AN EXAMINATION OF SELECTED RAGTIME SOLOS BY ZEZ CONFREY,
GEORGE HAMILTON GREEN, CHARLES JOHNSON, AND RED NORVO
AS TRANSCRIBED FOR XYLOPHONE SOLO WITH MARIMBA
ENSEMBLE ACCOMPANIMENT

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Graduate Council of the North Texas State
University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Doctor of Musical Arts

By

Thomas W. McCutchen, M.M.
Denton, Texas
May, 1984
McCutchen, Thomas W., An Examination of Selected Ragtime Solos by Zez Confrey, George Hamilton Green, Charles Johnson, and Red Norvo as Transcribed for Xylophone Solo with Marimba Ensemble Accompaniment. Doctor of Musical Arts (Performance), May, 1984, 49 pp., bibliography, discography, 36 examples.

This lecture-recital paper deals with some of the music of the early 1900's, examining both original xylophone solos and piano rags arranged for the xylophone. An attempt is made to identify the role of the xylophone in ragtime music and its implications for the present day xylophonist. In this investigation a brief history of ragtime music is presented along with the history of the xylophone.

The history of ragtime is traced from its beginnings around 1890 to its decline during the 1930's, developing from cakewalks and folk rags into its various styles of Classic rags, Popular rags, Advanced rags, and Novelty rags.

The history of the xylophone is traced from the middle ages to its emergence as an orchestral instrument, popularized by a Polish Jew named Michael Josef Gusikov during the early 1800's. The popularity of the xylophone in the United States increased along with that of ragtime music; from approximately 1890 to 1935 the xylophone experienced what most refer to as its "golden age." Many
solos for the instrument, both original and transcribed, were published toward the end of this era. As the popularity of the xylophone declined, these solos went out of print.

In recent years, however, interest in these xylophone rags has been revived, as evidenced by recent recordings, percussion ensemble programs and solo recital programs. Xylophone rags are also used as teaching tools in both secondary schools and colleges to aid in development of technique, sight reading, and general musicianship. Four representative rags are examined for form and style features as well as performance: "Kitten on the Keys" by Zez Confrey, "Triplets" by George Hamilton Green, "Dill Pickles" by Charles Johnson and "Dance of the Octopus" by Red Norvo.
Tape recordings of all performances submitted as dissertation requirements are on deposit in the North Texas State University Library
### CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table of Examples</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of Ragtime</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of Xylophone and its use in Ragtime</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. EXAMINATION OF SELECTED RAGS BY JOHNSON, CONFREY, GREEN, AND NORVO</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Dill Pickles,&quot; Charles Johnson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Kitten on the Keys,&quot; Zez Confrey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Triplets,&quot; George Hamilton Green</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Dance of the Octopus,&quot; Red Norvo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. PERFORMANCE CONSIDERATIONS</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. CONCLUSIONS</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISCOGRAPHY</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF MUSIC
presents

Thomas W. McCutchen

in a

Graduate Percussion Recital

Monday, February 27, 1978  6:30 p.m.  Music Recital Hall

Program

SIX CAPRICES, Op. 26
I
II
III
IV
V
VI

TOCCATA FOR CLARINET,
TROMBONE AND PERCUSSION
Wade Irvin, Clarinet
Gary Barkey, Trombone

TWO MOVEMENTS FOR MARIMBA
CONNECTIONS AND MOMENTS
CONCERT PIECE FOR KETTLEDRUMS AND STRINGS
Kathy Richardson, Violin
Steve Cundall, Violin
Gary Walker, Violin
Phyllis Jones, Violin
Mark Roberson, Viola
Paul Taylor, Viola
Paul Kirkpatrick, Cello
Debbie Schmidt, Bass

Karl Kroeger
Toshimitsu Tanaka
Lewis Nielson
Lionel Nowak

Presented in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Doctor of Musical Arts Degree
NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF MUSIC
presents

Thomas W. McCutchen
in a
Graduate Percussion Recital

Thursday, August 3, 1978  8:15 p.m.  Music Recital Hall

Program

CONVERSATIONS
TRIANGULATION
DUETTINO CONCERTANTE

Mary Kay Adams, Flute

INTERMISSION

DUO FOR XYLOPHONE AND STRING BASS
Deborah Schmidt, String Bass

THE JOURNEY
EVERGLADES

Dr. Robert Schieltz, Mallet

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Musical Arts Degree

vi
NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF MUSIC
presents

Thomas W. McCutchen

in a

Graduate Percussion Recital

Monday, June 9, 1980
6:30 p.m.
Recital Hall

Program

PARTITA FOR PERCUSSION (1965)
I. Intrada
II. Gaillard
III. Paduan
IV. Bal
V. Pavane

FOUR PIECES FOR SOLO VIBRAPHONE (1977)
Fanfare
March
Ragtime
Waltz

DIVERSION FOR TWO (1972)
Edward Sandor, Trumpet in B♭
I. Allegro Moderato
II. Adagio
III. Moderato

GRAND FANTASY (1977)

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Musical Arts Degree
North Texas State University
School of Music

presents

Thomas W. McCutchen,
percussion

DMA Lecture Recital

An examination of selected ragtime solos by
Zez Confrey, George Hamilton Green, Charles Johnson,
and Red Norvo as transcribed for xylophone solo
with marimba ensemble accompaniment.

assisted by

NTSU Marimba Ensemble

Monday, September 12, 1983  5:00 p.m.
Recital Hall

Charles Johnson/Becker
Zez Confrey/McCutchen
Red Norvo/Stout
George Hamilton Green/Becker

