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Jazz at Lincoln Center Radio
Rags, Strides, and Stomps
Season 16
Program 23, Airdate 2/26/09

1) Background music:

2) Vox: Marcus Roberts

“It’s very deep and rich – there’s a huge body of work there done between 1900 and 1945. And what I like to do with that music is find modern things to do with it.”

3) Pierce:

EARLY JAZZ PIANO COMPOSERS AND THE MUSIC THEY MADE DON’T ALWAYS GET THEIR DUE. BUT MARCUS ROBERTS. HE HAS MASTERED THE DEMANDING TECHNIQUE AND THE HISTORY OF THIS MUSIC.

HE KNOWS HOW HARLEM’S FINEST STRIDE PIANISTS VIED IN RUTHLESS, CUTTING SESSIONS....HOW JELLY ROLL MORTON TRIED TO STEAL THE SHOW, AND HOW THE STRAIGHT EIGHTHS OF RAGTIME BEGAT THE LOPING SWING OF STRIDE.

3b) Vox: Aaron Diehl

“It’s all about how it feels. One of the great things about stride piano, is that rhythmically, it feels great. People want to dance to it, get up, clap, snap their fingers, dance. This music makes people want to move, it *should*.”

3c) Pierce:

PIANIST AARON DIEHL, JULLIARD CLASS OF 2007. JUST AHEAD, HE’LL JOIN CLASSMATE JONATHAN BATISTE, AND MARCUS ROBERTS, HERE IN THE ALLEN ROOM. TO CHALLENGE EACH OTHER ON THAT EXUBERANT BOOK OF EARLY JAZZ PIANO.

IT'S JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER. I'M WENDELL PIERCE -- AND WE'RE GLAD YOU'RE HERE.

4A) Background music:

4b) Pierce:

IN THE PRE-HISTORY OF JAZZ PIANO THE CENTRAL FIGURE IS THE SON OF AN EMANCIPATED SLAVE: IN A HOUSEHOLD OF MUSICIANS, SCOTT JOPLIN STUDIED CLASSICAL PIANO. BUT HE ALSO HEARD, AND WOULD WRITE WITH SYNCOPATION OF THE BANJO, ADDING UNEXPECTED RHYTHMS OVER A STEADY BEAT.

IN THE 1890S, THE MUSIC HE AND OTHERS WERE PLAYING WAS FIRST DISPARAGED AS "BANJO PIANO" BUT IT'S INFECTIOUS BEAT AND VIRTUOSO MELODIES CAUGHT THE SPIRIT OF THE COUNTRY, AND THE MUSIC KNOWN AS "RAGTIME," WOULD COME TO STAND FOR A WHOLE ERA.

4C) Pierce:

MARCUS ROBERTS SHOWS US WHAT THAT MEANS ON THE SCOTT JOPLIN'S 1902 - "ELITE SYNCOPATIONS."

5) Music: "Elite Syncopations" (2:57)

6) Pierce:

SCOTT JOPLIN'S "ELITE SYNCOPATIONS," MARCUS ROBERTS. AT THE PIANO

4b) Vox: Marcus Roberts

"So the biggest difference is, ragtime music, you deal with even 8th notes. The feeling of syncopation is in the rhythm, how the rhythm is manipulated, to give you that feeling of tension, which is, frankly, jazz."

7) Background music: “Maple Leaf Rag,” Scott Joplin piano roll

8) Pierce:

SCOTT JOPLIN PUBLISHED THE SHEET MUSIC FOR HIS “MAPLE LEAF RAG” IN 1899. IN A DECADE, IT SOLD HALF A MILLION COPIES. BUT JOPLIN SOUGHT MORE THAN POPULARITY – HE WANTED TO BE RECOGNIZED AS A SERIOUS COMPOSER HIS SUCCESS ENCOURAGED OTHERS –

BUT JOPLIN DEPLORED RAGTIME PIANISTS WHO EMPHASIZED SPEED OVER MUSICALITY. HE EVEN PUBLISHED A WARNING ON HIS COMPOSITIONS -- “DO NOT PLAY THIS PIECE FAST. IT IS NEVER RIGHT TO PLAY RAGTIME FAST!”

AND JOPLIN WANTED HIS MUSIC TO BE PLAYED **JUST** AS HE WROTE IT.

THE PIANIST, MARCUS ROBERTS.

9) Vox: Marcus Roberts

“No, Joplin did not want his music improvised on – which is why a lot of jazz musicians did it!” (laughter)

10) Pierce:

IN THAT SAME SPIRIT OF IRREVERENT AFFECTION FOR JOPLIN, THE YOUNG PIANIST JONATHAN BATISTE PLAYS – AND IMPROVISES ON TWO OF THE BEST-KNOWN WORKS BY “THE KING OF RAGTIME:” “MAPLE LEAF RAG” AND “THE ENTERTAINER.”

11) Music: Maple Leaf Rag (3:04)

12) Music: The Entertainer (6:59)

13a) PIERCE:

THE YOUNG PIANIST JONATHAN BATISTE WITH THE CENTURY OLD MUSIC OF SCOTT JOPLIN -- “THE ENTERTAINER” AND “MAPLE LEAF RAG.”

