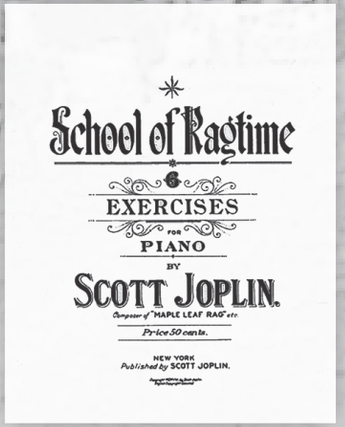
about this edition

The prefatory remarks found starting on page 8 ("Practice & Performance") are designed to anticipate and assist with various technical and interpretive challenges that may be encountered. These suggestions are merely a starting point, meant both to propose specific frameworks for exploration as well as to spur the pianist's own creativity in approaching matters of dynamics, touch, rhythm, pedaling, and expression. As with music of any era, a broader immersion in ragtime through score study, practice, and exposure to high quality recordings will help shape each pianist's own conception of this style.

Postcard of Main Street, Sedalia, MO (c. 1900). "Maple Leaf Club," named after Joplin's most famous rag, was just out of view to the right.



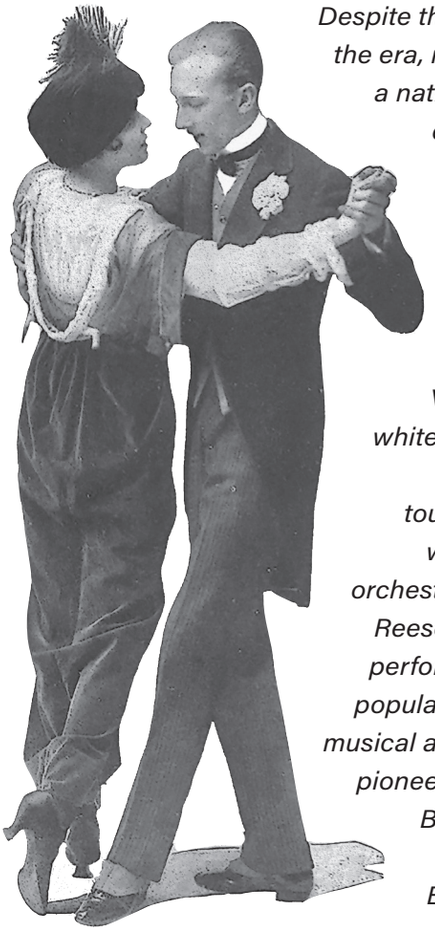
The School of Ragtime, 1st Edition

school of ragtime

By Scott Joplin

Remarks

What is scurrilously called ragtime is an invention that is here to stay. That is now conceded by all classes of musicians. That all publications masquerading under the name of ragtime are not the genuine article will be better known when these exercises are studied. That real ragtime of the higher class is rather difficult to play is a painful truth which most pianists have discovered. Syncopations are no indication of light or trashy music, and to shy bricks at "hateful ragtime" no longer passes for musical culture. To assist amateur players in giving the "Joplin Rags" that weird and intoxicating effect intended by the composer is the object of this work.