Dill Pickles
Kitten on the Keys
Dance of the Octopus
Triplets

This program is presented in partial fulfillment for the requirements
of Doctor of Musical Arts degree.
### TABLE OF EXAMPLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Zez Confrey, &quot;Kitten on the Keys,&quot; mm. 1-3</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Zez Confrey, &quot;Kitten on the Keys,&quot; mm. 26-28</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Zez Confrey, &quot;Kitten on the Keys,&quot; mm. 47-54</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Zez Confrey, &quot;Kitten on the Keys,&quot; mm. 99-102</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Charles Johnson, &quot;Dill Pickles,&quot; mm. 5-8</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Charles Johnson, &quot;Dill Pickles,&quot; mm. a) 22-25 and b) 71-74</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Charles Johnson, &quot;Dill Pickles,&quot; mm. 87-92</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Bob Becker Arrangement)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. George H. Green, &quot;Triplets,&quot; mm. 5-9</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. George H. Green, &quot;Triplets,&quot; mm. 22-25 a) original piano and b) the Bob Becker arrangement (condensed marimba parts)</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. George H. Green, &quot;Triplets,&quot; mm. 59-62</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Red Norvo, &quot;Dance of the Octopus,&quot; mm. 40-43</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Zez Confrey, &quot;Kitten on the Keys,&quot; mm. 12 a) original right hand piano part, b) xylophone part from the Herman arrangement.</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Zez Confrey, &quot;Kitten on the Keys,&quot; m. 9</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Zez Confrey, &quot;Kitten on the Keys,&quot; mm. 10-12</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Zez Confrey, &quot;Kitten on the Keys,&quot; mm. 38-40</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Zez Confrey, &quot;Kitten on the Keys,&quot; mm. 71-74</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Zez Confrey, &quot;Kitten on the Keys,&quot; mm. 95-98</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Zez Confrey, &quot;Kitten on the Keys,&quot; mm. 105-108</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
19. Zez Confrey, "Kitten on the Keys," mm. 26-29 . . 34
20. Zez Confrey, "Kitten on the Keys," mm. 47-50 . . 34
21. Zez Confrey, "Kitten on the Keys," mm. 51-53 . . 34
22. Zez Confrey, "Kitten on the Keys," mm. 95-98 . . 35
23. Charles Johnson, "Dill Pickles," mm. 91-92 . . 36
24. Charles Johnson, "Dill Pickles," mm. 5-6 . . . . 36
25. Charles Johnson, "Dill Pickles," mm. 54-57 . . 38
26. George H. Green, "Triplets," mm. 7-8 . . . . . . 38
27. George H. Green, "Triplets," mm. 26-29 . . . . 39
28. George H. Green, "Triplets," mm. 5-8 a) as written
   and b) as played by Bob Becker . . . . . . . . . . 40
29. George H. Green, "Triplets," mm. 15-19 . . . . 40
30. Red Norvo, "Dance of the Octopus," mm. 15-16
    as played by a) Gordon Stout and b) Bob Becker . 44
31. Red Norvo, "Dance of the Octopus," m. 27 . . . . 45
32. Red Norvo, "Dance of the Octopus," mm. 29-30 . . 45
33. Red Norvo, "Dance of the Octopus," mm. 33-36 . . 45
34. Red Norvo, "Dance of the Octopus," m. 27 . . . . 47
35. Red Norvo, "Dance of the Octopus," m. 28 . . . . 47
36. Red Norvo, "Dance of the Octopus," m. 52 . . . . 48
Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, compositions for solo marimba have become plentiful while the literature for solo xylophone has not grown as rapidly. However, keyboard percussionists such as Gordon Stout, Bob Becker, and William Cahn have revived many virtuosic solos written for the xylophone during the early to mid 1900's. While most of these solos belong in the category of ragtime music, others are transcriptions of songs and melodies which were popular at the time. These selections could range from transcriptions of Sousa's "The Stars and Stripes Forever" to Verdi arias, or even popular dance tunes such as "Stardust."

This paper will focus on some of the music of the early 1900's, examining both original xylophone solos and piano rags arranged for the xylophone. Before examining them, it is helpful to consider the history of ragtime music, the role of the xylophone in that type of music, and some of the important xylophonists of the period.
Chapter II

AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

History of Ragtime

Ragtime developed and matured as a musical form between 1890 and 1910. There are several stages in the development of ragtime, and, accordingly, several different styles. A clear-cut definition would be an over-simplification, since ragtime music is a combination of a variety of musical elements and social influences. It has been described however, as "a substyle whose chief characteristics are duple meter (2/4 or 4/4); functional harmony stressing tonic, dominant, subdominant, and applied dominants in a major tonality; compounded songform structures with 16 or 32-bar periods and shorter introductions, vamps, and codas; a syncopated treble melody which operates in opposition to a harmonic and nonsyncopated bass line; and a bass line which moves approximately at half the speed of the melody."

Eubie Blake, one of the great ragtime pianists, said that "anything that is syncopated is basically ragtime, . . .

whether it's Liszt's "Hungarian Rhapsody" or

Tchaikovsky's "Waltz of the Flowers."\textsuperscript{2}

While syncopation seems to have been the main criterion for ragtime music, it was only one of several characteristics. Other devices that were used included the break, stoptime, and complex bass patterns that went beyond the usual march bass line. A "break" is an abrupt cessation of the basic rhythm and the bass line, with a singleline interpolated as a contrast to the regular progress of a syncopated melody with a march-like accompaniment. "Stoptime" refers to a broken rhythmic pattern of single note figures separated by rests, accenting the sound through the repeated silences. It was used as a standard accompaniment for dances.\textsuperscript{3}

The origins of ragtime include several types of black dance music, such as "coon songs," cakewalks, and folk rags. The lyrics of those black folk melodies called "coon songs," along with the minstrel shows, generally created crude racial stereotypes, but with the element of syncopation it was sometimes hard to distinguish a "coon song" from ragtime. These songs became very popular in the 1890's and remained standard fare in vaudeville and musical revues throughout the early 1900's.


Ragtime pieces, however, acquired a more desirable commercial connotation, even though they shared qualities with "coon songs" such as gay, lively melodies and syncopation. Accordingly, such ragtime favorites as Irving Berlin's "Alexander's Ragtime Band" and Hughie Cannon's "Bill Bailey Won't You Please Come Home?" could have been called "coon songs." 4

The cakewalk was a traditional type of folk music of the slave plantation. It had a descriptive character, and depicted a slow, high-kicking improvisatory black dance (done by couples competing for a prizecake). The cakewalk was the first syncopated style of music to become popular in America, largely through stage presentations.

The most successful composer of cakewalks was Frederick Allen Mills, a professor of Music at the University of Michigan from 1892 to 1893. 5 As one of the Tin Pan Alley publishers, he went by the name of Kerry Mills and in 1897 wrote the most popular of all cakewalks, "At a Georgia Camp Meeting." It was subtitled "a characteristic march which can be used effectively as a two-step, polka, or cakewalk" and was part of a collection called 'Two Step Marches.'

Cakewalks had several features in common with the standard

---


march structure, that is, several strains with repeats, bridges, and trios.\(^6\)

These musical features are also found in ragtime, but usually also with syncopation. The cakewalk easily lent itself to instrumental transcription, and John Phillip Sousa's band did much to further the popularity of cakewalks and rags by playing arrangements of them while touring Europe. Claude Debussy responded to ragtime with two stylistic works: "Menstrels" and "Golliwog's Cakewalk." Other compositions showing the influence of ragtime are Stravinsky's "Piano Ragtime" and "L'Histoire du Soldat," Erik Satie's "Parade," Hindemith's \textbf{Suite 1922}, and Milhaud's oratorio \textbf{King David}.

The folk rag, along with "coon songs" and cakewalks, was an important element in early ragtime music. Folk rags consisted of the stringing together of assorted syncopated themes. These tunes came from the songs and dances of the working people in the rural Midwest and the South. The most outstanding folk rag composers were Charles Hunter of Tennessee and Tom Turpin of St. Louis. Even though Hunter and Turpin were contemporaries of Scott Joplin, who is considered to be the major figure in the development of classic ragtime, their works conceptually precede the classic rag. Furthermore, a folk rag written in an early

\(^6\) Shafer and Riedel, \textit{The Art of Ragtime}, 31.
style may have been published or played at any point in the ragtime era.7

The medley format of folk rags gave way to a more formalized structure, that of the Classic rag. The focal point of Classic ragtime was in St. Louis, and the folk rag composer Tom Turpin became its champion and leader. Traveling musicians from across the country gathered at Turpin's Rosebud Cafe to exchange ideas. Scott Joplin was one of those traveling musicians. He arrived in St. Louis around 1902, as soon as his publisher, John Stark, had become established there.

