

HARVARD UNIVERSITY • DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC

MUSIC BUILDING

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Mr. Bob Milne
P. O. Box 586
Lapeer, MI 48446

Dear Bob:

It is not often that I cross paths with a master of American vernacular music, because my own career as a performer and teacher deprives me of the pleasure of attending ragtime and jazz concerts. This has always been a great source of sadness, as there is scarcely a kind of music that I enjoy more. At home after a rough day, our loudspeakers resound to the sounds of Jelly Roll Morton, Fats Waller, James P. Johnson, Willie the Lion Smith, and of course their magician heir Art Tatum.

For this reason our encounter the day of your enthralling concert at the Chautauqua Amphitheatre a few weeks ago will long remain in memory. A musician of your pianistic skills is rare; but what particularly astonished and enlightened me was the extraordinary range of regional ragtime and boogie-woogie styles you have mastered and speak with the flawlessness of a native. I had never realized that there were such myriad subtle shadings to ragtime, and considered the concert an education as well as sheer delight. That you added informative comment to the audience only brought to greater heights what you communicated musically.

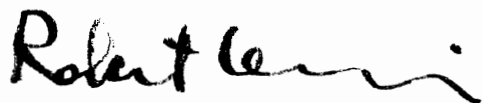
As one of the (regrettably) few Classical performers that improvises, I found the opportunity to talk with you prior to the concert and afterwards enlightening and unusually stimulating. Having revealed to you that the day after your performance I would be playing a Mozart concerto and improvising the cadenzas, I was charmed and amazed by the deftness of your rag ("The Ragged Music Box") in the style of Mozart. I must confess that I would not have imagined a successful amalgamation of such disparate styles, but your consummate mastery of ragtime turned an homage to a seemingly incompatible style into one of the most amusingly entertaining showstoppers I've experienced in a long time.

I really enjoyed sitting with you following the concert and talking into the wee hours of the morning about Mozart and music in general. The points you make as to the similarity in playing styles, between classical and ragtime era performers, demonstrated by your tour de force at the concert, are very perceptive. Performers have to please their audiences, whether they played in the European courts of royalty or the saloons of the Mississippi River. This fact, which I emphasize to all who will listen, is worth keeping in front of the public.

It is my hope that I shall soon have an opportunity of meeting with you and hearing you perform. Please let me know the next time you will be anywhere in the New England area.

With best wishes, I am

Yours sincerely,



Robert Levin
Dwight P. Robinson, Jr. Professor of the Humanities