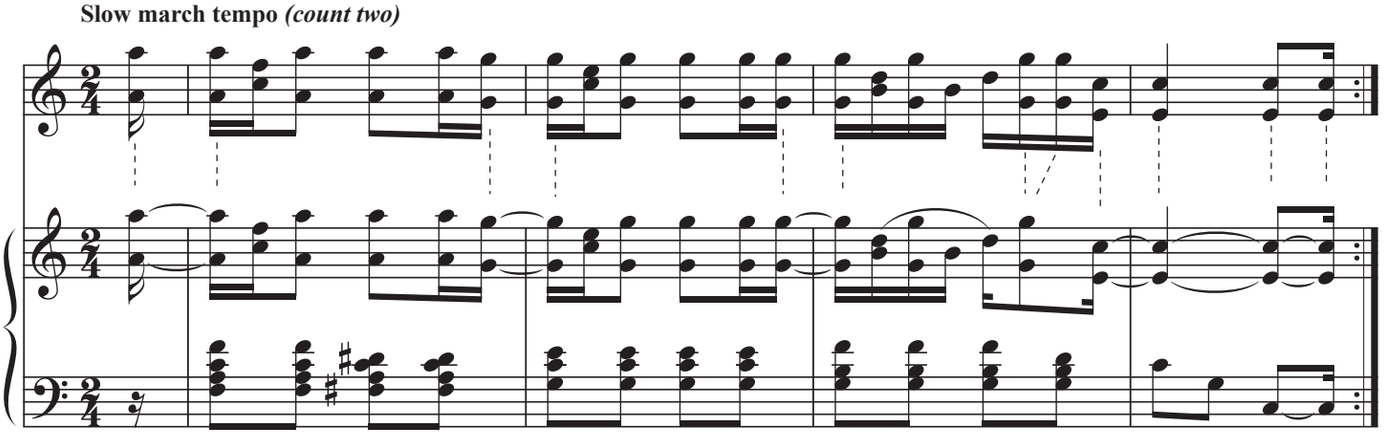


Despite the prejudices of the era, ragtime became a national and global craze during the early twentieth century. The Broadway and silent film stars Irene and Vernon Castle, a white married couple (pictured here), toured in the 1910s with an all-Black orchestra led by James Reese Europe. These performances helped popularize syncopated musical and dance styles pioneered by primarily Black composers such as Joplin, Eubie Blake, and Europe himself.

See page 32 for more on James Reese Europe.

Exercise 1

It is evident that, by giving each note its proper time and by scrupulously observing the ties, you will get the effect. So many are careless in these respects that we will specify each feature. In this number, strike the first note and hold it through the time belonging to the second note. The upper staff is not syncopated, and is not to be played. The perpendicular dotted lines running from the syncopated note below to the two notes above will show exactly its duration. Play slowly until you catch the swing, and never play ragtime fast at any time.

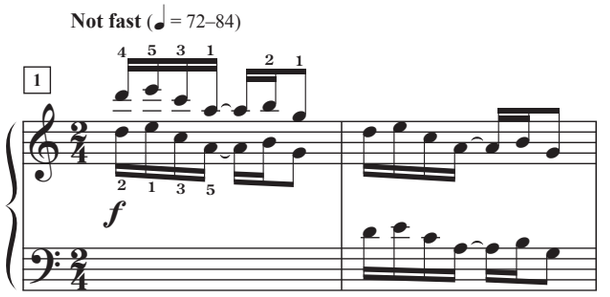


practice & performance

The Entertainer

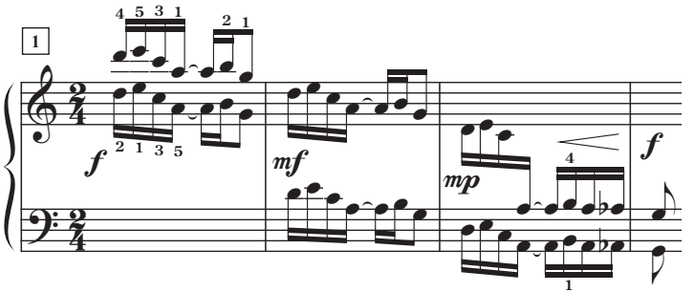
"The Entertainer" is, along with "Maple Leaf Rag", probably Scott Joplin's best-known composition. After being featured in the movie *The Sting* (in addition to other seminal recording projects of the 1970s), this piece became central to the revival of interest in Joplin's music and ragtime more broadly.

In choosing a tempo for performance, it is important to consider other styles in $\frac{2}{4}$ time, of which ragtime was partially an outgrowth. One such style, the march, would typically be performed at a tempo of 100–120 to the quarter note. Without any indication to the contrary, the assumption would be to play this piece at a similar tempo. 'Not fast' therefore advises the performer simply to play slower than the presumed march tempo, but the feeling of two beats per bar (rather than four) must still be maintained.