Classic ragtime has been described as "a form with the style of musical composition which was created and developed by Scott Joplin, combining the folk music of the Missouri and Mississippi Valleys with the European tradition in Classical music of the nineteenth century."8 The term "classic" was used in the sense of "best of its type" and was promoted vigorously by John Stark in publishing the main works of Scott Joplin and his contemporaries. The purpose of such vigorous promotion was to offset the widely held conception of ragtime as a low-class and shoddy musical product.9

Joplin's idea was to develop the rag as a composed music emphasizing thoroughly worked-out harmonies, voice-leadings and other rhythmic considerations as well as the necessary syncopation. He was the most influential ragtime composer of all time, mainly because he wrote the first popular ragtime hit, "Maple Leaf Rag" (1899). Joplin combined the traditions of Afro-American Folk music with nineteenth century European romanticism; he collected the black midwestern folk rag ideas as raw material for the creation of original strains. Thus, his rags are heavily pentatonic, with liberal use of "blue notes." This combination of syncopated folk art and European composition, along with the march form, resulted in the Classic rag.10

Scott Joplin's work can be divided into three periods, according to Jay Trebor Tichenor:

1. The early period (1897-1904), characterized by simple, flowing melodic lines of great beauty and much folk inspiration, such as "Weeping Willow," "Easy Winners," and "The Entertainer;"
2. The peak period, which started about 1904 with "Cascades," when his rags began to strut; his conceptions are more expansive and there is a new grandiose quality; "Fig Leaf" is a masterpiece of this period; and
3. The experimental period (1909-1914), characterized by rags with bolder harmonies and more elements of romantic classical music; "Euphonic Sounds" and his opera Treemonisha are in line with the third period and the few rags of this period may be offshoots from his work on the opera.11

10. Jasen and Tichenor, Rags and Ragtime, 83.
James Scott and Joseph Lamb were two popular composers who fell into the "Joplin School" of classic ragtime. The works of these two composers (along with Joplin's) are generally differentiated from the more commercial or imitative products of the era. The rags of Joplin, Scott, and Lamb show a combination of imagination and craftsmanship, all within the boundaries of classic ragtime, yet each of the three composers were different in many ways. While Scott usually wrote in one sustained mood, Joplin's rags often expressed different moods within one composition. Joseph Lamb carried this idea a step further and varied moods not only from section to section but from phrase to phrase.12

The form of the Classic rag was that of most European and American marches, which was as AA BB A CC DD. Other facets obviously borrowed from the march tradition included modulations to the subdominant in the Trio or C section, with a two or four bar leading-in modulation. The first two strains were usually similarly bright and memorable in character, and the third strain, or Trio, was more rhythmic, with a final strain, which was more fluid and lyrical. In many rags, dynamic activities increase in the final strain, giving a culminating effect.

Rags are generally classified as linear or rounded in form. A linear rag, such as Joplin's "Maple Leaf Rag,"

could have as many as four new strains within the bi-sectional rag structure. A rounded rag has the first section followed by one or two new strains with the return of either its first or second strain, or the first strain of the second section, as in Joplin's "The Chrysanthemum" (Intro AA BB A/CC DD C).

In addition to being in linear or rounded form, some rags are motto rags, in which the composer uses a memorable figure or motive at the beginning of all or most of the strains. The term "contrapuntal rag" could also be applied if there was a linear melody in the right hand, counterbalanced by a melodic line shaped by the uppermost notes of the chords or octaves of the left hand part.

The popularity of ragtime was due in large part to the highly industrious New York publishing houses, which were collectively referred to as Tin Pan Alley. These publishers were so eager to make financial gains by selling great quantities of music that quality began to decline. The result was that the music, instead of flowing from abstract artistic inspiration, or folk sources, became "a commodity to be manufactured, advertised, bought and sold like any other product."

Following the Classic rag was Popular ragtime (1906-1912), which was simpler and easier to play (partly due to the pressure of Tin Pan Alley on composers to create

something playable by a wider public audience). Popular ragtime is typified by Charles L. Johnson's "Dill Pickles Rag," which was the next big hit after Joplin's "Maple Leaf Rag." "Dill Pickles" was the first Tin Pan Alley million-selling hit; it established the form for most rags that followed. The chief device that made "Dill Pickles" such a hit was the "three-over-four" pattern, which will be discussed in the section dealing with performance considerations.

Johnson made a change in Joplin's rag structure, creating a three-section rag. Instead of using the AA BB A CC DD formula, he substituted a repeat of either the first or second strain, which saved him from having to write a fourth strain. Thus his form as AA BB A CC AA or AA BB A CC BB. For "Dill Pickles," however, the structure is Intro AA B A CC B.

The popularity of ragtime peaked around 1912, which also marks the beginning of advanced ragtime. The pressure exerted by Tin Pan Alley to create popular hits was eased, encouraging experiments with musical ideas. The content was changed more so than the form. Unusual harmonies, new dissonances and blues elements were incorporated in traditional ragtime writing to tantalize the then-jaded listener. The "ragging" of classics blossomed forth in this era (1913-1917), with such titles as "Operatic Rag" and

"Hungarian Rag" by Julius Lenzberg, as well as George Cobb's
"Russian Rag," which was taken from Rachmaninoff's Prelude,
Opus 43, No. 2. Accordingly, the advanced rag was not only
harmonically advanced, but was more difficult to play than
the preceding popular rag.\textsuperscript{15}

The period from 1918-1928 was the era of Novelty
ragtime, which was the product of American pianists with
classical music training who originally arranged and per-
formed popular songs on piano rolls. Zez Confrey's warm-up
exercise, "Kitten on the Keys," established and maintained
this latest development of ragtime; it was one of the top
three rags in the number of recordings. The distinctive
sound of the Novelty rag is a combination of the influence
of the French impressionists--Debussy and Ravel--with
contrasting rhythms as used by the piano roll arrangers.
Chromaticism is wide-spread in Novelty rags, as is the use
of consecutive fourths in the melody voicing.

During this same period Stride ragtime emerged from the
eastern United States. It made use of a piano style that
was a good deal more forceful than the average ragtime piano
style. It was strong, exhibitionistic, refined, and ex-
tremely challenging. Stride was a way of playing ragtime as
well as a type of composition. It came to mean "the

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 171.
syncopation alternating between the right and left hands and the counter-melodies created by a moving bass line."\textsuperscript{16}

These Stride piano players, commonly called "New York Ticklers," viewed the rag as a framework upon which they could make changes as various ideas and tricks come to them in the spontaneity of performance. This was in sharp contrast to Joplin's idea of the rag as a polished composition.

