

2008 SCOTT JOPLIN INTERNATIONAL RAGTIME FESTIVAL

A REPORT FROM THE TRENCHES

by Bill Edwards

OK, it's actually the benches, as in piano, but there was a time... Now we are sure that ragtime is safe in America, especially in the Heartland. This year marked the 28th anniversary of the festival, and a joyous event it was. In spite of a couple of hiccups that were beyond the control of the organizers, everything went very smoothly and at the end of the week smiles were the universal sign of success.

Wednesday

Performers and guests started arriving in Sedalia late on Tuesday, June 3, but they had their challenges in doing so. Sedalia was overrun by a tremendous storm front with the threat of tornadoes, and those venturing into town on US 65 from either north or south had some concerns about even holding the road. But we all made it, and it was actually the most turbulent part of the entire festival, a good story to tell next year as well. In spite of the intense rain, wind and lightning, everything in at the Best Western held together well, in spite of a few soggy cars where windows had been left open. By contrast, Wednesday morning was fresh and vivid, and a good day to get started. I love the smell of ragtime in the morning!

As has become a tradition since the Wednesday kickoff was initiated in recent years, the afternoon events were held at the Sedalia State Fair Community College theater and cafeteria. Numerous performers entertained students and early arrivals to the event throughout the afternoon, while many chose to attend the kickoff concert. They all expected something clever and entertaining, and music director Sue Keller and her legions of syncopators did not disappoint.

The theme was "See the USA on the Ragtime Trail," based in part by an idea presented by the late Bob Darch many years ago. Susan Cordell started us off in the Big Apple with *Broadway Rag*, followed by ragtime veterinarian Dr. Dave Majchrzak romping through Pennsylvania with the *Keystone Rag*. Moving southward into Maryland, Mimi Blais gave us a scintillating taste of Eubie with the *Baltimore Todolo*. Bill Edwards followed with a hybrid of Eubie and James P. with the *Charleston Charleston*, combining the signature pieces of those two composers. Then Bryan Wright and Martin Spitznagel performed a duet of Bryan's *Ticklish Tom*, subtitled a Carolina Cakewalk. Dr. Steve Standiford set a delightful pace with his famous rendition of *The Georgia Grind*. Continuing south, northerner Jim Radloff from Wisconsin took us to the rambunctious *Alabama Jubilee*. Mimi came back for a taste of one of the earliest of ragtime pieces, *The Mississippi Rag*. The journey continued westward with a solo of the *Texas Rag* from Martin. Touching on our neighbors in the southwest, Steve brought out the rarely heard *Border Blues*. California native Bill gave us a taste of the also seldom played *California Sunshine*.

At this point we took a journey out into the Pacific Ocean, and perhaps the most likely to make it to YouTube moment of the concert. Sue Keller and her friend Beverly Opelka started off a nice little vamp, accompanied very adeptly on the cocoanuts by Brett

Youens as he galloped, sort of, across the stage, in a Monty Pythonish manner. When he was finally done, Sue continued with a verse of the *Hawaiian War Chant* with Beverly soldiering on at the other piano. Then as she started a second verse, out of nowhere - well actually out of each side of the stage - came the hula girls. Keep in mind that budgets are tight for these types of events, and authentic hula girls were unavailable. But Dr. Dave and Professor Bill did their best with their leis, grass skirts, well placed coconut shells and dark socks exposed. A little bit of bumping and swaying, and then they were gone. Surprisingly, no encores were called for, but Sue and Bev did manage a grand finish. Susan Cordell took us to the 49th State of Alaska with another rarely heard rag, *Flicker Red*. From there the best place to go was Bob Darch's ancestral home, so the entire troupe, led by Jim, gave out with a rousing rendition of Berlin's *I Want to Go Back to Michigan*. Bryan and Martin returned with a duet of *Hoosier Rag* and *Richmond Rag* in tandem. It was hard to resist the need to go to Illinois, so Sue, Bev, Dave and Jim were joined by Mike Schwimmer on his tiny washboard, letting us know the *Wish't They Was in Peoria*. Dr. Dave gave homage to his neck of the woods with the dynamic *St. Louis Rag*, and we all ended up back in central Missouri with *The Sedalia Stomp*, composed for the festival by Galen Wilkes in 1983. The captive audience was then allowed to escape with big smiles into the relatively cool afternoon.

