

## Introduction

Jack paced the small room that housed the controls of his recording studio. He was growing increasingly nervous that the old piano player he was waiting for was going to stand him up. Their agreed upon rendezvous time had arrived and passed over an hour ago and Jack was beginning to think he might have to close up the studio and search some of the old timer's favorite watering holes.

He couldn't understand what went wrong. His first recording with Red had gone smoothly, after Red's initial apprehensions were quelled. Indeed, once Red started recording, it was difficult to get him to stop. The tunes and ideas flowed from him as strongly and tempestuously as a river overflowing its banks. Once Jack compiled the best of the material he contacted Grand Canyon Music, a record company in Phoenix, to put Red's music out on 78s and distribute the discs to their outlets. So far the reviews had been very enthusiastic and the sales had outperformed anyone's highest hopes. People were entranced with Red's playing and were asking for more. So where was he?

Jack walked out to the lobby and grabbed his car keys. Just as he approached the front door, it opened from the outside to reveal a highly inebriated Red, who leaned on the doorjamb, slurring, "Well, where ya goin', Jack, my boy? I thought we had a date here."

Jack couldn't contain his annoyance, exclaiming "Well yes, we did, Red: over an *hour* ago. You said 10 am was too early to get together, so I agreed to an afternoon session. Has 3 pm become too early as well?"

"No, no, Jack, really, I juss lost track of time. I use to have mora that—time, I mean—before so many people knew me. I'll be walking down the street and som-un' I've ne'er seen'll come up and say 'Hey, Red, man I love your tunes!' We'll get to talkin'n all of a sudd'n they're buyin' me breakfass or lunch or even a drink or two..."

"Or three or four?" Jack asked with raised eyebrows.

"We-ell, you know," Red began defensively, squinting at Jack to remain standing, "a guy's gotta be polite, Jack..."

"Hmm...Red," Jack began cautiously, "how do you feel right now? It is quite a process to set up the equipment and prepare to capture more of your great music, you know. If you're feeling like you need a nap or we should postpone until you have a bit more energy..."

"Poss-pone?? Nothin' doin', my fine young lad. Let us proceed to the pianah!" Red lurched in the general direction of the studio, tangled his feet up in the carpet and fell face first onto the lobby couch. He made an abortive attempt at rising, slumped down, and seconds later was snoring gape-mouthed.

Jack stood there non-plussed for a moment and then walked dejectedly back to the studio. He had some other projects to edit and clean-up so the day would not be a total waste. He was worried that Red's small amount of success was changing him, and not for the better. Red was now playing in restaurants and was even being invited to perform in people's private homes. In addition to his pay, Red eagerly

accepted every offer to buy or give him a drink, and there was a lot of drinking going on. As Jack continued working on his back projects, he pondered a solution.

### 1<sup>st</sup> set

At 5 pm, Jack was finishing putting away his equipment when he heard a terrific crash coming from the studio lobby. He ran into to find Red had fallen over the coffee table in front of the couch acting as his “sleep-it-off” pallet.

“Whuff!” exclaimed Red, “Wha-where am I?” He looked around blearily before resting his red eyes on Jack.

“At the tail end of a drunk it looks to me,” Jack scowled at Red. “I’m closing up shop for the night, Red, so you’ll have to go.”

“Yeah, kid, how’d you know? I do!” Red grunted as he staggered to his feet. “Don’t worry, I remember where the john is.” He weaved down the hall at the back of the lobby, intent on finding relief.

Jack rolled his eyes heavenward and returned to the engineering section of the studio to collect his hat. As he was hunting for his keys he heard the piano in the recording room begin to play. He stopped for a moment to keep his temper and then really tuned in to what he was hearing. Red was playing a march that Jack had heard performed by some of the local Dixieland bands in town. He couldn’t remember the name but there was no mistaking the opening fanfare. He strolled into the recording room and leaned against the doorjamb, hands in his pockets.

Red was sitting bolt upright at the piano, concentrating on his flying fingers, oblivious not only to Jack but to everything around him. Jack could have shouted, set off an alarm, *even*, so he thought, offered Red a shot of whiskey, and Red would have kept pounding those keys.