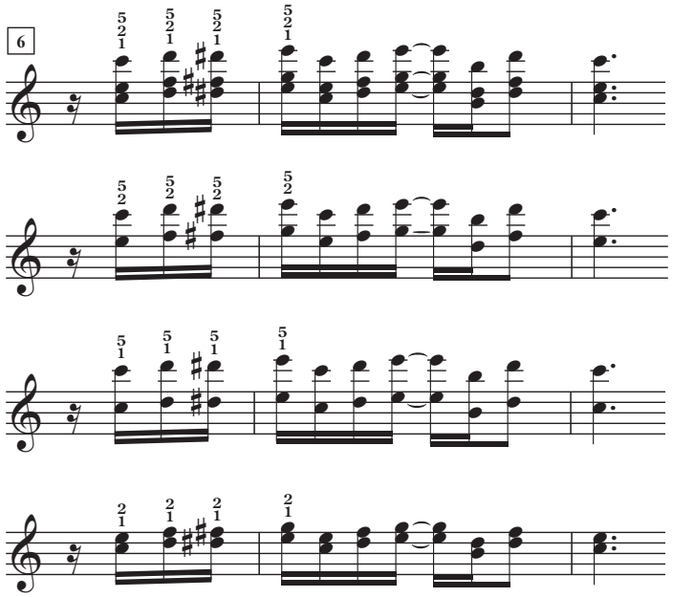


A general question many performers have in approaching this style is whether to render fast notes with 'straight' or 'swung' rhythm. The legacy of piano rolls and early sound recordings made by composers and performers suggests early ragtime should be performed with straight, not swung, 16th notes. This started to change toward the end of Joplin's lifetime with the emergence of stride and other jazz styles, and today the matter of straight-versus-swung can be left up to personal preference.

Repeated patterns (i.e., mm. 1–3) sometimes have built-in variety; in this case, the octave displacement provides some interest, but the performer is welcome to add more contrast. Try dropping the dynamic to ***mf*** in m. 2, then start m. 3 ***mp*** before a ***crescendo*** up to a ***f*** accent in m. 4. Joplin indicates dynamic contrasts between the call and response in the A section (m. 5 vs. 7, etc.); the performer may heighten this contrast through the use of different amounts of pedal in each respective dynamic, or by highlighting the LH octaves more in ***p*** then shifting the balance more toward the RH in ***f***.



From a technical standpoint, the RH chords and octaves (in mm. 6–8, 10–12 and similar) pose the greatest challenge. Practice the three-voice chords by trying each permutation of two voices at a time: top and bottom notes (i.e., frame an octave), top and middle, and middle and bottom.