James P. Johnson and Luckey Roberts were the two most prominent Stride players during their time, but the name that is usually associated with Stride (and ragtime in general) today is Eubie Blake (1883-1983). He is known not only for his talent as a performer and composer, but also for the fact that he survived from the turn of the century until his recent death and was able to transmit much of his knowledge to our generation. Eubie Blake lived to be 100 years old, and his career was on an upswing when he died. During the 1960's he came out of retirement and became increasingly more active in recordings, performances, and public appearances until his death in 1983. The current Broadway musical "Eubie" is made up of songs which Blake wrote, in many cases for Broadway musicals of the 1920's.

Jelly Roll Morton (1885-1941), known as a jazz pianist, has sometimes been referred to as the bridge between ragtime and jazz. He developed a unique style of playing which was

\textsuperscript{16. Ibid., 240.}
referred to as the New Orleans Style or simply as "Jelly Roll" style. His sound reflected his upbringing in cosmopolitan New Orleans, mixed with the blues and the syncopated sounds of ragtime. There was nothing haphazard about Morton's style of playing, but it did include uncommon voicings and unexpected rhythmic patterns.

Ragtime virtually disappeared during the last part of the 1920's and 1930's, but the year 1941 marks the beginning of the ragtime revival. This revival was accomplished with the vital help of the recording industry as musicians, critics and listeners in turn began playing ragtime as an alternative to the big band swing sounds. This revival has continued to the present as Joshua Rifkin's recordings of Scott Joplin's rags have influenced students of classical music in conservatories and universities. Rifkin recorded three volumes titled Piano Rags by Scott Joplin, which included the following: (Volume I) "Maple Leaf Rag," "The Entertainer," "Gladiolus Rag," "Ragtime Dance," "Fig Leaf Rag," "Scott Joplin's New Rag," "Euphonic Sounds," "Magnetic Rag;" (Volume II) "Elite Syncopations," "Eugenia," "Leola," "Solace," "Pineapple Rag," "Rose-Leaf Rag," "Bethena," "Paragon Rag;" (Volume III) "Stoptime Rag," "Original Rags," "Weeping Willow," "Cascades," "Chrysanthemum," "Sugar Cane," "Non pareil," and "Country Club". Perhaps the most important factor in bringing

17. Piano Rags by Scott Joplin, performed by Joshua Rifkin (Nonesuch 71248, 71264, 71305.)
classic ragtime to the general audience was the 1974 motion picture The Sting, in which the following six Scott Joplin rags were used as background music: "Solace," "The Entertainer," "Easy Winners," "Pineapple Rag," "Gladiolus Rag," and "Ragtime Dance." One of these, "The Entertainer," became a pop hit and was the number one recording of 1974.

Along with this revival, which was given impetus by the music from The Sting, another revival has occurred in the area of ragtime music for the xylophone. Before discussing the role of the xylophone in ragtime music, let us briefly examine the history of this curious instrument.

History of the Xylophone and Its Use in Ragtime

Xylophones, marimbas, and other keyboard percussion instruments have common ancestors that date as far back as 3500 B.C. Various keyboard percussion instruments were found in Egypt, China, Japan, and Indonesia during the pre-Christian times. The bars on these instruments could consist of a variety of materials including wood, metal, bamboo, or even stone. Our modern-day xylophone has its ancestor in Europe, where it was mentioned in 1511 by organist Arnold Schlick in his book Spiegel der Orgelmacher und Organisten. He called it "hultze glechter," which

18. Soundtrack from The Sting (Marvin Hamlish, piano), conducted and adapted by Marvin Hamlish (MCA 390).

means "wooden percussion." In 1538 Hans Holbein depicted in his cycle of woodcuts a xylophone hanging from the neck of a skeleton in The Dance of Death. Praetorius described a similar instrument nearly a century later in his Syntagma Musicum, published in 1620.

The xylophone of the Middle Ages was a simple, crude instrument. It consisted of wooden slabs loosely strung together, or resting upon belts of straw. The Germans named it "Strohfidel" which meant "straw fiddle." For many years the xylophone was an instrument of wandering musicians, until it gained prominence as a solo instrument and was eventually incorporated into the orchestra.

Three centuries elapsed between the first mention of the xylophone in Europe and its appearance as an orchestral/solo instrument. This recognition and acceptance of the xylophone was no doubt encouraged by the extensive concert performances of a Polish Jew named Michael Josef Gusikov (1806-1837). Before appearing in Paris in 1836, he was heard in Moscow, Kiev, Odessa, Vienna, Leipzig, and Berlin. He attracted the notice of Mendelssohn, Chopin, and Liszt, all of whom spoke of his expertise. Mendelssohn said, "I must own that the skill of the man beats everything that I could have imagined, for with his wooden sticks resting on straw, his hammers also being of wood, he produces all that

20. Ibid., 188.
is possible with the most perfect instrument."\textsuperscript{21} Gusikov's programs consisted of arrangements of well-known works and his own pieces; his transcriptions of Paganini's "La Campanella" always won him a standing ovation. It is tragic that illness interrupted his career very early, for he died at 31 years old of tuberculosis at Aix-la-Chapelle in the middle of a performance.\textsuperscript{22}

Another xylophonist named Sankson Jabukovsky performed in Paris in 1886, and was mistaken for Gusikov by a local magazine, printing that he had been heard there thirty years earlier. Around 1870 the Parisian Charles de Try also enjoyed fame as a virtuoso on a xylophone-like instrument which he called the \textit{Tryphone}.\textsuperscript{23}

It is probable that some of these European xylophonists traveled to the United States for concerts, since Americans were learning to play the instrument. The popularity of the xylophone (along with that of ragtime) increased in this country; from approximately 1890 to 1935 the xylophone experienced what most refer to as its "golden age".

This popularity was greatly influenced by the acoustic properties of the xylophone, which produced very clear recordings for the acoustic phonograph. These early


\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
recordings were intended primarily for use in the coin-slot machines as a form of entertainment for the public. Since the patrons of these machines preferred to hear good recordings, instruments such as the xylophone and banjo were used quite often because they recorded well using the acoustic process. Perhaps not by coincidence, the popularity of the xylophone faded with the advent of the electronic recording process.

According to William Cahn, the earliest known xylophone recording was made in 1889 by A. T. Van Winkle for the North American Phonograph Company, which was formed by Thomas Edison. It was part of the first series of records made for use in the coin-slot machines, and included such titles as "My Treasure Polka," selections from "Owls Overture," and "Galop Brilliant." 24

Between 1896 and 1901, while Classic ragtime was just beginning to form, Charles P. Lowe recorded twenty-one different titles for the Edison Company. 25 The xylophone was yet to be closely associated with ragtime, since most of the music on Lowe's recordings consisted of polkas, galops, waltzes, and popular songs.

