

THE CAT'S MEOW



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Aletha Jacobs is Back!

Lourie Center at Maxcy Gregg Park (just off Pickens near Blossom)

2:30-5:00 pm Sunday, February 5, 2017

I've said it before but it bears repeating. We've been lucky in the pianists who became regulars in the house band.

Aletha, our current pianist, is not only a fine pianist but she is also a good singer (and not many get that accolade from me)! Aletha stays busy teaching at USC and Columbia College along with occasional choral work. **Special Note: You can hear her again in a solo piano concert at Rice Music House on Sunday Feb 19 – more details later.**

It would be nice if we had a real piano for Aletha. We got one for the special concert by John Royen, the fine pianist from New Orleans. And that highlighted the difference. We were able to get the piano for that event because Patty Davis, our long time secretary, got a discount on a piano because she knew someone at Rice Music.

The club may have owned a piano early on but when I joined, we were renting one from Rice Music. And we stored it on site at the Knights of Columbus Hall where our concerts were being held.

Unfortunately, they rented the hall to a frat for a party and the kids discovered our piano. They tried to move it by pushing on the keyboard. The wheels hit a crevice and the piano went flat on its back! The kids picked it up and shoved it back in the store room. When Ralph sat down to play, the piano was so badly out of tune that it was unusable.

We tried several alternatives as replacements for the piano, eventually finding the electronic piano we have now.

Piano & pianists (continued)

A real piano would be great but what we have now is one of the best sounding electronic pianos I've ever heard. And it saves us a lot of grief in maintenance. Most importantly, Aletha has never complained

Looking back; Ragtime is important because it introduced syncopation, an important element in Jazz. Prominent early ragtime pianists; include Scott Joplin, the big name in Ragtime with his "Maple Leaf Rag" (named for the bar not for any Canadian connection) along with two other important figures, James Scott & James Lamb. Both were fine pianists and composers.

Above all, this leads to Jelly Roll Morton (Ferdinand La Menthe), one of my musical heroes. I think Jelly Roll deserves to be up there with any pantheon of musicians. I feel sure that List and Mozart are saying, "Jelly Roll play us another of your compositions. They are just so much fun" – that is assuming Jelly Roll made it in that direction – he lived a colorful life. Unlike many early jazz musicians, JellyRoll had formal musical training. But when his parents found out where he was playing, they kicked him out of the house at age 15. From that moment on, he had to make his own way in the world.

JellyRoll wrote lots of great songs. One I find fascinating is "Sidewalk Blues". Ignore the hokum at the beginning (The recording executives back then didn't think jazz records would sell without a gimmick). When I listen to it, about a third of the way through, I hear the chord progression of Liebestraum. I've asked musical authorities about this and have never gotten an answer - which probably should tell me something – either about me or about them.

I gather JellyRoll made and lost more than one fortune during his life, especially for an African American in that era. And he continued to perform all of his life. I remember a hip, young black music student telling about an assignment a professor gave him "to go listen to an early jazz musician". He and a buddy went to a Nightclub Jelly Roll owned in DC, expecting to sneer at the performance. But the student said, "that old guy had to pull himself up on the bandstand. But when he started to play, he played all over that piano – white keys, black keys – it didn't matter." The student asked JellyRoll how he decided what key to use? JellyRoll replied, "The key the song sounds best in".

JellyRoll was master of the instrument and he formed some great bands. I don't think he was stretching things very much when he said, "I invented Jazz".