. Because of these factors pianists did not make discs regularly until the 1920's when the record was an established money-maker and performers were better paid.

The preceding is merely an extended explanation for the lack of pre-1920's recordings on the present album. All but two of the fourteen cuts are from the 1920's when ragtime was a declining force in popular music and being replaced by jazz. According to the title the dates covered are 1921-1939 but one selection, Alonzo Yancey's "Everybody's Rag," was made in 1943. The earliest recording is the still active nonagenarian Eubie Blake's 1921 rendition of his "Charleston Rag," a tune written in 1899 but not copyrighted until many years later. Side 1 of the album is devoted to black pianists and side 2 mainly to white syncopators, although Ferdinand "Jelly Roll" Morton's performance of Scott Joplin's first published work, "Original Rags," is also included. With the black musicians, geographic factors were also taken into consideration in choosing numbers. New York or Stride ragtime is represented by three famous masters of the genre, Eubie Blake (1883-), James Price Johnson (1894-1955), and Fletcher Henderson (1897-1952). Chicago style (perhaps I should say styles, since the music in the Windy City was much more varied than in most other ragtime centers) ragtime is surveyed through the work of Alonzo Yancey, Blind Leroy Garnett, Jimmie Blythe, and Jesse Crump, none of whom is as well-known today as the three New York artists.

Side 2 offers several examples of Novelty ragtime including the prototype of that style, "Kitten On The Keys," played by its composer Zez Confrey. Vera Guilaroff's 1926 performance of Scott Joplin's "Maple Leaf Rag," in which the melody is almost submerged by the harmony, epitomizes the Novelty rag. Incidentally, this and Rube Bloom's "Spring Fever" are the only two previously unissued takes on the album. Other examples of the Novelty style given here include "Sailin' Along" by Frank Banta recording under the pseudonym "Jimmy Andrews," "Pianotes" by the Belgian artist Jean Paques, and "Knice and Knifty" by the Canadian, Willie Eckstein. These latter two numbers are important as a reminder that ragtime's success extended beyond the borders of the United States. It is customary for critics to sneeringly dismiss Confrey and his followers as mercenaries playing a degenerate form of ragtime who were eventually responsible for the decline of the music. That is a tradition which should be broken. True, the Novelty numbers are drastically different from the works of Joplin, James Scott, Charles Hunter, Joseph Lamb, and other masters of classic ragtime but, then, their composers never claimed they were the same. It seems unfair to blame the Novelty artists for ragtime's decline since the increasing complexity of the music almost certainly spelled its doom as a widely popular music. The Novelty style seems to be merely an inevitable development in the history of ragtime. As for the mercenary argument, none of the classic ragtimers was averse to making money from their compositions, they were merely less successful in this regard than the Novelty composers. I suspect that one of the main reasons the latter are viewed condescendingly is that they are more difficult to romanticize than the classic ragtimers.

Black and White Piano Ragtime is a good survey of the various styles that flourished in the waning years of the ragtime era and, if restricted to

selections taken from phonograph recordings, perhaps as good a capsule history of the music as is possible. However, a more representative general picture can be provided with items taken from player piano rolls, for musicians associated with pre-1920's ragtime centers, such as the Missouri cities (Sedalia, Kansas City, St. Louis), New Orleans, and Indianapolis, chose this method of commercial distribution of their music over that of phonograph recordings. As with most Biograph albums the sound is good, especially when it is taken into consideration that the originals are, in most cases, fifty years old. The present record is a valuable document because it amply illustrates the variety that can exist even within the narrow confines of a few styles of one musical form.