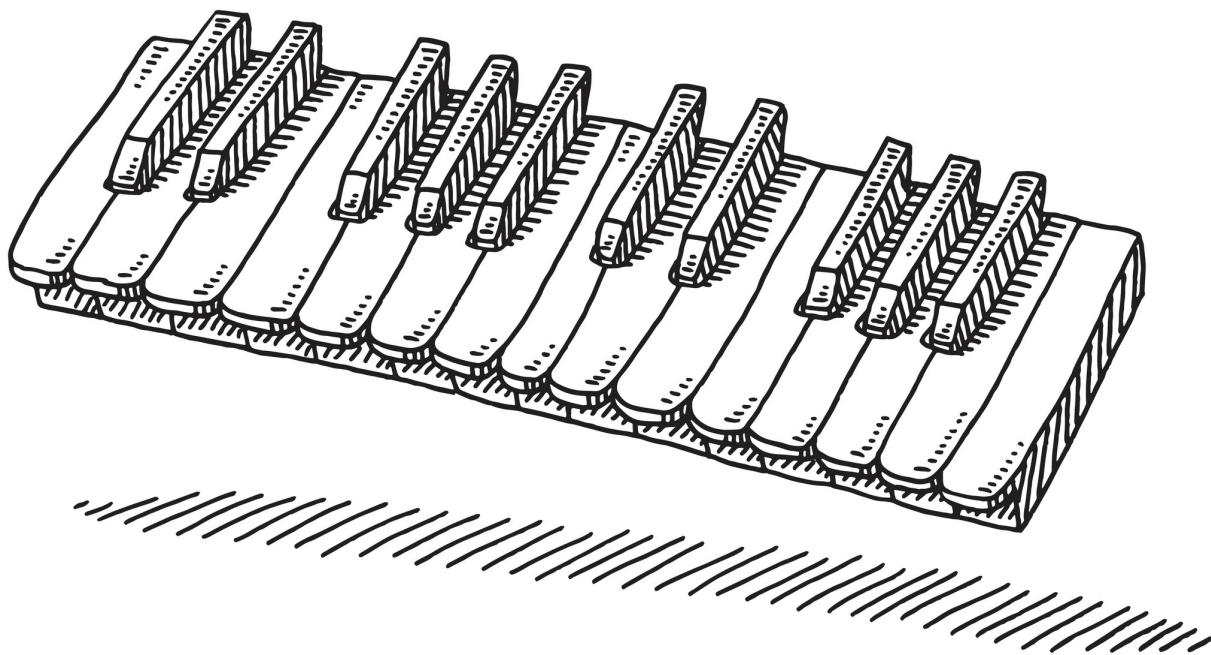


Teaching Ragtime Packet

by Carol Matz



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Teaching Ragtime

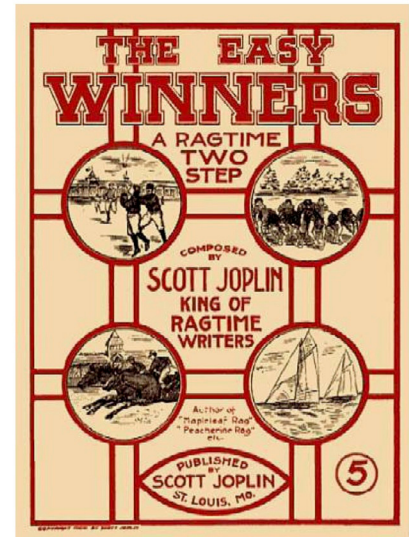
by Carol Matz

Ragtime in Context

In the 1970s, there was a major ragtime revival, partly due to the popular movie *The Sting*. This revival was great for piano teachers and students since it opened up a whole new genre to further explore. The soundtrack to *The Sting* featured many Scott Joplin pieces, including “The Entertainer,” “The Easy Winners,” and “Solace.” The great Marvin Hamlisch created orchestrations of many of the ragtime pieces featured in the film. His versions are in a rather up-tempo, staccato style, which is an interpretation that has stuck in a lot of people’s minds whenever they think of ragtime.