When he brought the piece to a virtuosic finish, he swiveled on the stool and looked up at Jack with a bemused expression. “Jack, I know I let you down today. That’s not the way friends treat each other. I wouldn’t blame you for tellin’ me to go blow, but I’m feelin’ real good now and I’d like to play if you’d care to stay.”

Jack was silent for a moment and said, “Well, Red, it’s not like I have a hot date or anything...but I don’t have any hooch for you to swig on as you play.” He raised his eyebrows and looked questioningly at Red.

“We-ell, Jack,” Red squinted at him in a sideways glance, “I *guess* I could try and play OK with no, a-hem...liquid sustenance.” He adopted a tragic air as he rolled his eyes in Jack’s direction.

“You sounded pretty good just then and not a drop of booze in sight. We’ll see if you can you do actually do that twice.” Jack turned his back, went out of the recording room and shut the sound-proof door leaving Red muttering under his breath, “Li’l whelp!! Do it *twice*? Did he *actually* say ‘do it TWICE?’ Hmmph! Wait’ll he hears this!!”

Red waited for Jack to give him the OK sign through the window and launched into his march once again, attacking it with a new fervor, bringing new variations in on top of his old ones, playing the melody with his left hand and his right hand beat out arpeggios and chords, adding chorus after chorus and finally changing key midway through the last time around the tune. When he finished, the

sweat was dripping from him and he wearily turned to Jack to see the young man's upraised thumb telling him this was really a keeper.

Walking into the engineering room, he was greeted by Jack laughing and cheering. "Man," Jack exclaimed, "I gotta keep getting you all mad. When you're worked up over something, you're amazing!!"

Red smirked and said, "I've always played good when my mind was gnawing at something and what you said got me so riled I didn't even know what I was doin'!" He paused. "I do pretty well with a few draws from a bottle too, y'know..."

"Never mind that, Red!" Jack admonished, "Once we're done here, I'll be happy to buy you the whole bottle, forget about a few swigs. It'd be nice if you made it last for a couple of days, though."

A not entirely comfortable silence ensued that Jack broke by saying, "I know that I know the tune you played but I can't remember the name of it." He rotated his hand in a small circle, indicating that he wanted Red to share what he knew.

"That piece is not a *tune*, Jack. It's a march called ***High Society***. A clarinet player I used to gig with down there in New Orleans took that march...well, really stole it, I guess," Red chuckled softly, "and made a rag out of it. He learned the piccolo part from the march and played it on his axe. Now whole bands play it and it sounds like a real New Orleans jazz tune, but back then it was ragtime! I'm probably the only guy who does it as a piano solo now, but back then in the Big Easy, any piano player who wanted a job had to be able to cut that piece!"

"It was amazing, Red," Jack enthused. "Surely back then, even when you were young, you couldn't keep that pace up all night, could you?"

"Hell, no, Jack!" Red barked, "And the owners of the place didn't want us to play that fast all night, either! We had to give it some variety so's the folks would get down to the business of drinkin' and carousin'; the real reason they were there! Let me demonstrate."

Red went back into the room with the piano and sat at the keyboard. Jack gave him the OK and he began playing a lilting waltz. Again, Jack recognized the tune, but couldn't name it. After a short time, Red transitioned into a loping stride, moving out of the waltz rhythm into a foxtrot. As Jack had learned to expect, the music built in intensity to an exciting climax. As he listened to Red finishing up the tune, he thought about how it must have been in Red's day: the raucous crowd, the beautiful ladies, perhaps a fight or even gunfire over a quickly forgotten dispute. He wished he could experience, say, *one* night in an environment such as the one he was imagining, but was very glad to be young in the late 1940's; with the war over, things were looking bright.

Red sauntered into the engineering room with a wry smile on his face. He seemed to have fully recovered from his excesses of the previous evening. "Well, well, Jack," he began. "I have no idea where *that* one came from. I remember playin' it back in the day, but I haven't gone through that tune in around 20 years. Before **you** were born, I figure."

"Too, true, Red, too true. I think I might have an idea what you just played, however. Two weeks ago, I recorded a soprano and it seems to me that one of the melodies on the selection list was very similar to what you just played. Back in a second."

Jack popped out of his chair and went to a storage closet. He brought back a reel-to-reel tape labeled "Opera Session" with the date of recording. "I'm not sure what the producers want to do with this, if anything," Jack explained as he sat back in his chair and started to feed the tape into his machine. "Sometimes the sessions sit here for quite a spell before anything is done with them; sometimes they're never released."