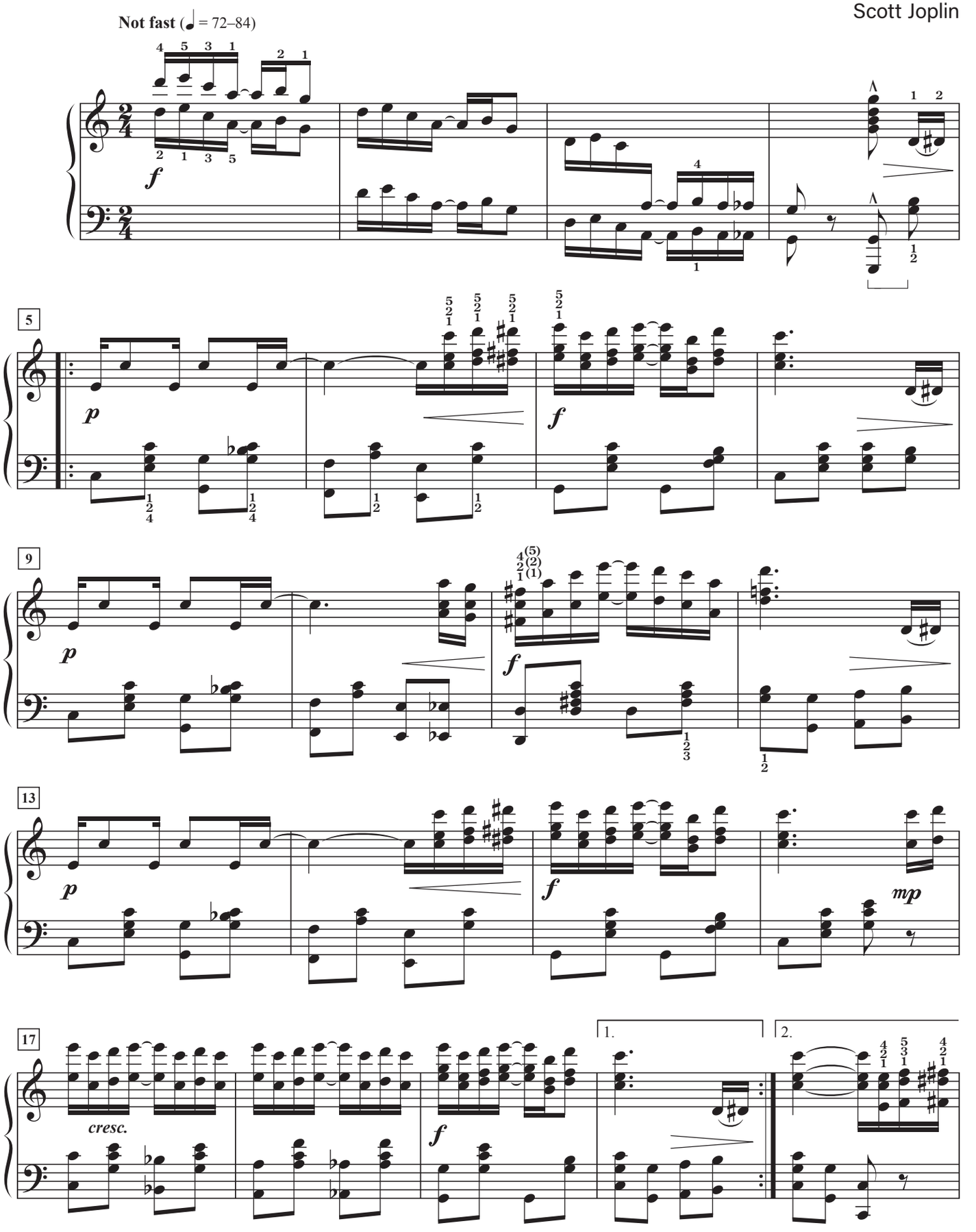


Measure 11 is particularly tricky: between the first and second 16th notes, the RH changes direction, goes from three-note to two-note chords, and from octaves on black keys to white keys. Practice pausing after the downbeat of m. 11, releasing the notes along with any tension in the hand, and—after a breath—proceeding with the next group of 16th notes.

