

SCOTT JOPLIN



CLASSIC RAGS

JOSHUA RIFKIN
PIANO

MAPLE LEAF RAG · THE ENTERTAINER
BETHENA · ROSE LEAF RAG
GLADIOLUS RAG · PINE APPLE RAG
COUNTRY CLUB · SOLACE
STOPTME RAG · MAGNETIC RAG

WIGMORE HALL

SATURDAY 25 JANUARY 2014 · 10 PM

This concert is part of the Nash Ensemble American Series

Joshua Rifkin

Piano Music of Scott Joplin (1868–1917)

PROGRAMME

PLEASE ENSURE THAT MOBILE PHONES ARE TURNED OFF

Would patrons also please stifle coughing as much as possible and ensure that watch alarms and any other electronic devices which can become audible are switched off.

MAPLE LEAF RAG (1899)

THE ENTERTAINER – A RAGTIME TWO-STEP (1902)

BETHENA – A CONCERT WALTZ (1905)

ROSE LEAF RAG – A RAGTIME TWO-STEP (1907)

GLADIOLUS RAG (1907)

PINE APPLE RAG (1908)

COUNTRY CLUB – A RAGTIME TWO-STEP (1909)

SOLACE – A MEXICAN SERENADE (1909)

STOPTIME RAG (1910)

MAGNETIC RAG – SYNCOPATIONS CLASSIQUES (1914)

Scott Joplin



Born in the American Southwest and raised on the border of Texas and Arkansas, Scott Joplin grew up in a musical home headed by a former slave. He began to play the piano early and received some formal training – which he sought to augment throughout his life – from a local music teacher. In his teens, he left home for the life of an itinerant musician, living and performing

in Chicago, St Louis, and elsewhere in the mid-West. The success of the *Maple Leaf Rag*, published in 1899, enabled him to give up touring and settle down in St. Louis, where he led a quiet life of composing and teaching. By 1907, however, marital troubles and the failure of his newer, more sophisticated rags to equal the popularity of his earlier works forced him back on the road.

In 1909, Joplin remarried and settled in New York, where he produced some of his finest rags and began work on an opera, *Treemonisha*. Before long, the project came to absorb all his energies, virtually spelling the end of his ragtime composition. A failed attempt in 1915 to win support for *Treemonisha* proved a disastrous psychic blow from which Joplin never recovered. He had contracted syphilis as a young man, and the obsessive work on the opera had already begun to speed his mental deterioration. His quiet, level temperament become unpredictable, his behaviour tense, suspicious, increasingly moody. His wife and friends ultimately had no choice but to commit him to an institution, and he died there in 1917.

The sensitive, introspective features revealed by portraits of Scott Joplin perfectly reflect the character of his music. A deep sense of lyricism infuses his work, and even at his most high-spirited he cannot repress a hint of melancholy. Accounts of his piano-playing stress his smooth legato, singing tone, and subtle control of rhythm. He had little in common with the fast and flashy school of ragtime that grew up after him; several of his pieces bear the admonition “Do not play this piece fast. It is never right to play ‘Ragtime’ fast.” In Joplin’s hands, the flowing syncopated treble and steady bass typical of ragtime take on rare suppleness; he turns the lowest voice from a simple chordal support into a finely patterned line,

and the upper parts into delicate contrapuntal filigree. The late pieces above all revel in unexpected shifts of harmony and texture; but at all stages of his career, Joplin remains guided by a single ideal: the creation of a truly classic ragtime.

Joshua Rifkin

Joshua Rifkin



Joshua Rifkin’s life in music has spanned Renaissance motets and ragtime masters, Bach cantatas and Baroque Beatles. He has conducted and appeared as soloist with leading orchestras and early music groups in Europe, the US, Japan, Australia, and Israel in music ranging from Bach, Haydn, and Beethoven to Stravinsky, Copland, and the newest moderns. The Bach Ensemble, which he founded in

1978, won the Gramophone Award for its recording of the *Mass in B Minor* and has performed this and many other works of Bach at festivals in the United States, Europe, and beyond. The University of Dortmund, Germany, and the Academy of Music in Kraków, Poland, have awarded him honorary doctorates for his contributions to Bach interpretation, and the Academy of Sciences in Göttingen, Germany has awarded him the Lichtenberg Medallion, its highest honour.

Joshua Rifkin’s recordings of Scott Joplin spearheaded the rediscovery of this fundamental American composer, and he has since played Joplin’s music in major concert halls throughout the world, at the Proms in Hyde Park, and at the White House in Washington DC. His CD *Rags and Tangos* introduced many listeners to the works of Joplin’s great Brazilian contemporary Ernesto Nazareth; broadcast performances in Europe have counterpointed Joplin with Bach and with Chopin. His latest CD, the award-winning *Vivat Leo! Music for a Medici Pope* with the Dutch-based vocal ensemble Cappella Pratensis (Challenge Classics), has returned him for the first time in many years to the music of the Renaissance. Projects on the horizon include performances of Monteverdi’s *Vespers* in the US and Belgium, and music of the older Bach family with the Bach Ensemble and the recent Gramophone Award winners Vox luminis at the festival Bach:Sommer in Arnstadt, Germany.

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