The first evening concert, *The Entertainer*, was also held at the State Fair Community College Theater this year, with events moving to the Liberty Center the following day. This sold-out event helped to set a joyous tone for the rest of the week. Host David Reffkin kept things moving along smoothly. Early on, Sue Keller announced that the entire festival would be dedicated to the memory of pianist and friend of the festival John Arpin, who passed on in November of 2007. Up first was classical-come-to-ragtime pianist from New York, Richard Dowling. Flowing forth from his fingers was Joplin's *Magnetic Rag*, Lamb's sumptuous *Ragtime Nightingale*, *Poor Katie Redd* by Eubie Blake, and the challenging *Cataract Rag* that thrilled the audience. Among the highlights of the evening were Glenn performing *Elite Syncopations* and his own *Spider in the Tub*, plus a couple of duets with David Reffkin on violin, including the dynamic *Charleson Rag*. Mimi Blais did a nice set including *Pastime Rag #3* and the lovely Joplin Rag *Weeping Willow*. Dave Tucker performed some lovely pieces in his set as well. He had the honor of playing the theme piece for the festival, *Fig Leaf Rag*, followed by two other Joplin pieces, *The Strenuous Life* and *Heliotrope Bouquet*, the one surviving rag partially composed by Louis Chauvin. Reffkin came back with violin in hand, followed by Glenn Jenks. They entertained us with the rarely heard *Bird Brain Rag* by Joseph Lamb, followed by Ford Dabney's *Anoma* and James Scott's *Quality Rag*. They finished off their set with the advanced *Euphonic Sounds* and a stellar *Elite Syncopations*. Dowling and Jenks came back out and the quartet let loose with one of the first of many *Maple Leaf Rag* performances of the weekend. Afterwards most people left the college headed for more revelry at the Best Western, and another night of questionable weather, leaving the air fresh and clear for Thursday morning.

Thursday

One of the great parts of the major festivals is the opportunity to learn even more about the music or things associated with it. Seminars have become an increasingly popular staple of such events, and this year was no exception in Sedalia. The kickoff was

a 9:00 a.m. presentation by Bill Edwards on giving voice to silent movies through the use of music. It demonstrated how poor musical choices could detract from a story, how good ones could enhance it, and how sound effects could be rendered. Included were a sing-along and a clip from a Buster Keaton comedy that set a happy mood for the morning. He was followed by Jack Rummel who gave an unusual presentation - a quiz actually. Jack played 29 recordings of ragtime played on various musical instruments, including an astonishing yodeling version of Nola, and the audience was instructed to write down the instrument on the sheets he gave out. He covered everything from hammered dulcimers to Moog synthesizers. No clue if we were graded on a curve. Larry Karp, author of *The Ragtime Kid*, a mystery surrounding Brun Campbell and other Sedalia notables in 1900, gave the group some insight into the research he did to develop his novel. He was clear about trying to find a balance between history and fiction, while using some alternate forms of DNA to fill in the gaps and create a story. The noon seminar was given by British pianist Phillip Dyson on fellow countryman composer Billy Mayerl. In addition to informing us how to properly pronounce the name, he gave a history of Mayerl's works, adeptly performing many of them in a variety of moods.

The outdoor entertainment started around 9:00 a.m. as well in the various sites around the downtown area. There was fairly good attendance this year overall, even though gas prices and other economic factors reduced it slightly from the previous year's festival. At the Maple Leaf Club site along the railroad tracks, there were some substantial audiences throughout the weekend. Other than the trains which sometimes disrupt the venue, usually met with good humor, we had the added issue of wind gusts this year which made for interesting interactions with the canopy above the park. In spite of all this, the increased popularity of this venue was clearly a plus for the performers and hosts who attended. The Gazebo Park was in full swing once again, with some fine Musically Yours presentations to boot. These were events where the featured pianist played something outside of the usual expected ragtime, perhaps citing musical influences or other interests. The wind did not have quite the same effect there, but by Saturday the heat set in. Yet there was always a good crowd under the canopy.

The Cake Walk Hall was in full swing by 11:00 each morning, providing dance instruction followed by sets of music to dance to. Rod and Tricia Biensen, staples of this venue, helped guide newcomers and veterans alike, helping them become adept at the Two Step or the Grizzly Bear, useful skills if one ever encounters a ragtime orchestra on their journeys. The Katy Depot, the most recent regular venue, has the combined allure of an intimate indoor environment in which to hear the performers along with the great Katy museum with train history. It was used for private events on Thursday, but open for mini-concerts on Friday and Saturday throughout the morning and afternoon. Also not to be overlooked is the basement of the Methodist Church, the same building in which the symposiums are held. It is a great place to beat the heat, and hear one or more of the many pianists who come to the festival. Members of the congregation are there serving up sandwiches, drinks and ice cream as well.

The primary outdoor venue, The Stark Pavilion, was moved this year due to construction on the corner of Ohio and Fifth. So for 2008 it was located up on Second Street under the large mural of Scott Joplin: slightly tighter quarters, but still with the same capacity overall, and the same enthusiasm as always. The only person it seemed to be a problem for was Jeff Barnhart who claimed he sat at the old location for several

hours waiting for them to put up the tent. Fortunately he caught on. This pavilion is the two piano venue where musical mayhem can and will ensue without warning. There were also some issues with the wind, but everything held tight in this temporary location throughout the event. It is anticipated that The Stark Pavilion will once again be situated in front of the former office of publisher John Stark in 2009.

Thursday afternoon was the time for the Cradle of Ragtime concert, presenting a wide range of authentic ragtime performances with some pleasant surprises. Host John Petley, known lately for his fine folk rag playing, included Brun Campbell's *Barber Shop Rag*, the lovely James Scott piece *Grace and Beauty*, and Hampton's *Agitation Rag*. The international ragtime delegation was capably represented by The Royal Guitars from Denmark, returning after a couple of years away. They delighted the audience with an acoustic set including Scott Joplin and Scott Hayden's rarely heard *Something Doing*, *Indianola* from composers Henry and Onivas, and *Glad Rag* by J. Bodewalt Lampe, originally from Denmark. New to the Sedalia stage this year was Faye Ballard, the only player that has been actively involved with the World Championship of Old-Time Piano Playing since its inception in 1974. Among her selections were three favorites, Morton's *Grandpa's Spells*, Roberts' *Pork and Beans*, and Bowman's *Twelfth Street Rag*, all well received by the crowd. Rising star Adam Swanson, current World Champion of Old Time Piano Playing and just scary good at 16, started out with John Arpin's take on *Bohemia*, then played what is becoming one of his staples, a very involved arrangement of the *St. Louis Blues* infused with many elements of Johnny Maddox's performance, which he in turn learned from his aunt while growing up in Tennessee. To seal the deal and put any doubts to rest, he then tackled the daunting Schutt piece *Bluin' the Black Keys*. Also new to Sedalia this year were the Ragtime Rebels from the University of Nevada in Las Vegas, which has been led for many years by Professor Dean Gronemier. They had an eclectic set of great arrangements for all manner of mallet instruments, starting with Joplin's *The Favorite*, moving on to the more contemporary *Root Beer Rag* by Billy Joel, and concluding with a long-time xylophone standard, Felix Arndt's *Nola*, and the audience concluded with warm applause.

The Easy Winner's Concert on Thursday evening went very well in spite of both technical and non-technical glitches. Host Glenn Jenks first had to contend with a gremlin in the sound system which had him dueling with a local radio station to great comic effect. He was finally able to get to the point where could bring out the first performer, Terry Waldo. Terry started out with one of his own songs from the 1970, *Everthing is All Right with Me*. Then he spent a few colorful moments dueling with the radio station, and conveying comic situations about his recent travels to other venues. His next piece was an instrumental rag, *Forty Years On*. Having spent a great deal of time with Eubie for many years, it was natural for him to talk about the importance of the breakthrough musical of Sissle and Blake, *Shuffle Along* which in part paved the way for other black composers and performers on Broadway. He made this point with a scintillating *Charleston* from Cecil Mack and James P. Johnson's *Runnin' Wild*. Next up was the "flip side" of his first number, a sort of narrative with choruses called *The Wrong Side*. The final piece required a bit of history starting with its composition and up to its adoption as a honky-tonk standard in the 1940s and 1950s: thus ended Waldo's part of the show with a wide ranging interpretation of the ubiquitous *Twelfth Street Rag*.