One of the first ragtime solos to be recorded on xylophone was the "St. Louis Rag," recorded by Chris Chapman


25. Ibid., 136.
in October of 1906. From this year to approximately 1915, roughly the period of Popular ragtime, the most popular xylophone recording artists were Albert Benzler, Chris Chapman, El Cota, Charles Daab, and Billy Dorn. In 1911 El Cota recorded two popular ragtime pieces, "Red Pepper" and the "Black and White Rag," displaying his style of playing which was technically more advanced than that of most of his contemporaries. It is generally agreed that George Hamilton Green (1893-1970) was the greatest xylophonist of the first half of this century. From 1917 to 1940 he was included on literally hundreds of recordings. In addition to his highly technical, yet fluid style, he created an extensive popular recital repertoire for the xylophone much as Fritz Kreisler did for the violin. Green recorded his own solos and transcriptions, two of the most popular being Kreisler's "Schoen Rosmarin" and "Liebesfreud." Among his original works were novelties, salon waltzes, popular dance tunes and a remarkable collection of ragtime tunes. Some of Green's currently popular xylophone solos are "Cross Corners," "Chromatic Fox Trot," "Jovial Jasper," "Rainbow Ripples," "Log Cabin Blues," "The Whistler," and "Triplets."

George Green's older brother Joseph was an accomplished xylophonist as well, and the two brothers made records for most all of the recording labels of the acoustic era (1918-1925). Joe Green's Xylophonia is a very popular rag

26. Ibid., 140.
today, being played just as much as those of his brother, George.

After World War I there was a big demand for dance music, both live and recorded. During this period from 1918 to 1925 the Green brothers were heard playing with several of the top recording bands. The Guatemalan marimba bands also became popular at the same time, and had names such as the Blue and White Marimba Band of Guatemala, The Imperial Marimba Band, the Cardenas Marimba Band, and the Hurtado Brothers Royal Marimba Band. 27

The Green brothers made recordings of dance music in 1917 and 1918 with the American Marimbaphone Band. Another recording dance band at this time was the Yerkes Jazzarimba Orchestra, which was directed by a xylophonist, Harry A. Yerkes. Through these recordings, other players heard and later imitated Green's "ragging" style, such as Lou Chiha "Friscoe" and Jess Libonati. 28

In 1925, toward the end of the Novelty ragtime era (and the Acoustic era), the age of electronic recording began. This year also marks the beginning of the record companies' decline. As this decline continued, most xylophonists had to make the change from center stage soloist to utilitarian players, usually working for the broadcasting networks. George Green was one who could not make this transition. He

27. Ibid., 143.
28. Ibid.
is said to have had a nervous breakdown when he put down his mallets in the middle of a radio broadcast in 1946 and walked out of the studio, never to return.  

A contemporary of George Green (but a few years younger) is Harry Breuer (b. 1901), who lives today in New York. Breuer's career grew along with electronic technology, as he made the transition from playing in the pit orchestras of the major "presentation houses" to performing in the Brooklyn Studios for Warner Brothers, and then working in radio and television broadcasting for more than four decades. Some of his more popular xylophone compositions of the 20's and 30's include "Back Talk," "Powder Puff," "On the Woodpile," and "Bit O'Rhythm," and he is now publishing some new xylophone rags as well.

Other prominent xylophonists of the 20's and 30's were Sammy Herman, Billy Dorn, Eddie Rubsam, Red Norvo, and Jack Connor. Red Norvo was a long time staff percussionist in the Chicago studios of NBC. His earliest known recordings were made in 1933, and included "Knockin' On Wood," "Hole in the Wall," and "Dance of the Octopus". Even though he was regarded as a ragtime soloist of equal ability with Bruer and

30. Ibid., 52.
Green, he is best remembered as an innovative, improvisatory jazz player.31

Because ragtime styles were so varied during the brief history of the period, five representative rags have been selected for closer study to represent some of those styles. Norvo's "Dance of the Octopus" has been chosen as an example of experimentation in early four-mallet writing for the xylophone. Of the remaining selections to be examined, Johnson's "Dill Pickles" and Confrey's "Kitten on the Keys" represent the Popular and the Novelty rag respectively. Both were published not only as piano rags, but as xylophone solos with piano accompaniment, which in this case have been transcribed for marimba ensemble by Bob Becker and the author, respectively. Green's "Triplets" also falls into the Novelty rag category, but was originally written as a showcase for the xylophone. The piano accompaniments for this rag and "Dance of the Octopus" have also been arranged for marimba ensemble by Becker and Gordon Stout, respectively. Before discussing performance considerations, it seems appropriate to examine the musical elements of these selections.

31. Michael Brooks, liner notes, Red Norvo and his Allstars (Epic JEE 22009).
Chapter III

EXAMINATION OF SELECTED RAGS BY JOHNSON,

CONFREY, HAMILTON, AND NORVO

Zez Confrey's "Kitten on the Keys" (c. 1921, Mills Music, Inc.) was arranged for xylophone solo with piano accompaniment by Sammy Herman. As with most piano rags arranged for xylophone solo, the xylophone part is basically that of the original right hand piano part.

This is, of course, a Novelty rag with a form of Intro AA BB A' CC, a three part structure rather than the five part Classic rag. The key scheme departs from the standard format in that it goes from the tonic F to the lowered submediant $D_{b}$, with a return of the first section before going to the subdominant $B_{b}$ at the Trio, which in this case is the last section of the rag.

One of the striking features of this piece is its abundant consecutive fourths. In the first three measures of the introduction, the right hand piano part is almost entirely consecutive fourths (Example 1).

The second strain is characterized by this feature also (Example 2).


Another common device in this rag is the three-over-four cross rhythm pattern, where a three-beat rhythmic pattern is used in contrast to the four-four meter. This pattern of the first strain is rhythmically altered on its return following the second strain, along with a slightly modified four bar introduction (Example 3).

Example 3. Zez Confrey, "Kitten on the Keys," mm. 47-54.

The third main feature of this piece is chromaticism, most in the form of lower neighbor tones (see Example 3, mm. 51-53). Some additional chromaticism occurs in the last four measures of the second strain and in the last four bars of the piece (Example 4).

Charles Johnson's "Dill Pickles" is the best known representative of the Popular rag, as it was the first million-selling hit from Tin Pan Alley. It set the precedent for having three rather than four strains, and for the use of the three-over-four pattern. This device is found throughout the first strain (Example 5).


The arrangement of "Dill Pickles" selected for this performance is scored for xylophone solo and four marimbas by Bob Becker, the most prominent xylophonist of the 70's and 80's. Included in the marimba accompaniment are sustained counter-melodies which were not possible in the solo piano versions. These flowing, descending lines serve as a contrast to the rhythmic solo part in the first strain. In the second strain most of the parts are of similar rhythmic nature, utilizing two rhythmic motifs: a) \[ \begin{array}{c} \hline 1 \hline \end{array} \begin{array}{c} 1 \hline \end{array} \begin{array}{c} 1 \hline \end{array} \begin{array}{c} 1 \hline \end{array} \], and b) \[ \begin{array}{c} 1 \hline \end{array} \begin{array}{c} 1 \hline \end{array} \begin{array}{c} 1 \hline \end{array} \begin{array}{c} 1 \hline \end{array} \]. There is a modulation from the tonic G to the subdominant C for the third strain, or Trio. This section provides dynamic and rhythmic contrast, being soft.
the first time through and the xylophone entering on the repeat with a continuous eighth note line. The last section is a return of the second strain with some alterations in the solo part. Here the first of the two rhythmic motifs is changed slightly and played an octave higher. The second motive is also slightly altered to be played in a higher range (Example 6).

