

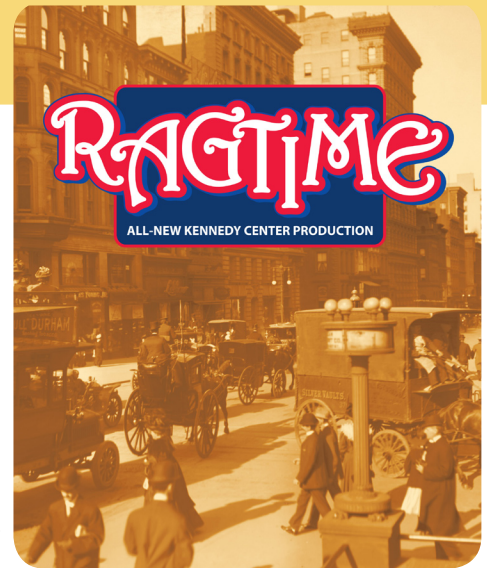
The Making of *Ragtime*

Friday, April 24, 2009

Grades 9-12

11 a.m.-12 p.m. ET

Curriculum Connections: American History and Language Arts National Standards for Music: 6, 7, 8, 9 and Theater: 5, 6, 7



About the Musical

The musical *Ragtime* is based on a much-acclaimed novel by E.L. Doctorow. *Ragtime* was published in 1975 and tells of the interconnection of a wealthy family, a poor immigrant and his daughter, and a Harlem musician in turn-of-the-century New York City. One by one their personal stories come alive as historic figures such as escape artist Harry Houdini, auto tycoon Henry Ford, famed educator Booker T. Washington, and chorus girl Evelyn Nesbit offer guidance and diversion. Together, their stories celebrate the struggle between tradition and independence...black and white...old and new...all in pursuit of the American dream in the land of opportunity.

About the Composer and Lyricist

Stephen Flaherty and Lynn Ahrens auditioned to do the score of *Ragtime* along with several other songwriting teams. They had to audition via demo tape and only had 11 days to write four songs. Of those four songs submitted, three songs remain in the show today and they are the title song, "Till We Reach That Day," and "Gliding." Ahrens and Flaherty spent the next three years turning this acclaimed novel into a musical with the help of Terrence McNally as the book writer or the librettist. The show opened in Toronto in 1996 and the first U.S. production premiered in Los Angeles in June 1997. *Ragtime* came to Broadway on January 18, 1998 at the Ford Center of the Performing Arts, newly restored for this production. The first national tour of the musical began in April 1998 in Washington, D.C. *Ragtime* won the songwriting duo the Tony Award®, Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle awards, and received two Grammy® nominations for their score of the Broadway musical. Ahrens and Flaherty teamed up again for the animated film *Anastasia* and in 1999 they returned to the stage with the musical *Seussical* based on the works of children's author Dr. Seuss.

Ragtime, The Music

The musical score features some of the era's most popular music, from ragtime to marches and gospel. Before the twentieth century, "ragged music" or ragtime was sweeping the nation. Ragtime was a widely popular style of music and played a major part in the development of jazz. By 1900, ragtime was played wherever African Americans lived, worked, and enjoyed themselves. Throughout the country, trained and untrained musicians taught the music to one another. The most popular form of ragtime music was instrumental and featured a march-tempo piece for piano or band with a heavy syncopated rhythm. The style was made famous by the creator of ragtime Scott Joplin, who fused European and African musical traditions. Ragtime's birth is dated to 1899 when Joplin published *Original Rags*. In 1900, "Maple Leaf Rag" established Joplin's reputation as the King of Rags, and also ensured him a small steady income from its royalties. Joplin was a serious musician who brought a classical sensibility to his music. His rags were short—only 86 bars long—but they were skillfully crafted. Joplin also



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composed for the lyric theater. His first opera, *Ragtime Dance*, was performed in 1899. Joplin's opera masterpiece was *Treemonisha*, which he self-published in 1911. Although the score received favorable reviews, the piece was not performed in its entirety until after Joplin's death. In the 1920s, jazz superseded ragtime and Joplin and his music were forgotten. The 1971 film *The Sting* renewed interest in ragtime, and many of Joplin's works were reissued. *Treemonisha* was staged in 1975, and in 1976 Joplin was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for its score.

About the Program

Go behind the scenes of the new Kennedy Center production *Ragtime* with moderator Michael Kerker, director of Musical Theater at ASCAP, as he explores the musical partnership between composer and lyricist. He's joined by acclaimed lyricist Lynn Ahrens and composer Stephen Flaherty to discuss their successful collaboration and their body of work, including the brand new production of *Ragtime*. Students also get a glimpse of the many elements — stage sets, lights, and costumes — needed to make a production come to life and hear some of the well-known songs from the musical performed by cast members.

Activities

1. Listen to several pieces of ragtime music and then describe the rhythms and melodies of the music. What similarities and differences do you hear between ragtime music and the music you regularly listen to today?
2. The ragtime era, from 1900 to the start of World War I, was a time of great change for the U.S. Make a list of what was happening at that time, historically and culturally. Listen to a few songs from the musical *Ragtime*. What historical and cultural aspects of the ragtime era do you hear reflected in the lyrics?

Resources

Books

Ragtime by E.L. Doctorow

Internet Resources

ahrensandflaherty.com/
artsedge.kennedy-center.org/jazzintime/index.html

Recordings

Songs from *Ragtime* — The Musical (1996 Concept Album)
Ragtime — The Musical (1998 Original Broadway Cast)

RAGTIME



Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty