

# Ragtimist filled and brought down the house

By Miriam Toren

Play it again, Bob!

For almost three hours a delighted, full-house audience was treated to the enchantment of Bob Milne's ragtime, boogie-woogie piano. It was an exciting, swinging, swaying Music on The Divide Sunday afternoon, Nov. 14, in the IOOF Hall. Milne, recognized nationally as one of North America's five finest ragtime players, proved it Sunday.

He opened the concert with a syncopated Missouri folk song

from the late 1800s, "Carrie's Gone to Kansas City." Then, to explain syncopation, he treated the audience to "Stars and Stripes" composed 101 years ago. He started the number in the conventional beat, then took it into a mild syncopation, then ended with rousing, flashing off-beat ragtime. That got spontaneous applause.

Throughout the concert Bob Milne explained the evolution of ragtime and the many different types of ragtime music. Its great period was from 1897 to 1917. Some of the great performers and composers were Scott Joplin, who was a versatile musician; Euday Bowman, whose "12th Street Rag" made a lot of money for the publisher but little for Bowman; and Charles Hunter from Nashville, who had a knack for making up beautiful, syncopated melodies. John William "Blind" Boone was totally blind but for 40 years played a concert every day but Sunday, for 10 months of every year. His first number was always a hymn, weaving Southern gospel and ragtime together.

Bob Milne explained that a ragtimist whose fans added "Papa" to his name was good. Milne said one of the greatest early ragtimists, whose music was never recorded, was called Papa Lord God and he must have been amazing.

Every number that Bob Milne played was enthusiastically applauded. He played the gamut from soft, slow, gentle tonality to super incredibly, and I mean super incredibly, fast, thunderous, crashing finales.

In the "Tear Jerker" style of ragtime, Milne played, and sang, "Break the News to Mother." Not a dry eye in the hall. Twenty-five years ago Milne played in saloons and wrote rags. His favorite music is classical and his favorite composer is Mozart. He wrote a rag based on a theme from "The Magic Flute," "The Ragged Music Box." What a gem! What a master at the piano! Your eyes could hardly follow the speed of his hands on the keys. It brought down the house.

Bob Milne "closed" the concert with another foot-stomper, "Honky-Tonk Train Blues" by Meade Lux Lewis. Then he took questions from the audience, illustrating his answers with appropriate music.

Finally "a last tune," the "Ouverture de la Grande Rodent" And that standing ovation brought the thrilled audience a really final encore, Jelly Roll Morton's "Tiger Rag." What an afternoon!

In greeting the audience and welcoming Bob Milne, to open the concert, Music on The Divide president Ilse White thanked the audience for their support of the Music Guild's very successful Spaghetti Fest.

Comments from the audience: France Senecal, "I'm so excited!" Wendi Milka, "Fabulous." Bill Kinch, "He must have more than 10 fingers to get all those notes in so fast." Clair Cunningham, "I was almost exhausted, just watching his hands fly over the keyboard." Sonya Adamson, "He's great." Beryl Grimm, "I think he is Papa Lord God." Thiaa Besan, "Another wonderful memory." James White, "Fantastic." Jerry Gercken, "He makes the piano sound like six instruments." Cecy Thomas, "A wonderful concert. Music on The Divide is a jewel." Jerry Kirkpatrick, "He's not only a terrific ragtime player, he's a fine musician." Helen Myerson, "What a fine concert." Linda Gigliotti, "He played so fast I couldn't keep up with my foottapping." Judy Cuesta, "Such a pianist. And his comments were so interesting and instructive." Dave Cameron, "He's good, really good." Someone called out in the audience, "When are you coming back?"

There were also many audience comments about the lovely floral decorations in the hall and side room. Thanks go to Thiaa Besan, Mary Tomfohrde, Lilly Sackl and Ilse White. Many thanks also to the Music Guild ladies for the delicious intermission refreshments. And what a joy to have Carol Frisch back! And looking so great.

Monday morning Bob Milne gave a music lesson-top performance program in the IOOF Hall for fourth and fifth graders from the local schools. The hall was full of very enthusiastic and delighted students. Milne started with Scott Joplin's "The Entertainer" first with a one-note melody, then going to two notes, then three, then to full chords, to illustrate the development of a tune. He demonstrated the different ways a song can be played, with "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star." The first time through it was with alberté bass, then as a rag, then as a boogie-woogie, then as a waltz, then in minor key and a grand finale. With "Maple Leaf Rag" Milne gave the students faster and faster tempo. At the request of a student he ragtimed the "Blue Danube Waltz" and, by request, awed the students with "Honky-Tonk Train Blues." Throughout his performance, he emphasized that students must learn to play for their own enjoyment. A wonderful lesson and fine musical experience for students, provided by Music on The Divide.

For the member in the audience who asked Bob Milne when he would be back, we're trying to arrange his return next November. Keep hoping.



Bob Milne at the IOOF Hall.

--Photo by Ted Reinke

