

Maple Leaf Rag

Scott Joplin (1867/8–1917), arranged by Melanie Spanswick (b. 1969)

Set up

Key: G major

Time signature: 2/4

Tempo: March tempo ♩ = 100

Style: Ragtime

Piano technique:

- Syncopation: playing in a Ragtime style
- Articulation: accents

This well-known piece is by the 'King of Ragtime', Scott Joplin. **Ragtime** is a style of music characterised by a syncopated (off-beat) melody and an accented accompaniment.

PREPARATION

Revisit the G major scale and arpeggio (page 16) to familiarise yourself with the key of this piece. Play through the *Maple Leaf Rag*, hands separately, noting all fingerings (and adding some, where you feel it is necessary).

PRACTICE TECHNIQUES

Left-hand practice

Left-hand eighth note (quavers)

- In preparation for playing the left-hand eighth note pattern, it can be helpful to play repeated notes in order to grasp positions and fingering. The example below illustrates the first few bars.



- If you play this pattern throughout (making sure your wrist and arm are free of tension at all times), it will help note-learning and ensure rhythmic precision, by increasing awareness of rhythmic placing.

The left hand should be played non-*legato* throughout. Work through a bar at a time, blocking out whole bars as shown in the example below. Aim to play each note pattern as a chord or group of notes (one per bar) using the intended fingering:



Rhythm is crucial in a work such as this; the pulse must remain stable in order that the melody's syncopation (or off-beat pattern) is 'placed' correctly, providing the jazz-like feel. The wrist should remain very flexible in order to keep the note changes accurate and the articulation 'snappy', short, sharp and punchy.

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March tempo ♩ = 100

1 5 1 3 5 1 5 1 2 5 1 3 1 2 1

mf

5 2 1 1 2 1 5 3 1 2 1

5

1 2 5 4 1 3 1 1 3 1

4 5 2 1 5 1 5 1

9

5 2 3 1 3 4 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 3 1 2 1 8⁻⁻⁻

f *ff*

2 1 2

13 (8)

17

mp

21

25

29

Tip

The '8' with a dotted line in bars 12–14 and 28–30 means you should play the right hand an octave higher than written.

Right-hand practice

The right hand's sixteenth notes (semiquavers) can all be *legato*. Keep the arm and wrist flexible whilst moving from one section to another, for example at the two-octave jump in bar 12.

When playing in sections always count aloud and use a metronome. Every beat must be accounted for without any sense of rushing or slowing down. Once you have mastered this the hands can be practiced together.

Hands together

Work through the piece in small sections. Experiment by playing the right hand as written and the left hand as chords (this could also work the other way around).

Small accents (or 'pushes') on certain beats in the left and right hands will enhance the ragtime flavour. Experiment with the suggested accents in the following example, aiming to place every note carefully (to aid counting, the sixteenth note beat has been added in between the staves):

The image shows two systems of musical notation for piano practice. The first system consists of two staves (treble and bass clef) with a 2/4 time signature. The right hand plays sixteenth notes with fingerings 3 4, 1 2 3 4, 1 2 3 4, 1 2 3 4, and 1 2 3 4. The left hand plays quarter notes with fingerings 1 2 3 4, 1 2 3 4, 1 2 3 4, 1 2 3 4, and 1 2 3 4. Accents (>) are placed over the first and third notes of the right hand in each measure. The second system also consists of two staves with a 2/4 time signature. The right hand plays sixteenth notes with fingerings 1 2 3 4, 1 2 3 4, 1 2 3 4, 1 2 3 4, and 1 2 3 4. The left hand plays quarter notes with fingerings 1 2 3 4, 1 2 3 4, 1 2 3 4, 1 2 3 4, and 1 2 3 4. Accents (>) are placed over the first and third notes of the right hand in each measure.

INTERPRETATION

Try practicing with a deep touch, then lighten it a little (although not too much as this style of music is best played with a strident swagger and plenty of sonority). Use the sustaining pedal sparingly!