One thing that was clear is that Joplin's genius is underestimated at times, in spite

of how much we know about his piano rags. Among the most ambitious things that director Sue Keller has done for the festival was to put together a presentation of highlights from Joplin's Opera, *Treemonisha*. A lot of hard work went into editing what would be performed and rehearsing as well. It paid off in a big way as the audience was extremely moved by what they heard. Among the singers were many ragtime players, including Richard Dowling, Glenn Jenks, John Partridge, Brett Youens and Bill Edwards, with Nora Hulse filling in for Pamela Edwards who was unable to attend. They were joined by singers Nancy Carle, Sharon Moore, Beverly Opelka and Seth Rector. The small orchestra was comprised of Sue Keller and Jeff Barnhart at the pianos, with Anne Barnhart on flute, Danny Coots on percussion, Steve Standiford on tuba, and maestro Dave Reffkin doing a magnificent job on the violin. Among the highlights were *Aunt Dinah has Blowed de Horn*, *Frolic of the Bears* (albeit without bears - hard to train for opera), and the finale, *A Real Slow Drag*, after which the audience gave a resounding standing ovation. Sue's efforts should be recognized in this truly demanding presentation, as well as the talents of all who participated.

The second half of the program went in an unusual direction when Glenn introduced Neville Dickie, even though Jeff Barnhart was scheduled to come out. Jeff ventured out anyhow, and from that point on nobody was sure who would appear on stage when anyone was introduced. It was one of the great unplanned running gags of the year. Jeff started with a request, the mournful *219 Blues* by Jelly Roll Morton. He then brought out his wife Danny and drummer Anne, or something like that, and the trio Ivory and Gold performed *Pine Apple Rag*, followed by one of the first pieces Anne and Jeff ever did together, ("We were young and innocent. I was young, she was innocent."), *Blue Goose Rag*. Then in a tribute to our fallen ragtime comrade John Arpin, they played Jenks' own *Planxty Jim Stewart*, with Danny doing a masterful job playing the snare with only his fingers and thumb. They closed out with the famous ragtime anthem that contains no ragtime; at least it didn't until this bunch got hold of it, *Alexander's Ragtime Band*. Glenn came back out to re-introduce Neville Dickie, and this time got - Jeff Barnhart. Then Neville actually did arrive, exclaiming that he had already got three rounds of applause and hadn't even played yet. Our British friend started with a great James P. Johnson tune, *Old Fashioned Love*. He then pulled out the eclectic and fabulous *White Wash Man* by Jean Schwartz, his own take on the Donald Lambert arrangement of the classical *Anitra's Dance*, and *Pinetop's Boogie Woogie*, one of his specialties. Jeff was called out to the piano, so of course Terry showed up instead. Or was it Anne? In any case, things got straightened out and Danny and Jeff joined Neville for the final tune, jazz standard *Limehouse Blues*. Then it was off to the hotel for those smitten by syncopation to revel in another night of pianistic pleasantries.

Friday

Enthusiastic supporters set up camp early in the Methodist Church for another round of seminars starting at 9:00 am. First up were Bryan Wright and Martin Spitznagel talking about novelty writer and performer Frank Banta. It included live performances of his challenging works along with some recordings, and a nice overview of his career. A more contemporary writer, one connected with the ragtime resurgence, was the next topic. Judy Ashwander Moore and Sharon Moore gave a perspective and history on their relative, the late Donald Ashwander. This was enhanced with audio recordings of him

playing, and some fine numbers performed Sue Keller on solos, as well as accompanying Sharon, a professional jazz singer, on a few delightfully entertaining songs. It was great to hear more about a guy who, to many, was simply a name in a book, and enjoyable to have his family members there honoring him. Next up was Neville Dickie who gave a talking concert about some of the great stride players, many who he had met in his native England as well as the US. It featured interesting stories about them and some powerful stride licks as well. The last symposium of the festival was by performer and author Terry Waldo, who in the 1960s started a relationship with pianist Eubie Blake which would last until the ragtime pioneer's death. He had many interesting stories about Eubie that are rarely heard, and fielded some interesting questions as well.