Red watched over Jack's shoulder as he threaded the tape and manipulated the knobs and wheels. He marveled at the technology he was seeing. Things seemed to be moving so quickly nowadays, and really had been during the years between the two wars. At first, shortly after the laughably named "War to End All Wars" (until the next one, Red had cynically thought, even back in his young days), Red was dismayed about the pioneer recording industry, proclaiming that it would shortly mean the end of work for musicians such as himself. Although he had never recorded before meeting Jack, he had continued to find work; it seemed nothing could take the place of a live performance, especially when done with pizzazz and entertainment value! However, his means of learning tunes had to change; it was no longer good enough to pick up a tune from a fellow—often rival—piano player: now he knew he had to haunt record stores so that he could keep up with the latest tunes. Sure enough, within 6 months of the first appearance of those early "pop" records, he was being requested to play the tunes found on those little wax discs. The learning curve was steep, but Red was a fast learner and had a good memory, as evidenced by the tune he had just played in the recording room—a tune that he'd heard once on a record, played incessantly for about 3 months and then discarded for new requests.

Jack had been hunting around on the tape and called out, "Got it!" He played the tape for Red, who heard the same piano he had been playing being caressed by someone, he could tell, with real training. After a few seconds of the piano introduction to the aria, a beautiful female voice emanated from the speakers. Red was speechless. Jack allowed the old piano player to hear the aria to the end and then switched off the machine and began to remove the reel.

"Wow," Red breathed. "Sure doesn't sound like the same tune when *she* does it!" He paced the small room. "These tunes that I play all have different places they come from. I don't know much about the beginnings of a lot of these types of songs."

"The origins you mean?" Jack inquired. "Well. Let's see what that one was and where it was from." He looked at his list. "That aria is listed as...***Quando me'n vo'*** from 'La Boheme' by Giacomo Puccini"

"God Bless You!" exclaimed Red as if Jack had sneezed. Jack chuckled and Red said, "One of them Italian numbers, eh? That makes sense. I learned that one and one by another Italian guy...Verdi I think he was...when I was visiting New Orleans back in 1910 or so."

"They were playing songs from operas in New Orleans back then?"

"Still do! Many bands do a lot of their own jazzin' up of any tunes they can think of, from waltzes to opera tunes to, well, whatever. They do now what us pianna players were doing back in those good ol' days. Yes sir, I learned that song from none other than Jelly Roll himself!"

"You had said you knew him, but you actually were close enough to learn a song from 'The' Jelly Roll?"

"The one and only!" Red enthused proudly, "All them stories you know about him, from the diamond in his front tooth to driving is Caddy while towing his Lincoln behind it are one hundred percent true. That guy was amazing! Why, he could play *anything*." Red jumped up and ran into the recording room, calling behind him, "Check this out! I'll show you a version of **St. Louis Blues** that I copped part of from Jelly in 1915 on my second visit to the Big Easy, including the tango section...well, Jelly called that the "*Spanish tinge!*"

Red started with a dramatic tremolo and moved onto some arpeggios. He then began a pensive version of the minor-keyed section with pauses and drama that did not sound at all like the Jelly Roll Morton style Jack had heard before. He thought that Red still had some booze in his system the way he was laconically caressing the tune; it was the most peaceful, relaxed version of the Handy's blues he had ever heard.

Red returned to the minor strain and began to intensify the music adding in a bit of the tango style in the left hand. As Red moved into the final strain—the chorus, you would call it, Jack supposed, the music started to swagger. By the second chorus Red was beginning to romp.

THEN, returning yet again to the minor theme, Red went into full tango mode, only to leave it for a full boogie-woogie bass. Jack found himself moving with the music. After two choruses of boogie, Red finished up with a real, barrelhouse ride that ended in a whisper.

He came back out and looked puzzled. "Jack, that didn't sound *nothin'* like Jelly...I'm sorry."

"What do you mean?" Jack asked. "We already have a lot of Jelly on record. We need more Red. I've never heard **St. Louis Blues** played like that and I expect I never will again. It was a very personal statement, Red, with a lot of feeling. I think it was great."

