

CD Review — Finding inner chill: Michael Adcock's *Ragtime in Washington*

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by Hannah Schoepe



Now that everyone is returning from summer vacations, school is in session, new seasons are starting, and the workplace is beginning to pick up the pace, the search for a window of relaxation amidst the craziness of everyday life is becoming real. Pianist and Oberlin Conservatory alum Michael Adcock's new CD, *Ragtime in Washington*, might be just the thing. The tunes on this album evoke images of sitting by the fire with a warm beverage, enjoying swayed rhythms that naturally make you want to sway too.

Released in July of 2018 by Centaur Records, the recording features a diverse range of rags and composers. Everyone loves ragtime, but let's face it, the genre runs the risk of becoming too much of a good thing. But across 17 tracks and 74 minutes, the album remains fresh with a variety of rag. Adcock varies the playlist skillfully, introducing a wide emotional range through the unconventional lens of rags. Beginning with Scott Joplin's slow, sentimental lines in *Bethe* moves to Henry Lodge's increasingly fast paced *Red Pepper Rag*.

Adcock's ordering of the works not only varies pace and mood, but also harmonies. Thomas Benjamin's *That Old Viennese-school Rag* is reminiscent of Arnold Schoenberg, while wrapping up the swinging package of a jazzy rag.

William Albright's *Sleepwalkers Shuffle* sounds exactly like one might imagine, while his *Grand Sonata in Rag* shapes quotations from Western repertoire into a piece that is catchy and strikingly emotional. At eight minutes in length, this track is a pivotal climax of the album.

William Bolcom's *Fields of Flowers* retains the distinct flavor of a rag but moves through various rhythmic concepts, providing a refreshing and interesting glance into how diverse a rag can be. *Fields of Flowers* transitions into John Musto's *Recollections*, a modest gem that is one of the most beautiful tracks on the album. Nostalgic and sentimental, its unique harmonies and unconventional rhythms are full of warm emotional depth. Here Adcock plays with exceptional sensitivity and a striking dynamic range.

Nearing the end of the album, *Grandpa's Spells* by Jelly Roll Morton would put a smile on anyone's face. The piece effectively captures memories of good 'ol granddad, utilizing cheerful melodies and catchy rhythms. The smile is about to get even broader with Bob Zurke's *Tonight on the Keys*. So far the album has incorporated elements from atonality and jazz, as well as influences from grandmothers and grandfathers. Next on the list: rock and roll. How cool can a piece be with elements of rock and jazz? Listen to find out. *Ragtime in Washington* is available on Spotify, YouTube, Naxos, and Google Play.

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