



RAGTIME JUBILEE

TONY PARENTI'S

RAGTIMERS

&

RAGTIME

GANG



*Aiz*ology
JCD-21

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Recordially,
George H. Buck, Jr.

THE RAGTIMERS

Notes by Bob Aurthur

The unique and rather astounding CD of ragtime tunes is the direct and satisfying result of two men, both with definite ideas about jazz, getting together on one record date. One of them, Tony Parenti, is a clarinetist of long, yet underrated standing, who in this album emerges as one of the top-flight artists in the jazz world today. The other man, Rudi Blesh, was the recording director for Circle Records and has long held the recognized position of being in the vanguard of those all too few people who seek to document jazz on records in its proper category as an art form. These ragtime records are some of the outstanding results of this documentation.

Tony Parenti was born in 1900 in the city of New Orleans. His father, an Italian army bandmaster, saw to it that Tony had the proper classical music training starting from just about the time he should have been swinging a rattle rather than an fiddle.

But to follow the classics in those days in the Crescent City was a near impossibility for a boy with an ear for the great music that was being born there. And Tony was an apt student of the negro and white giants of that Golden, Bolden Age. He switched to the clarinet, and soon, he will proudly tell you, he was playing in some of the worst type dives and honky tonks in New Orleans...at first, in short pants.

One thing about Parenti was that he could read music, and for this reason he was invaluable. During the second decade of this century he played with the greatest names in white New Orleans jazz history. In 1916 Tony was offered a chance that, since then, has proved to have been his first opportunity at musical immortality. He was the first choice as the clarinetist with the *Original Dixieland Jazz Band*, but since his mother thought him too young, Tony did not make the trip that changed the entire course of popular American music.

All during the 'Twenties and 'Thirties Parenti played every type music imaginable...or records, on the radio, with Ted Lewis, and as 1st clarinetist with the

Radio City Music Hall band. Later on he turned back to small band jazz, first working with Eddie Condon, then in a band with Brunies, with Muggsy Spanier's band in Chicago, and leading his own band at Jimmy Ryan's for many years.

But all through the years Parenti carried with him a memory of other bands, bands that he had heard in his youth in New Orleans. He remembered it as great music and wondered why no one played it any more. He became convinced that it should be heard, and his conviction led him to Rudi Blesh and this CD.

Here, the music is documented as honestly as possible. Whether it sounds exactly like that music of forty and fifty years ago is extremely doubtful, but the notes are there, and the spirit is there, and that's really what is important. The difference is in the musicians, and who would expect musicians, or any men, for that matter, to turn back the pages fifty years? The men in this CD represent products of true progress in a real art form. they do not copy nor do they borrow from worn out cliches. the music is played the way it is felt, and what more can be asked?

True enough, the music was written out – taken from colorful, faded sheets, representing many hours of toil on the part of Parenti, the leader. but it was interesting to note what happened to this music during the actual session.

Tony would say: "OK, let's run it down for reading."

And this would be done until each man had the



feel of the unfamiliar number. Then there would be a take, and the music was forgotten. All afternoon there was only one re-take. Listen to the music, and you will know that nothing can swing like these records if the men are reading.

Here's the way the music can be classified. It's ragtime style played by a jazz band. Some of them are marches, and this adds yet another type music. PRALINE, one of the most beautiful blues recorded in many a year, is an original written by Parenti and Clarence Williams, and listen to that wonderful chorus by Archey. SUNFLOWER is a real rag; HIAWATHA, A SUMMER IDYLL, is certainly idyllic in title but hardly in the playing. HYSTERICS is subtitled A Trombone Fit and contains real humor. SWIPESY is a cakewalk, and GRACE AND BEAUTY is one of the greatest rags from old St. Louis, latter day capital of the art form.

Listen to Davison on these records, playing as he never has before in his life, and Archey, former King Oliver trombonist. Listen, too, to the great rhythm section of Dodds on drums, Barker on banjo, Sutton on piano, and St. Clair on tuba. The rhythm moves in a way that is really inspirational.

