

PICKLES AND PEPPERS

A RAG ODDITY

arranged by JAMES

SHEPARD

INTRO.

9 10 11 12 8 9 10 11 12 12 P10 P9 9 5 7 6 7 0

9 10 11 9 H10 P9 11 10 9 11 10 9 10 11 9 H10 P9 11 10 11 P9 0 0 0 0 0 0

10 9 12 10 9 12 9 11 9 3 2 0 2 1 0 0 9 9 9 9 9 9 9 0 2 4 4 2 2 0

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RAGTIME GUITAR



by

JOHN JAMES

A certain Myron A. Bickford writing in the Boston magazine *Cadenza* in September 1913 noted the following five categories concerning the playing of ragtime;

- (a) those who can play ragtime and play it properly.
- (b) those who cannot play it but know it and would like to.
- (c) those who cannot play it and don't know it.
- (d) those who can play it but will not.
- (e) those who cannot play it and will not try.

His comments were prompted by the outpourings in the press and amongst the musical fraternity on the merits of ragtime — or the lack of them. The very fact that it was a talking point at all says a great deal for the music, especially when you consider this quote from the music publication *Metronome* in 1901, "Ragtime's days are numbered. We are sorry to think that anyone should imagine that ragtime was of the least musical importance. It was a popular wave in the wrong direction".

Well, if you have been following the story of ragtime on these pages, month by month, then you will, no doubt, see the folly of that remark. Ragtime has been fundamental in its influence on all popular music to follow in its footsteps.

Today the fight for recognition for this music goes on. It is not just the passing of time that is against the acceptance of ragtime as a seminal musical form, for during the peak of the ragtime era in 1914 the *Harvard Musical Review* wrote "Unfortunate surroundings constitute probably the main reason why ragtime fails to gain recognition in the musical world. There are few of those above the ragtime sphere who will admit having caught its fascination. Most people seem to have a peculiar, highly sensitized faculty of closing their ears to what they are unwilling to recognise as music". Yes, I think that is it exactly . . . 'unwilling to recognise as music'. Unwilling, simply because their education won't let them. If you have been schooled into regarding one particular thing as 'serious music' and that all else is 'rubbish': then what hope do you have to discover new and wonderful sounds that are going to come your way? Indoctrination an accepted practice in political and religious instruction, is, unfortunately, prevalent in musical education too. Can you believe such a thing as the President of the American Federation of Musicians issuing an instruction, in 1901, for all its members to cease playing ragtime! He proclaimed "The musicians know what is good, and if the people don't we will have to teach them".

How they defined a rag and how they monitored this ban I have not been able to find out but the mind boggles at such ridiculous scenes of heavily disguised 'anti-ragtime militia' springing out of the dress circle when the guitarist after opening with a sixteen bar sequence changes key to the sub-dominant and is immediately arrested. This is however, not so fantastic as it sounds, for in 1903 when Danish piano teacher Axel Christensen opened his studio to pupils requiring tuition in ragtime, the owners of the building where his studio was housed, were so outraged that they accused him of 'unethical

conduct' namely, advertising, and felony, namely, teaching ragtime. He was sentenced to leave the building immediately.

It seems the main prejudice against ragtime was not musical or racial but really because of its 'low origins'. The claim that the music was of 'folk origin' and hence with development 'classical', was disputed by the dissenters who insisted that it was 'city music'. In its issue of March 29 1913, *Musical America* defined folk music as 'a product of the idyllic village atmosphere, mirroring the joys and sorrows, hopes and passions of the country people'. Ragtime it went on to say was of the city and therefore not folk music . . . "It exalts noise, rush and street vulgarity. It suggests repulsive dance halls and restaurants". Ah! so that's where those fast-food junk-aways came from.

Even though the above declaration that folk music must be of rural origin is, of course, nonsense, I must admit to hearing my first classic ragtime in the city. It was not in St. Louis, or New York but dear old London town.

Way back in 1967 when I arrived in London, armed with a repertoire of blues and folk guitar rags, learnt from hours of listening to records of Gary Davis, Mississippi John Hurt, Blind Blake etc., I met, as chance would have it, at my first club appearance, a collector of blues and ragtime recordings. At this time records of this music were indeed rare unlike today. He presented me with a tape of piano rolls, all, I later discovered had been originally played and recorded at way above tempo. Anyway, I attempted to put them on the guitar. I stress 'put' as the results were not transcription arrangements as are many of the study pieces featured in this series, simply attempts at capturing the spirit of the music rather than the letter. This month I have chosen a piece from this old tape of piano rolls, *Pickles and Peppers — A Rag Oddity*. As far as my researches show it was attributed to one Adeline Shepard in 1906, and probably first transcribed onto a roll in Milwaukee, U.S. Other than that all I can say is that it is a real belter to play.

The intro. is a chromatic run that will give you difficulty, to some, especially those who don't, but should, include chromatic scales in their practice routine. I have shown the run on the tab at ninth position, this saves jumping across the fingerboard. You can play it an octave lower starting at seventh position on the fifth string, but this will mean moving to sixth position on the fourth string, and fifth on the third string. Of course you can be really clever and play it all on the first string, with the first finger sliding, or rather hopping, from first to the twelfth fret. The right hand fingering I have refrained from notating, technique differing, as it does, from player to player, but if the 'F' natural melody note in bar one, that is the second note played of the tune, is played with the thumb then you may find the alternating bass line easier to keep in time. Do the same in bars 3, 9, 11.

The tempo will be decided by how you play the counterpoint runs in bars seven and eight. Go to it!