

# 'Ragtimist' Milne wows Chautauqua crowd

By TRACY DOYLE

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CHAUTAUQUA, N.Y. — Ragtime rarely finds its way to a major stage anymore.

But when it does, the effect is magical.

Pianist Bob Milne, billing himself as a "ragtimist,"

received an enthusiastic standing ovation from a crowd of 4,000 last week at the Chautauqua Amphitheater.

Milne's style, like the Chautauqua Institution, defies description. This journeyman (his description) learned to please an audience the hard way: on stage.

"Whatever it takes," he says. The journeyman is "someone who will drive anywhere today to play a piano tonight so he can eat someplace tomorrow." Some 30 years of playing the gamut from saloons to concert stages, testing styles, tempos and improvisations before live audiences, is how he honed his performances into something truly unique.

There is no other like Milne. Whether he is playing a gently swinging classic Missouri rag, setting fire to the piano with a



**Bob Milne brings his ragtime music to Woodstock Thursday.**

Photo provided

## REVIEW

knockout boogie-woogie or syn-copating a traditional tune like "Wabash Cannonball," he leaves the audience gasping in awe. His style is unmistakably his own.

The music is unmistakably American. Ragtime music, known for carrying a heavily syncopated melody over a steady march-time bass, was born from a blending of European and African musical ideas.

From there, it underwent a number of changes in the hands of thousands of pianists in many regions.

"If you go down to the little corner bar anywhere in the United States, chances are they had a piano in it," he told the audience. He talked between each piece, telling its history and its

place in ragtime's development.

That development continues today through a group of artists, Milne included, who not only perform but write new ragtime, introducing new ideas and trends.

"A lot of times at ragtime festivals I have people ask me if ragtime is dead music, an old music," Milne said. "Certainly not."

Especially not when Milne plays it.

*Bob Milne will appear at 7 p.m. Thursday at the Congregational Unitarian Church in Woodstock. Admission is \$7 for adults, children younger than 12 attend free. Milne is negotiating an appearance at the Woodstock Opera House, tentatively scheduled in the summer of 1996.*