And listen to Parenti playing a real New Orleans style. You might be hearing him achieving the jazz immortality that he missed back in 1917.

These recordings were made on November 22, 1947, and there was some doubt just before the session whether the experiment would merely turn out well or whether it would, as it undoubtedly did, turn out to be great. The divining rod of any experiment is Wild Bill Davison, who, when happy, likes to do a 'bump' or two. Let it go on record that on that particular Saturday afternoon Wild Bill was doing the 'bumps' all over the joint.



THE RAGTIME GANG

Notes by Rudi Blesh

There's a certain rag player making his well-booked rounds today who tells his audiences: "Ragtime dead? Hell, it ain't even sick!"

He has a point: America's reawakened interest in ragtime is a truly remarkable thing. Ragtime, after all, was a national hit seventy long years ago! True, we have a certain curious interest (prompted by the TV westerns) in the horse and buggy – but we don't own a span of chestnut mares or drive a surrey. We may collect cylinder phonographs, but mainly to make into lamps – who plays them? We hoard Tiffany glass – who dares use it at today's prices?

But we've found ragtime again, we play it: we listen to it, we enjoy it just exactly as our great-grandparents did in 1904 at the St. Louis World Fair. Ragtime, in short, is not a museum piece but once again a living part of our ever-moving American scene. And it deserves to be. For it is not only the warmest, gayest, liltiest music ever born here. It is an enduring musical form as carefully and adroitly wrought as Mozart. It is America's first original musical creation – so native to our soil, our character, our very speech and thoughts, that two generations ago all of Europe instantly grasped its unique quality. While the Parisians were cakewalking in the streets to Sousa's band ragtime, the staid, unstampedable old London *Times* was declaring that "from nowhere else but the United States could such music have sprung...Nor can there be any doubt about its vigour, brimming over with life...Here for those who have ears to hear are the seeds from which a national art may ultimately spring.

But we soon lost sight of ragtime in our hurry about growing up. A World War, the advent of jazz, a flurry of inventional – buggy to automobile to airplane, magic lantern slide to movies to television – all the action took our minds elsewhere.

But ragtime kept right on, with or without a large public. Older players taught younger ones, and the music itself, of course, was preserved for all time on hundreds of printed scores. During the 1940's ragtime began emerging from its long underground stay, to find a new public to which this sprightly old music was a sprightly new music. We had found a long-lost wine cellar. In its old bottles the wine had mellowed, now sweeter and headier than ever.

But it was not a revival, not a resuscitation nor re-creation, not a period piece on a newly-dusted museum shelf – we simply discovered what had been going on all the time.

It was then that surviving older composers like J. Russel Robinson and the immoral Joseph F. Lamb got a new chance. And joining the ranks of the younger arrivals, came the veterans from ragtime's first brilliant period: virtuoso composing-pianists like Eubie Blake and James P. Johnson – and ragtime's greatest all-time clarinetist, Tony Parenti. All of them – like the early giants Scott Joplin and James Scott – are secure in ragtime's Hall of Fame. but Tony Parenti will have a special niche.

Tony was born in New Orleans wit the birth of this century and just when jazz was being born out of the marriage of ragtime and the blues. A one-time boy prodigy on the clarinet, Tony in later years has fitted with equal ease and grace into the surroundings of symphony orchestra or jazz combo.

But Parenti's heart belongs to ragtime. Way, way back in 1947 he came to the Circle Records office in New York. Circle was a little company that Harriet Janis and I had organized to document jazz and Jelly Roll Morton, barrelhouse and the blues. Inexplicably, we had forgotten ragtime. But Tony came, to find a willing listener in Hansi, as everyone call Mrs. Janis. Tony wanted to record a ragtime band album. He came prepared: he had made full musicianly arrangements of classic rags for a seven-piece band and even included a beautiful composition of his own, Praline. On paper, confessedly, it looked

music like just another jazz session, with front line of cornet clarinet, and trombone, and rhythm section of piano, banjo, tuba, and drums. In rehearsal, however, it was the proverbial Something Else. Tony had brought off what had eluded two generations of arrangers, the instrumentation of piano ragtime without going over into jazz. Beyond his obvious virtuosity and his impeccable sense of style, this arranging feat may eventually prove to be Tony Parenti's unique contribution to ragtime development.

