

John Philip Sousa/ Marches and Scott Joplin/ Ragtime

John Philip Sousa (1854-1932) led the U.S. Marine Band from 1880-1892. Then he formed his own band and toured the United States and Europe for the next 40 years. He wrote some operettas, waltzes, and 136 marches. A march is a form usually played by a band (such as marching band) that is typically in 2/4 time. Hear two of his most popular marches “Stars and Stripes Forever” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M5bcpiUjLpU>) and “The Washington Post” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mxrh1CrMmTY>).

In the 1890’s the march form helped lead to the ragtime piano style. Marches emphasize beat one; whereas rags syncopate the beat and emphasize beat two. The most popular years for ragtime were from 1900-1925, and the most popular composer was Scott Joplin.

Scott Joplin (1868-1917) started piano lessons as a boy but probably didn’t go to school until he was a teenager. He went to college at age 28 and published 50 compositions. He wrote some marches and then started writing ragtime piano music. When he published the “Maple Leaf Rag” in 1899 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fagH03fxY7c>), it became the first piece of sheet music to sell over 1 million copies. Joplin said ragtime music shouldn’t be played fast. Here’s “The Pineapple Rag” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yTgl235BQsM>) and “The Entertainer” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fPmruHc4S9Q>).

Composers such as **George Gershwin** and **Irving Berlin** (who wrote “Alexander’s Ragtime Band”) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tWINBS5hykg>) were influenced by ragtime music. A style that grew out of ragtime was called “stride piano.” It’s more improvisational than ragtime. The right hand still plays the melody, but the left hand has more leaps. Pianists would play popular songs of the day in the stride style. **James P. Johnson** (1891-1955) is known as the “Father of Stride.” A famous piece of the era was “Carolina Shout” (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d_xvH5XTmSA). **“Fats” Waller** (1904-1943) was another popular stride performer and composer. He wrote the stride piano piece “Handful of Keys.” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ET3n09AfY68>). An entire musical was written about Fats Waller using his music; it’s called *Ain’t Misbehavin’*, and here is “Handful of Keys” sung (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1PbxipSxsHE>).