As always, the afternoon concert, Legacy of Scott Joplin, featured pieces by composer and namesake of the festival. It was led off by host Donald Ryan who played *Leola*, a sanguine *Solace* and *The Cascades*. Following him was Phillip Dyson giving unique performances of the seldom heard *Bink's Waltz*, *Elite Syncopations*, and the benchmark *Maple Leaf Rag*. Then Susan Cordell launched into the popular *Pine Apple Rag*, followed by the *Maple Leaf* clone *Sugar Cane Rag*, and last year's featured piece, *Gladiolus Rag*. John Remmers continued with the delicate *Weeping Willow*, Sedalia composition *Swipesy Cakewalk* and the grand waltz *Bethena*. Brian Holland took us out with a fascinating take on *Peacherine Rag*, one more Sedalia era piece, *The Ragtime Dance*, and his own arrangement of *Scott Joplin's New Rag* which modulates from C to Db for a challenging ending.

The festivities then moved to Smith Cotton High School for the traditional Friday Night Fish Fry. On the musical side, performers included Faye Ballard, Dave Majchrzak, Bill Edwards, Max Keenlyside, Rich Berry and John Partridge, playing their best dinner rags. Some of the other players spread themselves throughout the town as they had on Thursday night, happily targeting the fine Sedalia restaurants that offer discounted food in exchange for performances. At least we get to eat well, unlike the rest of the year. That is a reminder of the old joke: How do you streamline a ragtime piano player's car? Take the Domino's sign off the top.

The evening event was the great Ragtime Ball, held this year at the Missouri Electric Cooperative building. The Sunflower Ragtime Orchestra let loose with the opening number which allowed every dance in attendance to parade around the room, many in very festive period outfits. Those who had been receiving instruction over the past two days joined in with the Biensens as the orchestra played rousing ragtime era pieces. Intermissions were fielded by Nora and Mark Hulse, as well as Adam Yarian and Ed Judd. A splendid time was had by all.

Then most people returned to the Best Western on South Limit Avenue (US 65) for even more ad hoc ragtime and stride into the wee hours. While not as structured an event as the rest of the festival, the nightly parties at the host hotel often yield some of the greatest surprises, and allow a chance for previously unheard players to shine. With two pianos and a stage, the possibilities become endless. This year a silent short was shown each night to either remind older folks about or introduce younger ones to the genius of film comedians such as Buster Keaton and Harold Lloyd. New duet teams were formed as well, along with some round robin playing of classics like *Honeysuckle Rose* or *Twelfth Street Rag*. There was even a Space Shuffle smackdown - two duet performances of the piece back to back - later during the final evening. So for those not getting enough

ragtime in their diet throughout the day, the after hours is recommended highly, and it is cholesterol free to boot.

Saturday

The final full day of ragtime got underway at 8:30 am, but in a reverse direction from previous years. Due to the displacement of the Stark Pavilion, the annual Ragtime Fashion Contest was held at the Liberty Center, with participants in many categories strutting their finery on stage for an appreciative audience and a panel of judges. Meanwhile outside, a group of classic motorcars and sleepy musicians were all preparing for the parade, which commenced just after 9:00 from the Liberty Center on a route down Ohio to Main, ending at the Maple Leaf Site. Many important members of Sedalia and of the Scott Joplin International Ragtime Foundation rode in the cars, as did some of the fashion show participants, with the walking participants behind. We had the added benefit of an old fire truck this year for a great visual effect. A truck carrying a small band of instrumentalists was behind, performing such standards as *Bill Bailey*, and behind them near the rear of the pack were some representative piano players.

At the end of the parade the crowds gathered under the canopy where we were fortunate to have very little train traffic that morning. The winners of the fashion show were announced. Among the highlights were a lovely couple of females in their Sunday best who charmed the crowd and a little boy of around five immaculately dressed who was less interested in the contest than he was to get to the nearest restroom, a surprisingly entertaining moment. The combination of high fashion and well preserved automobiles was further enhanced by delightful weather. As always, the merchants of Sedalia who participated by offering some very nice prizes should be recognized for their support. For a full listing of them, you can either look in your program if you attended, or a program or information can be obtained from the foundation office.