Example 6. Charles Johnson, "Dill Pickles," mm. (a) 22-25, and (b) 71-74.

a.

\[ \text{music notation} \]

b.

\[ \text{music notation} \]

As with many xylophone solos, a tag has been added as a closing statement for the piece (Example 7).

Example 7. Charles Johnson, "Dill Pickles," mm. 87-92 (Becker arrangement).
"Triplets" has been selected as an example of George Hamilton Green's stylistic writing for the xylophone. As the name suggests, triplets are part of the rhythmic patterns in each strain. The traditional modulation to the subdominant at the trio is presented here along with a three part form of AA BB A CC.

Whereas "Dill Pickles" is the combination of a syncopated line (melody) and a continuous, even rhythm (accompaniment), "Triplets" has a counter-melody in each strain, often with syncopation in contrast to that of the solo part (Example 8).

Example 8. George H. Green, "Triplets," mm. 5-9.

The rhythmic patterns of the second strain provide a stop-time accompaniment in contrast to the first and third strains. This stop-time effect has been taken one step further by Bob Becker in his arrangement of "Triplets". On the first time through the second strain, the accompaniment is made more transparent by removing the ascending eighth note line and substituting it with more of a stop-time pattern (Example 9).
Example 9. George H. Green, "Triplets," mm. 22-25 of the (a) original piano part and (b) the Robert Becker arrangement (condensed marimba parts).

\[\text{Example 9. George H. Green, "Triplets," mm. 22-25.}\]

The third strain, or Trio, is a combination or counter-melody in the accompaniment and stop-time breaks alternating in two-measure phrases (Example 10).

Example 10. George H. Green, "Triplets," mm. 59-62.

\[\text{Example 10. George H. Green, "Triplets," mm. 59-62.}\]

The tag is called an "ad lib Break" on the original version. We can speculate that George Hamilton Green rarely, if ever, played his rags exactly the same way each time; he would improvise on the melody, since his recordings
of the same piece were frequently very different. Perhaps Bob Becker was emulating the "ragging" style of Green with his use of syncopated, accented double-stops in patterns combined with alternated single notes.

A serious drawback in this arrangement of "Triplets" is that the xylophone part is published in its original form, with none of Becker's additions written out. Perhaps he is making a statement about playing ragtime, as did David A. Jasen in his book, *Recorded Ragtime*:

> The good ragtime musician, like the good jazz musician, is one who is not only technically proficient on his instrument, but who can also successfully communicate his joy and tastefully improvise and embellish within the boundaries of the form of composition. To create within stated limits is the ideal for the performer of ragtime.

Red Norvo's "Dance of the Octopus" is an example of early four-mallet writing for xylophone and marimba. This piece was published in 1935 as being for either instrument, but a 1933 recording by Norvo and a more recent recording by the Eastman Marimba Band include "Dance of

34. Red Norvo, "Dance of the Octopus," performed by Red Norvo and His All Stars (Epic JEE22009, 1974) side 1, band 4.
the Octopus" played on the marimba. This piece, being in a much slower tempo than most xylophone rags, seems to be more suited to the additional resonance of the marimba.

The form of this piece is quite different from most xylophone rags; it has a lengthy introduction followed by a form of AA B A C, with the C section serving as a coda.

While there are many advanced harmonic and rhythmic features that are not characteristic of ragtime music, the section following the introduction is very much reminiscent of Joplin's Classic ragtime, with its stately tempo and syncopated melody. The solo part is much like a piano rag, with the right hand having a syncopated melodic line and the left hand providing a steady, duple rhythm (Example 11).


The two recordings of "Dance of the Octopus" have several differences in interpretation; these will be discussed in the chapter dealing with performance considerations.
Chapter IV

PERFORMANCE CONSIDERATIONS

The following discussion deals with performance considerations pertaining to the four selected rags. Areas that will be addressed include sticking, articulation, mallet choice, and interpretation.

Some differing ideas appear in comparing Sammy Herman's arrangement of "Kitten on the Keys" for xylophone solo with recordings of Zez Confrey and Claude Bolling performing it on piano. The most striking feature of the xylophone version is that additions have been made, presumably to make the xylophone part more interesting. For example, at several phrase endings where the piano originally had a whole note chord, the xylophone part has a rhythmic extension of the chord using syncopation to fill up the measure (Example 12).

Example 12. Zez Confrey, "Kitten on the Keys," m. 12 a) original right hand piano part, b) xylophone part from the Herman arrangement.

The tempo is marked "moderato--not too fast," yet the Confrey recording is taken rather quickly as compared to Claude Bolling's rendition. Perhaps Confrey was playing it at a comfortable tempo for him, whereas Bolling was aiming more at a stylistic interpretation of ragtime music, which is often not very fast.

The numerous double stops in this and most other rags are of great significance to keyboard percussionists. The combination of double stops and single notes results in frequent instances of two or more successive strokes with one hand, which becomes an important technical factor in regard to tempo. One of the primary performance problems inherent in "Kitten on the Keys" is that of approaching Confrey's performance tempo on piano with the numerous successive left hand strokes (assuming the performer is right-handed). In the first measure of the first strain, there are five successive strokes with the left hand to four in the right hand (Example 13).


When this pattern starts ascending in the next measure, there are then a total of fourteen successive left hand strokes before the phrase ends (Example 14).
In the second strain the sticking problems are mostly with the successive double stops. On the piano most of these would be played using different fingers for each double stop. On xylophone, however, they must all be played with the same two sticks, using both hands simultaneously. In the closing measures of this strain there is again predominant use of the left hand as it carries most of the melodic material (Example 15).


In the Trio, or C section, there are more successive strokes with the left hand; this time there are twenty in one phrase (Example 16).

In the last four bars of the Trio, the left hand part is similar in activity and importance to the last four measures of the second strain (Example 17).

Example 17. Zez Confrey, "Kitten on the Keys," mm. 95-98.

Another performance consideration is interpretation; whether to play straight eighth notes (as written) or swing style eighth notes, where two successive eighth notes on a downbeat are interpreted as the first and third notes of a triplet (\( \overline{\ \ } = \overline{\ \ \ \ \ } \) or \( \overline{\ \ \ \ \ } = \overline{\ \ \ \ \ } \) ).

In the Sammy Herman arrangement for xylophone solo, phrases written in dotted eights and sixteenths (which normally indicates swing style) are frequently alternated with phrases written in straight eighth notes. One might be inclined to change styles on these phrases, but Confrey's performance is done in swing style throughout, with the exception of measures 95 through 98, near the end of the Trio (Example 18).

There are some factors, however, in the xylophone arrangement that seem to indicate a change of style. The second strain begins with four sixteenth notes (Example 19), which of course cannot be played in a swing style. This seems to indicate the possibility of playing the rest of the section in even eighth notes, especially since the sixteenth note pattern returns during this strain.


---

When the introduction returns following this strain, Herman adds a melodic line based on sixteenths and eighths (Example 20), but the return of the first strain is obviously in swing style with the triplet variation of the first theme (Example 21).


