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“Maple Leaf Rag” from *Terry Waldo: The Ohio Theater Concert* (Delmark Records)

“The Entertainer” from *Terry Waldo: The Ohio Theater Concert* (Delmark Records)

“The Dream Rag” from *Terry Waldo: The Soul of Ragtime* (Tomkins Square Records)

“Mississippi Rag” from *Waldo’s Ragtime Orchestra: Ragtime Classics, Volume 1*
(Musical Heritage Society)

“Proctology” from *Classic Waldo* (Metronome Records)

Our first step in converting the song to ragtime is to put it in 4/4 time. Ragtime has been written in 2/4 time, the same as marches were notated, but it is more common to write ragtime in the easier-to-read 4/4. The melody is converted to the new time signature and moved up an octave from the original. We have converted the left hand to the boom-chick pattern of most ragtime. A bass note is alternated with a chord usually centered around middle C.

 Audio 2

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Now we are going to change the melody into real ragtime. The top staff in the following example is our simple melody. The bottom staff is the simple melody notated in ragtime. The principal device used in syncopation is moving notes of the melody half a beat earlier than they naturally occur. For example, in the first full measure, the second note (C), is played on beat two and a half rather than three. Similarly, the last note in the measure (E), is the anticipated first note of the next measure.

 Audio 3

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RAGGING A SONG (HAPPY BIRTHDAY)

Although ragtime is now commonly described as written music that appeared on the scene before jazz, it was first introduced as improvised music. On the first recordings of ragtime—around the turn of the century—piano players are often heard playing differently on each take of the same tune. Eubie Blake credited Scott Joplin with writing ragtime down so that others could play it, but it was not common practice, perhaps in part because many of the early ragtime players could not read music. Moreover, rather than playing rags, the more common practice was to “rag” popular melodies. In this section, we are going to return to this tradition and demonstrate how to take a common theme (in our example, “Happy Birthday”) and turn it into various ragtime styles. These short arrangements also are useful as exercises for developing the techniques of playing ragtime.

Let’s look at the original melody, a waltz in 3/4 time. Here is a simple version.



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F C7 F

F7 Bb F C7 F

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