Tony's Circle records led to a ragtime concert in New York that elicited praise from the Herald Tribune's famous composer-critic.

Virgil Thomson who hailed Parenti as "the Master of ragtime execution." Then, with Mrs. Janis solidly involved, the records next led to my writing, with her, of the first ragtime history. They All Played Ragtime was published in 1950, has since appeared in many editions. (The present edition contains a whole folio of new ragtime compositions written especially for it.) The book immediately became a rallying point for the whole new ragtime generation, who refer to it as "the Bible."

Circle and its records are gone. Tony's faithful advocate, Hansi Janis, is gone too. But ragtime and Tony Parenti roll on, as this present beautiful album, Ragtime Jubilee, will prove to the last



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Tony found a new and eager sponsor in George H. Buck, Jr. whose Jazzology record label has supported jazz for years. Tony I suspect, came to George as he came to Hansi and me years ago, his homework all done and his star personnel already chosen and rehearsed. Larry Conger, formerly with Turk Murphy, is the clean-phrasing clear trumpet. Trombonist Charlie Bornemann has held forth with greats like Yank Lawson and Art Hodes. Don Franz is the phenomenal tuba player who anchors the St. Louis ragtime on the Mississippi riverboat the Goldenrod, if not the boat itself. Pops Campbell is a jazz drummer whose nickname came from the Boston Pops Orchestra with whom he is welcome whenever the longhair mood overcomes him. Dr. Edmond Souchon needs no introduction. Guitarist, singer, raconteur, and ex-officio member of the Jack Daniels staff, he is a great surgeon on the side. Friend of Jelly Roll, King Oliver Satchmo, and everyone else, he is a (very much) living jazz legend. Professor John W. Parker, Jr. is also on his way to becoming a legend. Sipping the syncopated ragtime potion, he wriggles out of his English professor personality into the other one: Knocky Parker, ragtime professor, ivory tickler, king of the keyboard. And, in the middle, "living a ragtime life" is Maestro Parenti.

Here is an album that is certain to become a legend, too. Just dig it, and you'll see why.



The CD may well be one of the most important ones in our entire Jazzology catalogue. Very few full jazz bands recordings have been attempted in the ragtime idiom. Serious interpretation with authenticity and knowledge performed by qualified jazzmen are welcomed contributions indeed to the treasury of recorded jazz.

Rudi Blesh, who wrote the latter half of the text for this CD, is one of the most authoritative critics in the field of jazz and ragtime. His book, SHINING TRUMPETS, is a must for all serious jazz connoisseurs. In addition, we especially recommend his book, THEY ALL PLAYED RAGTIME, written in collaboration with Harriet Janis. This book has been through several printings and revisions and has become established as the most authoritative book on the subject of ragtime. If you have enjoyed this CD and desire more background on ragtime this book is highly recommended for your jazz reference library.

Tony Parenti may also be heard leading his own all-star band on Jazzology JCD-1, TONY PARENTI AND HIS NEW ORLEANIANS. In addition his clarinet artistry may be heard on Jazzology JCD-2, WILD BILL DAVISON AND HIS JAZZOLOGISTS and JCD-20, ART HODES AND HIS ALL-STAR STOMPERS.

If you would like a complete free catalogue of both Jazzology and GHB Records, just send us your name and address. We are always pleased to hear from those who enjoy our CDs of authentic jazz.

JCD-1
**TONY PARENTI AND HIS
 NEW ORLEANIANS**



JCD-91
**PARENTI-DAVISON ALL STARS
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