One of the joys of ragtime in Sedalia has increasingly been the participation of a new generation of young performers, who get their recognition in a number of venues. Among those participating this year include Wesley Reznicek, a fifteen year old from Dixon, Missouri with true dedication to the craft; Morgan Siever, an eleven year old girl from Carlyle, Illinois with enormous talent and drive; and William Perkins, a fifteen year old from Riverbank in central California who keeps advancing his skill. Two others, while still under 18, have pretty much moved through the ranks to join the adult players, and both provide an encouraging look at the future of the music. They include seventeen year old Canadian Max Keenlyside from Charlottetown in Prince Edwards, already notable as a composer as well, and the scary-talented-unstoppable-but-we-love-him Adam Swanson, who at sixteen is already making a name for himself not only as a performer but an author and researcher. All of us, players and fans alike, need to continue to encourage this batch of players and any potential future performers, no matter their ability, in order to keep this important music alive in perpetuity.

The Saturday afternoon formal concert, Ragtime Revelations, put the spotlight on a wide variety of performers this year including some of the aforementioned youth. Host John Partridge started out with some of his own pieces, including *Lemon Tree Rag*, *Three Rag Miniatures*, and his signature *Lake Superior Rag*. Next up was youngster Morgan Siever who tackled the challenging *Doc Brown's Cakewalk* by Charles Johnson, a task for any level of player, followed by *I Found a New Baby* and *The Dance of the Grizzly Bear*

(again, the no bears on stage rule was strictly enforced). Max Keenlyside lit into the *Charlottetown Rambler*, one of his own pieces, Jelly Roll Morton's *Kansas City Stomps*, and another original, *Hickory Smoked Rag*. Don Ryan thrilled us with a recent composition by Hal Ibsitz, *Tulsey Town Rag* the prize winning rag written for the centennial of Tulsa, Oklahoma. The Philadelphian from Russia by way of San Antonio, Larisa Migachyov, entertained us with her own contribution, *Purple Chicken Rag*, followed by *Flying Tomatoes* (food is her specialty), and a lovely *Magnetic Rag* by Joplin. For a change of piece, Bill Brown brought out his accordion; an instrument rarely used for classic rags, and demonstrated the possibilities with Turpin's *St Louis Rag* and Joplin's *Original Rags*. The last one on stage was Wesley, who started with *Weeping Willow*, then a personal favorite of many including myself, *The Lion Tamer*, finishing with a note of culture on the Rachmaninoff-tinged *Russian Rag*. All were received at the end with a standing ovation.

Host Larry Lyles kept watch over the Stark Pavilion throughout the festival, and as always the last day of outdoor events ended there with powerhouse performances by Radloff and Standiford, John Petley, Glenn Jenks, boogie and blues from Neville Dickie, and no holds barred excitement from the favorite duo of Jeff Barnhart and Brian Holland, accompanied by Danny Coots. Then it was off to play-for-your-dinner for some of the performers, or the official barbeque ragtime dinner at the high school, before the final concert of the weekend, the always talked about and should be taken sort of seriously but not too seriously or you'll be confused and dazed Music Hall Concert.

While there is always a theme for this event, it often seems to evolve even while the concert is in progress, and even the performers don't know what to expect at times. The official theme was Le Chat Noir, loosely translated as events at a cathouse. Dave Majchrzak and Mike Schwimmer started by giving the audience members who may have forgotten their spare sense of humor at home a chance to escape through the exits before the carnage began. A reason to perhaps stay was immediately brought forward by Miss Sue, dressed in a large Fig Leaf, until a wardrobe malfunction revealed - well - Miss Sue, but at least partially covered. It was not the last appearance of said Fig Leaf (the symbol of the 2008 feature Joplin rag) which made its way across stage several times during the evening. Dr. Dave brought his daughter Erin this year, and after he plowed through *Rattlesnake Rag*, he brought her on for a cute song perfect for a clueless desperate teen; *I've Been Waiting For Your Phone Call*. Each of the performers was then "escorted" on stage for their turn at the piano. Anne Barnhart brought out Phillip Dyson who entertained us with *Sweet Williams* by Billy Mayerl. Then Mimi came on stage, partially dressed and "on a break," getting things moving with *Pickles and Peppers*. The guy she left backstage, cowboy drummer Danny (a brilliant bit of comic acting for a first appearance) came out to locate her. She ended up coercing him into a delightful Latin-rhythmed *Patricia Rag*.

