

Joshua Rifkin Plays Scott Joplin's Piano Rags (2007)

Written by bluesever

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Joshua Rifkin - piano

Ever since I first heard Joshua Rifkin's first LP of the Scott Joplin rags (when searching for music to play along with Super 8 silent comedies back in the early 70s), I have been in love with these recordings. Rifkin's sensitive playing finds a dignity and variety of moods in these rags, waltzes, senerades, dances, etc., that is simply astonishing. This music is the link between romantic classical music and early jazz, and it combines some of the finest elements of both. Having a classicly trained musician perform it (vs. someone from the stride or barrelhouse - much less honkytonk! - school) reveals much of the subtle beauty and invention in these compositions...

Once you've heard this, both the "fingerbreaker" high-speed approach to ragtime that preceded this, and the Hamlish-ized popularization of this music that came later, fade into insignificance! And having nearly all of the 3 original LPs on a single CD is fantastic. My ONLY complaint is that the recordings themselves, particularly the first group from 1970, seem somewhat flat and lacking in the rich tone and dynamics that we expect nowadays. No matter, these performances are wonderful. No other recordings of Joplin come close - do yourself a favor and grab this one! ---Michael S. Goldfarb

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I've always been a big fan of ragtime, and have many records and CD's in my collection. This has always been my favorite recording of Scott Joplin. Rifkin plays clearly and smoothly when called for, and the dynamics make each piece a delight to hear. Other recordings I've heard sound "choppy" or rushed compared to this disc; Joplin himself stated that his pieces were not to be played fast. Other recordings I've heard have way too much pedal, making them "muddy." This one is perfect... a little pedal at the right time, but never too much. The large-room auditorium sound of this recording only adds to its charm: it obviously wasn't recorded in a small, dampened studio; even so, each note is distinct. In addition, Rifkin is quite faithful to the original score. Other performers will stick in too many embellishments so that the music is no longer as Joplin wrote it. Rifkin sprinkles a few of his own grace notes or other ornaments occasionally, but they are always done with such taste that they never detract from the listener's enjoyment. If you have just one Scott Joplin recording in your collection, make it this one. Even if you own other collections of Scott Joplin's recordings, get this one. It's the best of them all! ---'Gimpy' Peach Johnson

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