13b) Background music: Eubie Blake

13c) Pierce:

EVEN THOUGH HIS FAVORITE MEAL WAS DONUTS AND 7-UP AND HE BEGAN SMOKING AT AGE SIX, THE BALTIMORE BORN PIANIST EUBIE BLAKE LIVED TO THE AGE OF 100 – AND WELL INTO HIS NINETIES HE COULD OUTLAST – AND OUT PLAY -- THE YOUNGER MUSICIANS AT LATE NIGHT JAMS..

BLAKE ACHIEVED HIS GREATEST FAME IN THE 1920S WRITING MUSICALS WITH SINGER NOBLE SISSLE. THEIR 1924 SHOW “CHOCOLATE DANDIES” TURNED DANCER JOSEPHINE BAKER INTO A STAR.

WHEN HE WAS JUST SIXTEEN, EUBIE WROTE HIS FIRST RAG AND IT HAS BEEN WIDELY PLAYED EVER SINCE. AARON DIEHL TACKLES IT NOW. THIS IS “CHARLESTON RAG.”

14) Music: “Charleston Rag,” (3:52)

15) Pierce:

EUBIE BLAKE’S 1899 “CHARLESTON RAG.” SOLO PIANO BY AARON DIEHL IN THE ALLEN ROOM, AT THE HOUSE OF SWING.

16) Background music: Luckey Roberts

17) Pierce:

SCOTT JOPLIN DIED IN 1917. A NEW GENERATION OF MUSICIANS WAS ADDING IMPROVISATION AND SWINGING EIGHTH NOTES TO THE RAGTIME SOUND. THE BURGEONING STRIDE STYLE TOOK ITS NAME FROM THE WAY THE LEFT HAND SEEMED TO WALK BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN BASS NOTES AND CHORDS.

18) Vox: Aaron Diehl “

“First what’s most apparent with the stride left hand is you have this ‘boom-chick’ kind of style between the bass and the chords. Bass note – CHORD! Bass note –CHORD! Bass-note chord!”

PIANIST AARON DIEHL.

“And it creates this very intoxicating rhythmic feeling. <demonstrates boom-chick while tapping his foot> And you couple that with some melody in your right hand – and that spells success.”

19) Pierce:

DIEHL SHOWS OFF HIS LEFT-HAND – AND HIS RIGHT -- ON A PIECE BY LUCKEY ROBERTS, ONE OF THE PLAYERS WHO TURNED RAGTIME INTO STRIDE --. THIS IS THE COMPOSITION “RIPPLES OF THE NILE.”

20) Music: “Ripples of the Nile” (3:26)

21) Pierce:

LUCKEY ROBERTS’ 1916 “RIPPLE OF THE NILE,” PLAYED BY AARON DIEHL.

IF YOU’RE SWEEPED UP BY THE RIPPLES YOU’RE HEARING, LET US KNOW WHAT YOU THINK. SEND US AN EMAIL AT JAZZ RADIO (AT) J A L C (DOT) ORG. AND YOU CAN HEAR THIS PROGRAM AGAIN AND CHECK OUT

ARCHIVE SHOWS FROM OUR WEEKLY SERIES – IN THE JAZZCAST AT J A L C (DOT) ORG (SLASH). BRING HOME THE SWING.

JUST AHEAD, OUR CUTTING CONTEST FROM THE ALLEN ROOM CONTINUES IN JUST A MOMENT. IN FOR WYNTON MARSALIS, I'M WENDELL PIERCE.

Midbreak: (:59)

22A) Background music: James P. Johnson

22B) Pierce:

HIS BRILLIANT TECHNIQUE AND STORIED HUGE HANDS MADE LUCKEY ROBERTS' A LEGEND AT HARLEM PIANO CUTTING SESSIONS. THE LEGEND WAS CARRIED ON BY THE LIKES OF JAMES P. JOHNSON, WILLIE "THE LION" SMITH, AND FATS WALLER IN THEIR HANDS, THE STYLE BECAME A VIBRANT ART FORM. WITH A FULL RANGE OF EMOTIONS. AARON DIEHL EXPLORES A WISTFUL CORNER OF THE STRIDE TRADITION: WILLIE 'THE LION' SMITH'S "ECHOES OF SPRING."

23) Music: "Echoes of Spring," (6:57)

24) Pierce:

"ECHOES OF SPRING" – BY WILLIE "THE LION" SMITH, AND PLAYED BY AARON DIEHL.

26) Background music: James P. Johnson

27) Pierce:

SCORES OF PLAYERS TRANSFORMED RAGTIME INTO STRIDE BUT, JAMES P. JOHNSON WAS CERTAINLY THE MOST INFLUENTIAL. HE GREW UP SURROUNDED BY THE MUSIC OF JOPLIN AND THE MANY FINE RAGTIME AND CLASSICAL PIANISTS HERE IN NEW YORK CITY

FORMIDABLE TECHNIQUE MADE HIM A ONE-MAN ORCHESTRA, HIS EXUBERANT COMPOSITIONS CAME TO EMBODY THE STRIDE STYLE. AND THAT IS WHAT DREW PIANIST AARON DIEHL TO JOHNSON'S "STEEPLECHASE RAG."