However, I want to emphasize that most of Joplin’s rags have a tempo marking that simply says “Not fast,” with no metronome mark. Ragtime developed from marches, which are usually around 120 beats per minute. (Think of Sousa’s “Stars and Stripes Forever” as an example). You might use this march tempo as a guideline, but rags can be played slower than this, especially when Joplin indicates *Slow march tempo*.

In addition to tempo, another ragtime performance issue to think about is the use of pedal, which is a bit controversial and has no “right answer,” since pedal is not indicated in the score. Most rags, in their original form, contain numerous octave-to-chord jumps, and many performers use pedal to bridge this jump (pedal down on the octave, up on the chord). In any case, pedal is appropriate in slower ragtime pieces, such as Joplin’s “Solace.” In mid-tempo rags, it’s up to the performer whether the piece should be staccato or more lyrical. Rags can be beautiful pieces when interpreted lyrically. If you’re interested in hearing some wonderful interpretations, you might



“The Easy Winners” cover (1901)

listen to the Joplin recordings by pianist Joshua Rifkin (especially his recordings of “The Entertainer” and “Gladiolus Rag”).

The most defining characteristic of ragtime is a syncopated melody against a steady left-hand accompaniment. To help students work on common syncopations found in ragtime, I’ve created the “Ragtime Exercises” pages found in this PDF. These exercises help students develop *rhythmic coordination between the hands*, which is essential for ragtime performance.

Carol Matz

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Ragtime Exercises

by Carol Matz

Overview

Syncopation is an accent, or stress, on an upbeat, which is normally a weak beat. It is one of the most characteristic elements of ragtime, but it can be tricky for students to feel. The following exercises help develop rhythmic coordination between the hands, using three common syncopations.

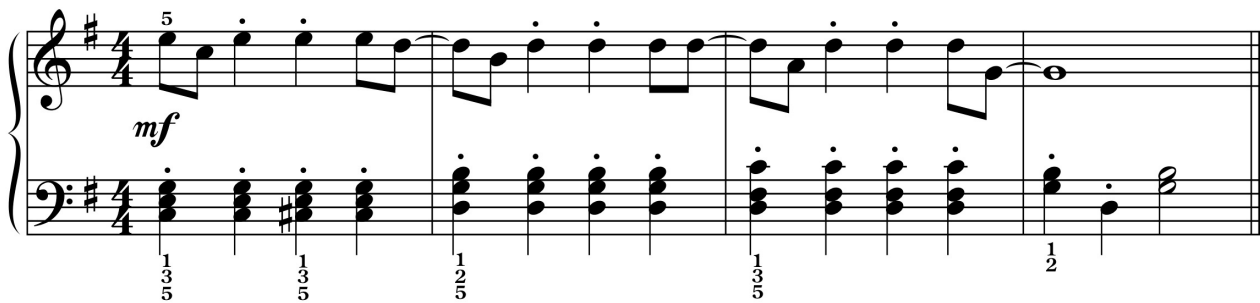
Practice Steps

Be sure that students practice the following exercises *slowly*, eventually building to a moderate tempo. Ragtime should not be played quickly.

- 1 For each exercise, have the student practice *hands separately* first.
- 2 Before putting the hands together, have the student play the right-hand melody while the left hand taps quarter-note beats on his or her lap.
- 3 Have the student practice both variations of each exercise. The first variation uses *blocked chords* in the LH. The second variation uses *broken chords*.

