

Anthology of American Piano Music Vol. 6

Scott Joplin  
King of Ragtime

21 Rags including: The Entertainer · Heliotrope Bouquet · Leola · Solace · Maple Leaf Rag  
Cecile Licad, piano



# Scott Joplin: King of Ragtime

## Cecile Licad

Scott Joplin (1868-1917), along with James Scott and Joseph Lamb, forms what are often called the “three B’s” of classic ragtime. While hundreds of ragtime composers were active at the turn of the twentieth century – many of them itinerant African American pianists performing largely unnotated rags throughout the Missouri Valley states – it was Joplin who brought the genre into a fully realized, notated art form.

These pianists, almost all male and rarely formally trained, were brilliant improvisers who earned their livelihoods in the so-called “tenderloin districts”. Often referred to as “professors”, they formed a vibrant musical network that fueled the ragtime craze from roughly 1890 until World War I. Joplin himself stood apart. Born in Texarkana shortly after the Civil War to a formerly enslaved father and a freeborn mother from Kentucky, he showed early musical promise and received formal instruction from a Czech-Jewish immigrant teacher.

Joplin's respect for disciplined musical training – and his sense of obligation to the genre – shaped the course of ragtime history.

Early piano ragtime was a loose amalgam of syncopated rhythms, improvisatory flourishes, and popular dance influences. Joplin believed ragtime could – and should – be something more: a serious musical language capable of being preserved, studied, and performed by others. To that end, he imposed formal structures on the style. Most of his fifty-five rags follow multi-thematic designs, often AABBACCDD, combining a steady left-hand pulse with highly syncopated right-hand writing. While many rags carry a march-like character, they are fundamentally concert works, intended for listening rather than dancing.

Interpretation lies at the heart of ragtime's expressive potential. Although Joplin often writes literal repeats into the score, musical repetition does not require sameness. When every repeat is articulated identically, the music risks sounding static and redundant. Heard as living material rather than a formula, these repeats become opportunities for variation in color, voicing, and direction, allowing the invention within each piece

to continue unfolding. Approached in this way, Joplin emerges not as a composer confined to a narrow idiom, but as a continual innovator whose imagination renews itself from rag to rag.

For me, these perfectly regulated structures are ragtime poems: disciplined in form, yet alive with wit, tenderness, and human breath.

One of the most poignant examples is Heliotrope Bouquet, a collaboration with the Creole pianist Louis Chauvin. Gravely ill with tuberculosis, Chauvin sent Joplin two themes he could not notate; Joplin supplied the remaining material, creating one of the most tender works in the ragtime repertoire. Chauvin's death at twenty-four, followed by Joplin's own early death, cut short what might have been further evolution of the genre into the jazz age.

By World War I, ragtime had faded from prominence, eclipsed by Tin Pan Alley and the emerging jazz idiom. Joplin died in 1917, impoverished and largely forgotten, never hearing his ragtime opera *Treemonisha* performed. His grave remained unmarked until 1974. Yet his legacy endured, later revived and reaffirmed as a cornerstone of American music.

## Final Note

After performing Scott Joplin's music extensively in recital during the 2024-2025 season, I came to feel that these works benefit from breadth, space, and sustained listening. Presented across two discs, the program allows each rag to retain its individuality while revealing the remarkable range of invention within Joplin's language. No two pieces speak in the same voice, and the extended format lets the music breathe without compression or fatigue.

The album concludes with *Peace Piece* by Bill Evans (1929-1980), the wonderful jazz pianist and composer, offered as a quiet epilogue. Heard after Joplin's world of syncopation and invention, it provides a moment of stillness – a reflective coda that listens forward, honoring the spirit of contemplation and humanity that underlies this entire journey.

I hope you enjoy this twenty-two-piece collection as much as I do.

Cecile Licad

## Biography

Cecile Licad's unique natural pianistic talent was recognized early. She began her piano studies at the age of 3 and made her debut as a soloist with the Philharmonic Orchestra of the Philippines in her native Manila at 7. When she was 12 she auditioned for Rudolf Serkin and was admitted to the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia. Ms. Licad's international career was launched in 1981 after she had been awarded with the prestigious Leventritt Gold Medal.

