

Abstract:

The author has been unable to identify significant literature on the topic of the use of ragtime as a teaching aid. It seeks to advocate for ragtime as an ideal teaching material in the development of musicality, both in terms of instrumental mastery (piano technique) and key music theory concepts. In relation to piano technique, ragtime provides an excellent basis for keyboard geography through the left-hand leaps. The melodic material is simple, there is usually only one voice. The rhythmic language is straightforward enough to teach the division of beats and the values of notes and dotted figures. At more advanced levels, the material is highly readable owing to stepwise movement and pentatonic patterns alongside predictable phrase structure. In terms of improvisation, it provides a foundation on which to build. In terms of theory, ragtime is an ideal vehicle for the teaching of form, which can be through score analysis and listening activities.

This work explores elements of ragtime performance practice and the subtleties that exist in the execution of this music. Using the works of Scott Joplin as a case in point, performances are discussed in relation to interpretative choices. In particular, matters of tempo, rhythm and embellishment are subject to discussion. This leads into a consideration of learning resources for students, in terms of appraisal of an existing ragtime method, alongside an example of an arrangement for the beginner.

Based on the foregoing discussions, further elaboration of the benefits of ragtime for specific didactic purposes are outlined with suggested resources. The contentious matter of 'authentic performance' is considered by exploring arguments for adherence and deviation from scores. The work is prefaced with a historical background of ragtime origins, its resurgence in popular culture.