To James Brown and his Mandolin Club

The Entertainer

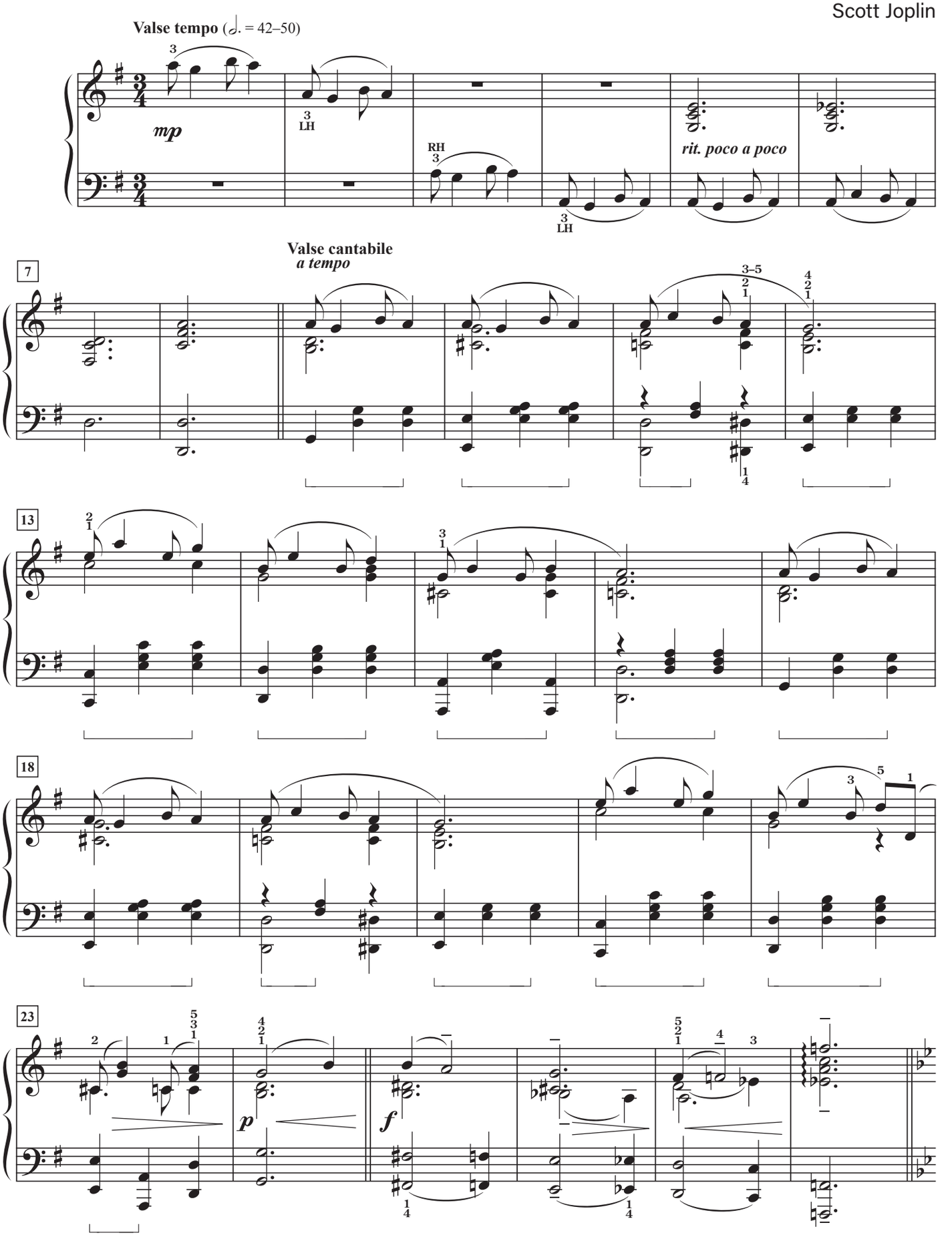
Scott Joplin



Bethena

(A Concert Waltz)