Jack had not really spoken so passionately and at such length about Red's music since their first encounter in that saloon downtown and Red stood there looking seriously at him. "You really mean that, don't you?"

"I really do, Red. I think it was magical. Now, would you like to do some more or are you gettin' a little tired?" Jack's unabashed grin told Red he was goading him, and of course he took the bait.

"Tired, Jack, why I haven't even begun to play tonight. Now's when I'm just gettin' going. We might even stay up too late for a young whelp like you!"

## 2<sup>nd</sup> set

"Now, I'm gonna dig *waay* back," Red declared. "This tune was published in the same year as W.C.'s blues, believe it or not. At least, that's what I'm told, having never laid eyes, heh, heh...or fingers...on the sheet. It's called the **12th Street Rag**. A guy from Texas by the name of Euday Bowman wrote it." Red laughed shaking his head and continued, "Now *there's* a guy could've used a nickname like 'Red' or, well just about *anythin'* would've done!"

Red leapt up and strode into the studio, saying over his shoulder, "Get that tape rolling, Jack. I feel a rag comin' on!"

Red positioned himself at the piano, sat up straight and began the rag in mock-serious form at a moderate tempo and deliberately accenting each alternating note as it landed on the downbeat. After his "12th Street Concerto" wrapped up, he doubled the tempo and took Jack on a wild ride through multiple variations, increasing in intensity and even speed, finally moving up to a new key to ride out the piece like a cowhand taming a bronco. When he finished, he leaned back whooping and coughing.

"Whoo-ee!" Red sputtered. "I din't know who the victor was gonna be on *that* one. Sometimes I get so excited by that tune that I lose control. Not bad for an old guy, eh? And stone *sober*, yet!"

"Mm-hmm," Jack mused as he listened back to a few seconds of the end to be sure Red hadn't peaked out the levels. "Now that I've heard that piece, I have to tell you your timing couldn't be better."

"How's that, Jack?" Red asked.

"A side of **12th Street Rag** was recently released by a dixieland trombonist named Pee Wee Hunt. Apparently, the band had a bit more time reserved in the studio after they had finished recording the tunes they had planned on doing. So they did this piece as a laugh, you know, real corny and 'doo-wacky.' That throwaway tune is topping the charts."

"It all makes sense, Jack. There's something about that old music that connects with people. A jazz band playing ragtime is also no surprise; the first bands playin' what was later called 'jazz' were simply playin' piano rags and marches with band instruments. I hope *my* version makes a splash, too!"

"Pee Wee and company have paved the way, Red. We'll just have to see," Jack mused.

The pair sat for a few minutes lost in their own thoughts when Jack asked Red, "Since you knew Jelly Roll, did you catch any of his tunes? I mean, the ones he composed."

"How could I avoid it, Jack? Ol' Jelly's tunes were all over the Big Easy. I'll do a great tune with a lot of mileage. It's part rag, part pop tune and all Jelly! It's called **Frog-I-More Rag**. Have you ever heard it?"

"Can't say as I have, Red," Jack admitted.

"Jelly wrote it for a trombone player he knew in New Orleans called One-Eyed Frog Joseph. It's a terrific rag. Let me at it!" Red scampered back into the studio and took his place, waited for the nod from Jack and began the introduction. Jack could almost hear the different instruments that might have taken over certain sections and melodies. When Red had returned to the starting melody, Jack thought he'd be finishing it out but he moved into a new melody, playing it in an almost hymn-like manner. Jack squinted his eyes and listened more closely. He'd heard this tune before, but not as part of the rag Red was playing. After a clear statement of the melody, Red launched into some Jelly-like characteristics and brought the rag to a close.

He sauntered back into the recording booth and looked at Jack inquiringly. "Did you catch the tune that finished up Jelly's piece?"

Jack said, " I did recognize it; I've heard it before but can't remember the title."

"Ol' Jelly was a crafty guy." Red chuckled, "He recycled that tune in the third section and called it 'Sweetheart O' Mine.' These guys were always great at reusin' material and makin' more money on it!!" He shook his head in wonder. "Even I'm beginning to make a bit of money with all the gigs my first recording's with you have brought me. I really do have to hand it to you, Jack. You know what you're doin'."

"Thanks, Red," Jack said a little embarrassedly. "Do you have any more tunes you'd like to get down tonight?"

