

Ragtime pianist wowed Opera House audience

by Jack Hutton

As a kid, Bob Milne always knew that he could play piano. Something in his head told him that he knew where to find the notes on the keyboard.

That's exactly what happened when Milne finally sat down at a piano as a young adult. He decided to accompany a pub sing-along, and figured out within minutes where both the notes and the chords went.

Last Saturday night, Bob Milne demonstrated his genius before an enthusiastic audience at the Gravenhurst Opera House, re-creating complicated ragtime solos that have never been written down. The solos came from piano rolls or old scratchy 78-rpm records.

For more than two hours, the self-taught pianist from Lapeer, Michigan held his



A RAGTIME COUPLE. Ragtime pianist Bob Milne and his wife Linda thoroughly enjoyed their first time at the Gravenhurst Opera House last Saturday.

audience spellbound with a program that ranged from gospel hymns to the driving barrelhouse boogie of Meade Lux Lewis and Albert Ammons, and ended with a rag

that Milne based on a theme from his favourite composer, Mozart.

Bob Milne is regarded as the finest ragtime/boogie-woogie pianist on this planet.

—and with good reason. Few pianists attempt the solos of Meade Lux Lewis, because Lewis, a musical illiterate, played impossibly conflicting rhythms. Milne makes it sound easy.

It's hard to believe that piano was a last choice for Milne. He started on violin and then studied the French horn at the Eastman School of Music. He was playing French horn in two symphony orchestras when someone offered him the job as a sing-along saloon piano player during his off-hours.

That first saloon job led to more than 25 years as what Milne calls "a journeyman piano player." Night after night, he played eight-hour shifts, shifting from ragtime to boogie to the classics, always adapting to his audiences. Along the way, he wrote more than 40 piano rags, a concerto for piano and orchestra, several classical art songs, a trumpet concerto and a flute suite.

For the last five years, Milne has concentrated on solo concerts, performing two to five nights a week across Canada and the U.S. The most unique location was the world's largest aircraft carrier, the USS *George Washington*. The captain invited Milne last June to perform for an audience that totalled 6,000.

It is no surprise that Milne was recently voted one of the five most popular ragtime pianists in the U.S. As the Opera House audience discov-

ered, Milne has a unique way of bringing his music to life with stories about the composers and the tunes.

I have had the honour of playing on the same festival programs with Milne many

times, and I can testify that other pianists always crowd into the room for his sets. He is always embellishing on and re-creating what has become familiar. So let's bring Bob back to Muskoka again.

Port Carling Legion News

Port Carling Friday lunch menu: All are welcome to come out and join us on Friday, January 21, from 11:30 a.m. till 1:30 p.m. Our special will be macaroni and cheese with cole slaw and a roll with butter. Soups are cream of chicken or minestrone. Sandwiches are egg salad or roast beef, and for dessert we have assorted pies. We hope to see you there.

Sports: Come on out and join Friday night darts. It starts at 8 p.m. The cost is \$3 each and everyone is welcome.

There are also prizes to be won!

Friday night darts: Winners January 14: Men's first - Marvin Wilson, second - Dennis Reimer, high in - Al Brydon, high out - Denis Potvin, high score - Dan Hendryks; ladies' first - Lois Forth, second - Irene Reimer, high in - Vikki Yade, high out - Sylvia German, high score - Dianna Yade.

Our next **meat spin** will be held Sunday, January 30 at 2 p.m. Come on out and join us, and spin that wheel. Maybe

you'll win yourself some dinner. The cost is \$1 per spin. Everyone is welcome.

Our next executive meeting will be held on January 27 at 8 p.m. All executive officers are urged to attend.

We would like to congratulate Glennis MacRae, who was the big winner in our 50/50 toonie draw. Her name was pulled from all our members by Eileen Atkinson. The draw had not been won in some time, so you can imagine that it was a large sum of money. Way to go, Glennis.