---

The Trio is written completely in equal eighth notes in the Herman arrangement (except for the last four measures), but is more effective if performed in swing style for all but measures 95 through 98. This was the only part of the Trio played in straight eighths on the Confrey recording, and the accompaniment seems to support this change of style, since it is a deviation from the usual 'boom-chick' type pattern where the bass line is on one and three with the chords on two and four.

Example 22. Zez Confrey, "Kitten on the Keys," mm. 95-98.

These style changes are supported by the fact that Bolling uses swing style on several sections of this rag, mostly corresponding with the way in which the music has been notated.

The question of interpretation of style is not a problem in Charles Johnson's "Dill Pickles," which is written almost entirely in straight eighth notes, with very few triplets, and at a quick tempo which would be
inappropriate for swing style eighths. The only real indication for swing interpretation is in the last two measures of the tag which include dotted eighths and sixteenths (Example 23).


A performance of "Dill Pickles" would be rather stale if played exactly as written. To give the piece a more natural sound and "feel," one must add accents to some of the syncopation, especially the double stops. These accents on the double stops will enhance the three-over-four pattern for which this rag is famous (Example 24).


Becker's arrangement of "Dill Pickles" is an excellent model, as is his recorded performance with Nexus, yet the xylophone solo part is somewhat lacking in dynamic indications, especially in the first three strains. For example, the first strain is more effective if started at mezzo-forte with a crescendo for eight measures through

---

the end of the phrase. The next phrase should also be performed accordingly. The return of this section following the second strain should again be played with the same dynamics.

The three-over-four pattern in "Dill Pickles" is based on consecutive groupings of three eighth notes, whereas the grouping of "Kitten on the Keys" is a pattern of three beats (rather than three eighth notes) in four-four time. The double stops in "Dill Pickles" help to distinguish these three-note groups, especially when accented. The sticking patterns which result from these double stops include frequent double strokes with both right and left hands, but nowhere do we find the large number of consecutive strokes with one hand that is found in "Kitten on the Keys." The usual sticking pattern for the three-note groups is as follows: \[ LRLLRLLRLLRL. \]

There are of course, frequent changes in this pattern, depending on rhythm and the placement of double stops.

As mentioned earlier, the accents on the double stops enhance the character of the piece; accents can also be used on single notes to help create note groupings, as is shown in this example from the fourth strain of "Dill Pickles" (Example 25).

The sticking as indicated by Bob Becker in "Dill Pickles" is adequate, covering each section that may present a problem. In "Triplets," however, George Hamilton Green is so thorough as to indicate the sticking for each and every note in the xylophone solo.

The sticking problems that one is likely to encounter with this rag are the numerous right hand consecutive strokes, as compared to those with the left hand in "Kitten on the Keys." This becomes a problem only when a suitably fast performance tempo is desired along with accuracy in rhythm and in playing the notes. The first problem area would be the third and fourth measures of the first strain, where there are five consecutive right hand strokes (Example 26).

Example 26. George H. Green, "Triplets," mm. 7-8.

A similar problem is faced in the fifth through the eighth measures of the second strain (Example 27).
Example 27. George H. Green, "Triplets," m. 26-29.

It is evident from this example that a three-note pattern is present. The same procedure of accent placement should be followed here as it was in "Dill Pickles."

"Triplets" is written using dotted eighths and sixteenths for most of the consecutive, non-triplet notes. This would seem to indicate a swing style, yet there are some phrase endings, measures, and groups of measures which are written in even eighth-notes. This raises the question of whether or not to change the style for each instance of eighth-notes, or to maintain a swing style throughout the rag.

Two recordings which are currently available, featuring Gordon Stout and Bob Becker respectively, provide two distinctively different interpretations of "Triplets." The Stout recording with the Eastman Marimba Band seems more conservative; it does not have as many style changes as does the Becker recording with Nexus. Becker not only plays all of the even eighth-notes as such, but some of the dotted rhythms as well. For example, he changes the third measure of the first string to straight eighth notes, presumably to

38. George Green, "Triplets," performed by Gordon Stout (xylophone) and the Eastman Marimba Band (Mercury SR17508, 1976), side 2, band 7.
George Green, "Triplets," performed by Bob Becker and Nexus (Ultra Fi ULD2), side 1, band 1.
lead into the following measure (the end of the phrase)
which is written in that manner (Example 28).

Example 28. George H. Green, "Triplets," mm. 5-8 a) as
written and b) as played by Bob Becker.

Becker also changes the dotted rhythms to straight
eighth notes for the last five measures of the first strain,
only two of which are written as such (Example 29).

Example 29. George H. Green, "Triplets," mm. 15-19.

Stout's interpretation of this phrase is on the other
extreme; he plays the dotted rhythms as written and even
'swings' one of the two measures written in even eighth
notes.

The second strain leaves little question as to style,
since both Stout and Becker play the dotted and straight
rhythms as written. It should be added here that Becker takes numerous liberties with the written notes as well as the rhythms. The first time through this strain he changes the notes and rhythms of both the solo and accompaniment parts, but on the repeat he returns to the original style as written.

The Trio offers little opportunity for changes of style. Every measure has at least one triplet; this plus the dotted rhythms indicate swing style throughout the section.

The choice of mallets used by the xylophone soloist on "Triplets," along with "Kitten on the Keys" and "Dill Pickles" is, of course, up to the performer, but several specific types should be considered. Many players tend to associate hard plastic mallets for general use on the xylophone, but in this case such a bright sound is not needed since the mariba accompaniment will sound rather mellow. A softer plastic mallet such as the Good Vibes Polyball could be used. Depending upon whether the instrument has rosewood or synthetic bars, the player may choose to add a layer of moleskin to the mallet head, or use a very hard yarn mallet to help the xylophone blend with the marimba sound.

The mallets used on the marimba accompaniments should remain the same for all four rags. There are four marimba parts, except on "Dance of the Octopus," which has three (plus the solo marimba part). The middle marimba parts
should be played using a medium soft yarn mallet such as the Stevens SF4 or Balter 14. The lower part requires a soft rubber core wrapped with yarn, such as the Balter 17 or Musser M 223; the first player should use a medium to medium-hard yarn mallet so the counter-melodies will speak clearly. The mallet should not be so hard that it competes with the xylophone part.

The solo marimba part on "Dance of the Octopus" should be played using a medium-hard yarn mallet that will produce clear struck notes and smooth rolls, yet will not sound "clanky" in the lower register. Since a large portion of this piece is in a very pianistic style with right and left hand functions separated into melody and accompaniment, one might be inclined to use softer mallets in the left hand and harder ones in the right hand. However, there are too many instances where both hands function melodically to warrant this choice of mallets. Thus, a set of four medium-hard mallets is suggested, such as the Firth M3 or Balter 12.

As mentioned earlier, there are two recordings of "Dance of the Octopus" used for comparison in this discussion. The 1933 recording features Red Norvo on marimba with Benny Goodman on bass clarinet, Dick McDonough on guitar, and Artie Bernstein on bass. The 1976

recording features Gordon Stout on marimba with the Eastman Marimba Band playing an arrangement patterned after the published piano accompaniment. These two recordings provide contrast not only in instrumentation and timbre but also in the interpretation of the solo part.