Since then Ms. Licad has appeared throughout the world, with orchestras such as the Chicago Symphony, Boston Symphony, New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, London Symphony and London Philharmonic (UK), Orchestre de la Suisse Romande (Switzerland), Orchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks (Germany), Moscow State Academy Symphony (Russia), NHK Symphony Orchestra Tokyo (Japan), Hong Kong Philharmonic (China), and many others, in collaboration with conductors Andrew Davis, Charles Dutoit, Kurt Masur, Sir Neville Marriner, Zubin Mehta, Seiji Ozawa, André Previn, Michael Tilson Thomas, David Zinman, as well as the late Claudio Abbado, Sir Georg Solti, Eugene Ormandy and others.

Ms. Licad is also a highly valued chamber musician who has performed regularly with pianists Murray Perahia and Peter Serkin, violinist Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg, cellists Mstislav Rostropovich and Alban Gerhardt, the Guarneri and Takacs Quartets, and numerous chamber orchestras in North America and Europe. Her solo repertoire ranges from the early classical to the contemporary period. Ms. Licad's discography includes piano concertos by Chopin (*Grand Prix du Disque Frédéric Chopin 1985*), Saint-Saens, and Rachmaninoff; chamber music by Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Brahms, Franck, Korngold, and Fauré; and solo piano music by Schumann, Chopin, Ravel and Gottschalk. The late Rudolf Serkin said about Ms. Licad: "She has an incredible instinct for all kinds of music and seems equally at home in any style."

More recently Ms. Licad has developed a keen interest in the piano music of American composers that resulted in a series of live recitals for solo piano, in a collaboration with the Wynton Marsalis Septet performing music of Louis Moreau Gottschalk to accompany Dan Pritzker's film *Louis*, a silent, b/w film homage to Louis Armstrong, and in this present Anthology of American Piano Music.





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Piano technician:  
David Amendola

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The Anthology of American Piano Music is designed to show the stylistic breadth, high musical quality, and great originality of the best American piano works. The series contains underrated, neglected or forgotten masterworks of the American literature for solo piano from the 18th to the 21st century that have been selected primarily for their musical worth and originality. The compositions are assembled in a series of themed CDs, their programs being connected by one common theme or overarching idea. Previous volumes include 'American First Sonatas' (Vol. 1) 'Music of the Night', a 2 CD album (Vol. 2), 'American Landscapes' (Vol. 3), and 'American Dances' (Vol. 5). Like Vol. 4, which contains the complete set of compositions for piano and orchestra by George Gershwin, the present CD focuses on one American composer. It is a compilation of ragtimes by Scott Joplin, the most prominent of American ragtime composers.

## SCOTT JOPLIN: KING OF RAGTIME

### CD 1

- [ 1 ] Original Rags 3:35
- [ 2 ] The Entertainer 4:06
- [ 3 ] Pineapple Rag 4:22
- [ 4 ] Breeze from Alabama 4:07
- [ 5 ] Solace (A Mexican Serenade) 7:25
- [ 6 ] Peacherine Rag 3:59
- [ 7 ] The Paragon Rag 3:40
- [ 8 ] Ragtime Dance 3:15
- [ 9 ] Heliotrope Bouquet 3:32
- [10] Reflection Rag 4:24
- [11] Elite Syncopations 3:16

### CD 2

- [ 1 ] The Easy Winners 2:36
- [ 2 ] Leola 3:33
- [ 3 ] Magnetic Rag 6:02
- [ 4 ] Gladiolus Rag 3:43
- [ 5 ] Fig Leaf Rag 4:13
- [ 6 ] Stoptime Rag 2:55
- [ 7 ] Wall Street Rag 4:27
- [ 8 ] Rose Leaf Rag 4:08
- [ 9 ] Search-Light Rag 6:19
- [10] Maple Leaf Rag 2:49
- [11] Peace Piece - Bill Evans 7:27

**Cecile Licad** piano

Photograph of Ms. Licad by Patrick Diokno for Tatler Philippines

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