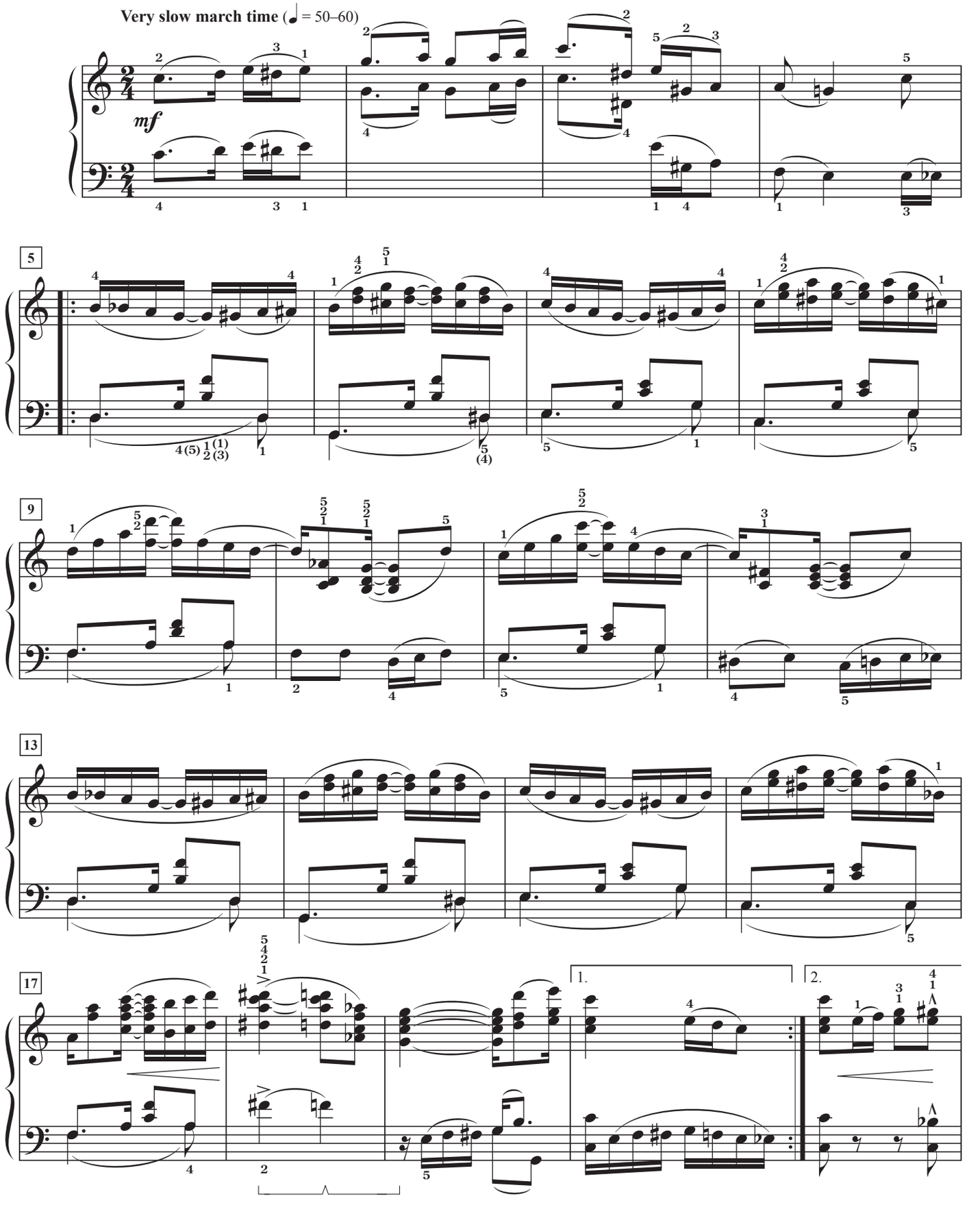
Scott Joplin



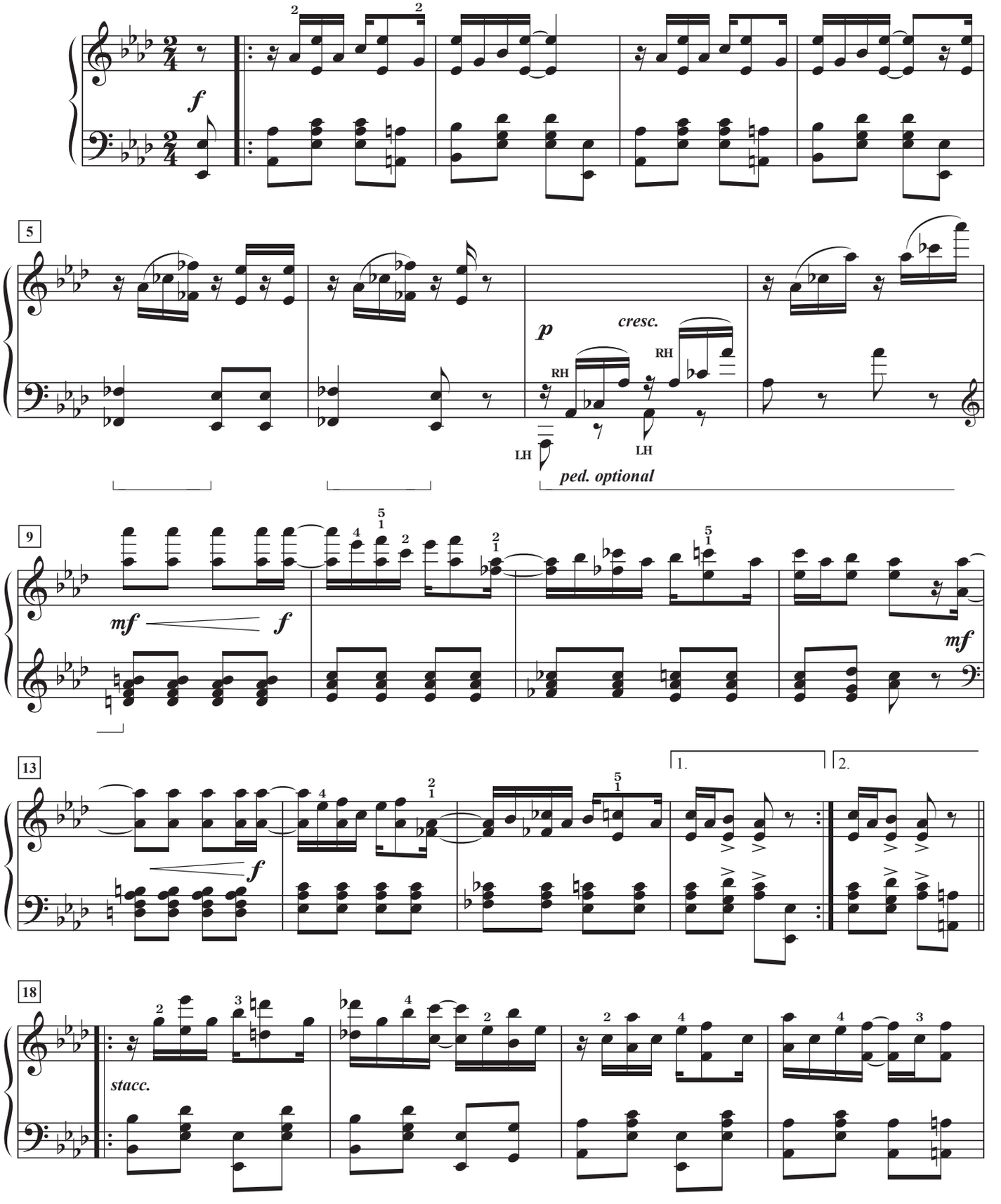
Solace

(A Mexican Serenade)

Scott Joplin



Maple Leaf Rag

Scott Joplin

Tempo di marcia (♩ = 96–108)