28) Vox: Aaron Diehl

"It's very rhythmic, especially in the right hand. Like in the third strain, the final strain: <taps his foot and sings> Ba-da-da, ba-da-da, ba-da-da, ba-da-da – WOOOOOO! It just felt really good, So I decided I'd like to play that."

29) Music: "Steeplechase Rag" (3:33)

30) Pierce:

JAMES P. JOHNSON'S "STEEPLECHASE RAG" –AARON DIEHL AT THE PIANO.

31) Background music: J.P. Johnson

32) Pierce:

. DUKE ELLINGTON TAUGHT HIMSELF STRIDE BY SLOWING DOWN JOHNSON'S PLAYER PIANO ROLLS.

32b) Background: Fats Waller joking onstage

32C) Pierce:

BUT JOHNSON WAS ALSO A PIANO TEACHER – AND HIS GREATEST STUDENT WAS THOMAS “FATS” WALLER.

WALLER LIKED TO HAVE HUMOR IN HIS ACT – BUT HIS ADVANCED STRIDE TECHNIQUE WAS ANYTHING BUT A JOKE. HE CAPTURES THIS CONTRADICTION IN AN ODE TO THAT OLD HERBAL REMEDY— MARIJUANA.

MARCUS ROBERTS TACKLES FATS WALLER’S “VIPER’S DRAG”

33) Music: “Viper’s Drag” (4:10)

34) Pierce:

FATS WALLER’S “VIPER’S DRAG” – IN THE HANDS OF MARCUS ROBERTS.

35) Background music: The Crave

36) Pierce:

HARLEM’S STRIDE PIANISTS SET THE STANDARD FOR TECHNICAL WIZARDRY. BUT IN NEW ORLEANS, A PIMP AND POOL SHARK BY THE NAME OF JELLY ROLL MORTON HAD HIS OWN IDEAS ABOUT HOW TO SWING ON THE PIANO.

MARCUS ROBERTS.

37) Vox: Marcus Roberts

“Jelly Roll Morton is another foundation figure – he’s like the root of a tree. With Jelly Roll, you get the full understanding of what the whole concept of what New Orleans piano is about. Playing Jelly Roll, teaches you how to groove, teaches latin rhythms inside of the swing rhythm, it teaches you about left and right hand counterpoint, it teaches you just a lot of things. And also, playing Jelly Roll is going to teach you about how to play the blues.”

38) Music: “New Orleans Blues” (6:25)

39) Pierce:

ON STAGE IN THE ALLEN ROOM, NEW ORLEANS NATIVE, JONATHAN BATISTE, HONORS HIS HOMETOWN TRADITION WITH JELLY ROLL MORTON’S “NEW ORLEANS BLUES.”

IN THE 1920S, STRIDE AND ITS COUSIN JAZZ BROUGHT IMPROVISATION TO THE FOREFRONT. AND A STREAM OF NEW MATERIAL TO IMPROVISE ON WAS FLOWING FROM NEW YORK’S “TIN PAN ALLEY.”

MARCUS ROBERTS

40) Vox: Marcus Roberts

“The Tin Pan Alley songs have always been rich fertile ground for jazz musicians to develop the craft of improvisation with. The way the chords move, they just lend themselves to improvisation.”

41) Pierce:

FROM THE ALLEN ROOM, ROBERTS TAKES ON THE 1928 STANDARD “IF I HAD YOU.”

42) Music: “If I Had You” (5:17)

43) Pierce:

MARCUS ROBERTS ON THE 1928 STANDARD “IF I HAD YOU” – BY JAMES CAMPBELL, REGINALD CONNELLY, AND TED SHAPIRO. -- CAPPING THIS EXPLORATION OF RAGS AND STRIDE PIANO, WE ALSO HEARD FROM JONATHAN BATISTE AND AARON DEIHL HERE IN THE ALLEN ROOM AT THE HOUSE OF SWING. AND I KNOW WE’LL BE BACK IN THIS RICH VEIN SOON

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER RADIO IS PRODUCED AT MURRAY STREET. THIS SHOW WAS WRITTEN BY ANDREW ROSENBLUM. OUR PRODUCERS ARE DAVID GOREN AND STEVE RATHE WITH ALEXA LIM. RECORDINGS BY ROB MACCOMBER WITH JEFF ROTHMAN AND ZACH BERKMAN AT XM STUDIOS. THANKS TO MATTHEW LONG-MIDDLETON, AARON DEIHL AND ADAM POGOFF.

CAT HENRY SUPERVISES OUR RECORDINGS AND BROADCASTS. THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER IS ADRIAN ELLIS. THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR IS WYNTON MARSALIS, I'M WENDELL PIERCE. THANKS FOR JOINING US.