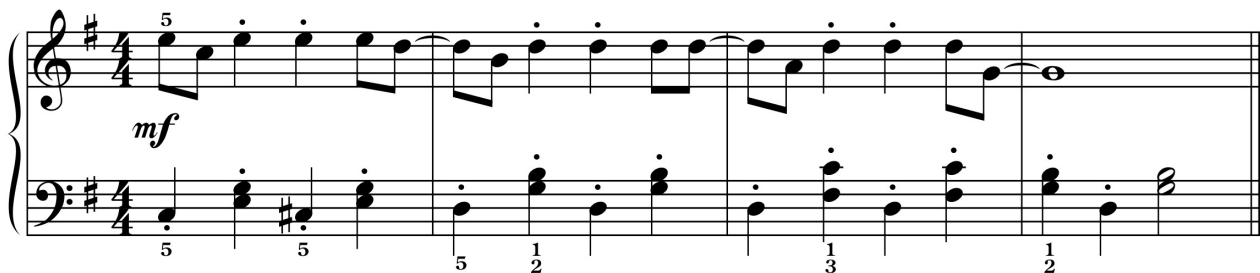
Exercise 1 Eighth notes tied between measures

Variation 1 (LH blocked chords)



Musical notation for Variation 1 (LH blocked chords). The right hand plays a melody of eighth notes tied across measures. The left hand plays blocked chords. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The piece is marked *mf*.

Variation 2 (LH broken chords)



Musical notation for Variation 2 (LH broken chords). The right hand plays the same melody as in Variation 1. The left hand plays broken chords. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The piece is marked *mf*.

(Syncopation exercises based on Scott Joplin's *School of Ragtime*.)

Ragtime Exercises, page 2

Exercise 2 Quarter note on the upbeat

Variation 1 (LH blocked chords)

mf

Variation 2 (LH broken chords)

mf

Exercise 3 Eighth notes tied between beats 2 and 3

Variation 1 (LH blocked chords)

mf

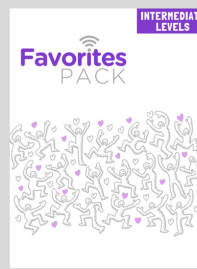
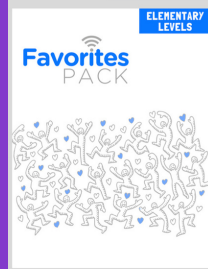
Variation 2 (LH broken chords)

mf

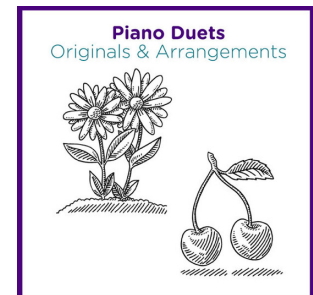
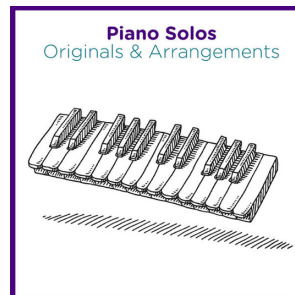
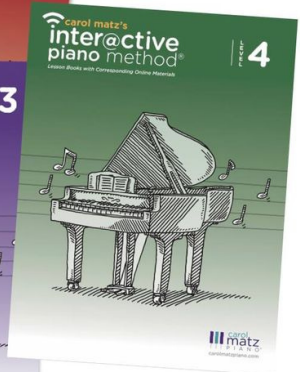
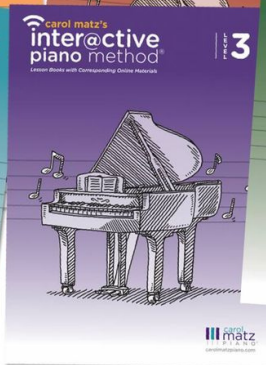
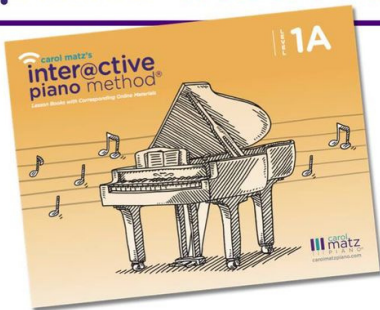
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