One could assume that since Norvo composed "Dance of the Octopus" his recorded interpretation would be considered definitive. However, the Gordon Stout recording has some very interesting differences in interpretation. The tempo is slightly faster throughout the piece, but perhaps the most noticeable difference is the style of eighth notes. Stout plays the entire introduction as written, in straight eighth notes. Norvo, on the other hand, chooses to use swing style for measures 11 and 12, which are very similar to the opening phrase; he then uses straight eighth note interpretation throughout the introduction.

The first strain is played swing style on both recordings, and is written in dotted rhythms to indicate this (\[ \begin{array}{c} \frac{3}{8} \\ \frac{2}{8} \end{array} \]). In fact, the rest of the piece is played in this style, but not all of it is written with dotted rhythms. This inconsistency in notation was and still is very common; it has led to confusion in interpretation by many musicians, especially among those who did not grow up during the swing era.

40. Eastman Marimba Band (Mercury SRI 75108, 1976), side 2, band 3.
Whether these differences in interpretation of style are deliberate or accidental (perhaps the Eastman group had not previously heard the 1933 recording), each recording has features not found in the other. The tenuto chords in measure 15 and the chord in measure 16 are heavily accented by Stout, and played very lightly by Norvo. Stout's style seems to be more aggressive; Norvo's more relaxed and free-flowing (Example 30).

Example 30. Red Norvo, "Dance of the Octopus," mm. 15-16 a) as played by Gordon Stout and b) by Red Norvo

\[
\text{(detached)}
\]

At the section marked "Brillante" Stout's faster tempo gives more life to the sixteenth note figure (Example 31). The accompaniment figures in the subsequent measures are played very straight by the Eastman group, but on Norvo's recording, Goodman takes the inner line on bass clarinet and uses a considerable amount of rubato (Example 32).
Example 31. Red Norvo, "Dance of the Octopus," m. 27.

Norvo also adds rubato, tenuto chords, and rolls to the last phrase of this extended introduction (Example 33).

Example 33. Red Norvo, "Dance of the Octopus," mm. 33–36 a) as written and b) as played by Norvo.

From the beginning of the first strain through the rest of the piece, the differences in interpretation are very slight, except that Stout's version is played a little faster.
Since the use of four mallets was a very limited practice at the time, Norvo included in the published version an explanatory page with "instructions for hammering." He numbered the mallets (or hammers as they were called then) from right to left, with the outer mallet of the right hand being number one. This system is used by many vibists, including Gary Burton, and is based on the premise that the number one mallet is usually the melody voice. However, most marimbists use a left to right numbering system, with the outer mallet of the left hand being number one. One must be aware of this difference when examining chord voicings, or some impossible hand positions could result.

Norvo also includes information on four-mallet technique in his instructions:

To play No. 1 singly, the right hand is tipped slightly to the right so that No. 2 is raised leaving No. 1 free to strike, alone. The hand is tipped to the left and the same action reversed to play No. 2 alone. This also applies to No. 3 and No. 4 in the left hand.

This rotary motion of the hands is now quite common among marimba and vibe players, with some refinements having been made to suit each instrument.

Another statement in Norvo's instructions reads:

When four notes are to be played at once, with no markings above, they should always be played as in the example below.

While most of Norvo's sticking indications work well, some could be slightly altered to facilitate technique. For example, the sticking on the third beat in measure 27 could be changed from 3-2-3-1 to 4-2-3-1 (Example 34).

Example 34. Red Norvo, "Dance of the Octopus," m. 27.

The three-note chords in the following measure could be changed from 2 to 3. Thus, the ascending line is in the right hand and the descending voices are in the left hand, making the right hand positioning much easier while not creating too much difficulty for the left hand (Example 35).

Example 35. Red Norvo, "Dance of the Octopus," m. 28.

42. Ibid.
In measure 52 the chord on beat three will sound much fuller due to better hand position by utilizing the following sticking: 

Example 36. Red Norvo, "Dance of the Octopus," m. 52.

This mallet position should also be used for the chord on beat one of measure 57.

While Norvo's four-mallet technique was considered to be ahead of his time, these same techniques have now become common practice among most of today's marimbists. In fact, many new techniques for the marimba have evolved, including several types of four-mallet rolls.

A limited number of these occur in "Dance of the Octopus"; for reasons of stylistic consideration the traditional roll should be used.

The performer of xylophone rags should be reminded that special considerations should be dealt with regarding interpretation of style, observing note groups, addition of accents and dynamics when appropriate, mallet choices, sticking patterns, and even improvisation. It is also important to have a grasp of the ragtime idiom in order to properly perform music of that era, just as it is important to study other style periods in order to improve the performance of music from those periods.
Chapter V

CONCLUSIONS

The xylophone's greatest period of popularity was from approximately 1890 to 1935. During this era it was heard extensively on recordings, in dance bands, and in vaudeville acts. Many solos for the instrument, both original and transcribed, were published toward the end of this era. As the popularity of the xylophone declined, these solos went out of print.

In recent years, however, interest in these xylophone rags has been revived. Recordings by groups such as the Eastman Marimba Band, featuring Gordon Stout, and Nexus, featuring Bob Becker and William Cahn, have greatly influenced University percussion programs, which in turn have helped return xylophone rags to popularity. These rags have become a common element in percussion ensemble programs and solo recitals. In most cases, the piano accompaniment has been arranged for marimba ensemble, often with use of various percussive effects to give a vaudeville flavor to the piece. Several of these solos are now published for xylophone and marimba ensemble by William Cahn and Bob Becker. However, many are still out of print.
In addition xylophone rags are now used as teaching tools in both secondary schools and colleges to aid in the development of technique, sight reading, and general musicianship. They have expanded the repertoire for percussion ensemble programs, recitals, and even drum and bugle corps. In the future perhaps they will be arranged for xylophone solo with band or orchestra accompaniment, thus providing another outlet for the xylophone soloist.
Bibliography


Bush, Jeffrey E. "Interview with Harry Breuer," Percussive Notes, XVIII/3 (Spring/Summer 1980), 50-53.

Cahn, William L. "The Xylophone in acoustic Recordings (1877-1929)," Percussionist, XVI/2 (Spring/Summer 1979), 133-152.


Discography

Classic Rags and Ragtime Songs, cond. by T. J. Anderson (Columbia PL2974, 1975).

Digital Ragtime (Music of Scott Joplin), perf. by Joshua Rifkin (Angel DS-37331).

It Had to be You: Popular Keyboard From the Days of the Speakeasy to the Television Era (New World 298).

Jug Band Music (and Rags of the South), perf. by Maria Meldair and Joshua Rifkin (Everst 339).

Nola, perf. by the Eastman Marimba Band (Mercury SE 175108, 1976).


Ragtime Concert, perf. by Nexus (Ultra Fi UL DB2).

Red Norvo and His All Stars (Epic JEE 22009, 1974).


The Sting (soundtrack), arr. and cond. by Marvin Hamlisch (MCA 390).