The always elegant Richard Dowling was escorted out to pass the time with three Pastimes, #2, 4 and 3 in order. At some point Mimi reappeared with the leaf, and some errant panties, embarrassing the poor guy in the best possible way to great response. Just when we thought it was safe, Agnes from Wonderland, the bearded ingénue who managed to make a splash last year, came back as well. Seems that Dr. Dave escaped from the cell, so what can you do once the cat is in the house? Jeff and Brian somehow got out there and gave us two dynamic duets, *Bohemia* and *A Handful of Keys*. They were

joined by Miss Sue and Mr. Schwimmer and a couple of ducks for a bit of a Swingle Singers styled rendition of *The Easy Winners*. The first half was closed out by Ivory and Gold, comprised of Jeff, Anne and Danny, performing *Ain't Misbehavin'* and *I've Got Rhythm*.

The overflowing sold out crowd remained for the second half of the program which started with the UNLV Ragtime Rebels reprising *Root Beer Rag*, *The Favorite* and *Nola*. Dr. Dave came out for some audience participation fun, teaching them the [not all too] tricky chorus of *I Like Bananas Because They Have No Bones*. He was a bit startled by the singing heads that popped out from behind the curtains next to his piano for that phrase, but still didn't miss a beat. Sue Keller sang once again, the sizzling tune being *Temporary Baby*, accompanied by Terry with percussion by Mike and Danny. Terry remained for another eclectic song about our complicated world, *We Owe a Lot to China*. Next, Brett Youens, who had been doing yeoman's work the entire week as a backstage manager, regaled us with his own new composition, *The Story Teller*. Neville Dickie was again escorted to the piano, letting loose with the amazing Bob Zurke number *Hobson Street Blues*. He finished out with a boogie-woogie take on *Swanee River*. Mimi and Sue took the pianos for Galen Wilkes' gentle anthem, *Last of the Ragtime Pioneers*, followed by Jeff and Brian with Mike and Danny ripping through *Tiger Rag*. The grand finale was an all hands (on all instruments) *Dill Pickles Rag*, with Mimi on her famous miniature piano out front. The only thing that could possibly be worn by everybody in the room after that was a big smile.

The Future

There were some major shifts in the organization and makeup of the Festival early in this past decade, and an expansion by adding Wednesday to the schedule. Another great enhancement is the opportunities for a wider variety of players to participate have further enhanced the experience for all involved. The board of directors, who usually remain on the sidelines during this event, need to be recognized for their steadfast support not only of the event, but their treatment of the entertainers. Music Director Sue Keller has also been up to the challenge of the past few years, and has once again been engaged for the 2009 festival as music director. Know that as of this writing she is already pretty far into planning something to equal or even top the festivities of 2008. It really does take that long (refer to the 2007 review for details).

However, there are two important facets concerning the future of this festival and of ragtime in general. One was already touched on - the current crop of players in training. This includes more than just the youth, as I frequently encounter pianists nearing retirement age who want to start playing ragtime. Engage them whenever you can with encouragement, because this is a music meant to be share, whether playing or listening. The other facet is you. My peers and I have been hearing for years how the audience for ragtime has been literally dying off. This was true at one point, but no longer. When we perform in schools or for youth groups, or even see comments on YouTube and other sites, it is clear that there is a continuing interest in ragtime by youth, and the chances are that the fan base is actually on the rise. I know this to be true in Australia in particular.

But rather than the players preaching to the choir, we need the choir to preach to the potential congregation. How can you help build on this? Have that ragtime CD or rag-filled iPod with you at all times. Let a little bit of it slip out at work, or when somebody is

riding in your car. Get CDs for your children, nieces, nephews, whoever. Arrange for a concert in your own town - there are both venues and willing players easy to match up. Send them to one of the many web sites that feature ragtime music and the fun that goes along with it. Most of all, don't forget to tell them how much they could have in Sedalia, Missouri, The Cradle of Ragtime.

See you next year.