"Do I ever, Jack," Red exclaimed, "do I ever. I'm going to go in and play some tunes written by someone I admire very much. His name is James Hubert Blake, but we all call him Eubie. He's a couple'a years older'n me. Man, does this guy have *hands!* Well, actually his palms aren't all that big, but he has these skinny, spidery, *strong* fingers that can pretty much play anything!

I'm gonna go in there and string some of Eubie's tunes together. I'll start with Eubie's most controversial song, at least at the time he wrote it. It was a love song called ***Love Will Find a Way*** that he included in his show, "Shuffle Along." Man, the jazz, rag and blues music from that show was so hot!"

Jack interrupted Red, "Did you actually see the show, Red?"

"I sure did! That show was a great moment in music, Jack! Y'see, the whole hub-bub about that song, really the whole production, was that it was the first show to present black actors, singers and dancers onstage as *real* people. The real risk here is that the show was playing for white audiences! Nobody had to worry though! Every night that song was *very* warmly received and it's stayed one of Eubie's handful of real hits."

Red thought a moment and then continued, "From there, I'll move onto an old favorite of mine, and one of his biggest hits: ***I'm Just Wild About Harry***. Y'know, he originally wrote that tune as a waltz, but Lottie Gee, the leading lady in "Shuffle Along," the show where Eubie's waltz was to go, said she couldn't put it across unless it was a one-step. Eubie was reluctant to change it, but his lyricist, Noble Sissle, had a crush on Miss Gee and so changed it was!" Red rolled his eyes as if to suggest that this was always the way; a woman would get her way, especially if *two* men were involved!

Jack was writing down the titles. "Any other tunes you'd like to include of Mr. Blake's?"

"Well, one that was in that show but a couple of years older has a great melody and chords so I'll throw in ***Goodnight, Angeline***. I remember in the show, the plot paused so Eubie and Noble could do some of their vaudeville routine and this was one of the songs. They sang so pretty together. I never forgot that tune. Then let's finish up with a great ragtime piece that Eubie *claims* he wrote when he was 16!! Pers'nally. I don't believe it for a second, but I'd love to see if I can get through ***Charleston Rag***."

Red strode into the studio and, getting Jack's nod that they were rolling, played for over 13 minutes. Jack realized that this take could never be released as it was too long; only the high-end classical labels were putting together boxed sets of

78's to present longer compositions. Still, it was magnificent to hear, and he knew he'd hang onto it for the rest of his life.

Red was on a roll, and immediately launched into two songs he loved to play: *Shine* and *Some of These Days*. It was only after Red was through with this final pairing and had left for the night that Jack did a bit of research and discovered the two tunes were both from 1910. Jack wondered if Red had known that or if it was just coincidence. He realized that these two tunes were still well known by all, over 35 years after their creation. Musing that hits were made by performers, not usually by composers, he looked back at some old 78's he had and discovered that Louis Armstrong had taken a shine to *Shine*, while the other song of Red's medley was the biggest hit in Sophie Tucker's career, at least so far. Jack went home that night wondering what other surprises Red might come up with.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> set

Jack had set up a noon session with Red—he'd learned the hard way that 10:00 am was much too early—and was eagerly anticipating a productive final day with his old friend. He busied himself rechecking levels and making sure the scene was just right. Red bounded into the studio 10 minutes early, looking energized and younger than Jack had ever seen him.

"What did you have for breakfast, Red? And did you bring me some?"

Red chuckled indulgently. "Young man," he intoned, "I'm afraid you're just a tad too young to fully appreciate why I have this spring in my step. Let's suffice to say tips come in all shapes and sizes and last night made me feel *young* again! Whoo-ee!!"

Thinking discretion was advisable in this situation, Jack simply said, "Well, Red, I'm glad you had some fun. Looks like you're raring to go, so how should we begin?"

Red declared, "Seeing as I'm feeling so spritely, I want to revisit some tunes I haven't thought of in years. Some old rags that my buddy Scott Joplin wrote back in the day."

Jack eyed Red incredulously. "You mean you actually *met* Scott Joplin? Wasn't he from a whole other era, sort of the Father of Ragtime? I know that he started getting his rags in print before the turn of this century."

"Well, sure, Jack! I might have been a l'il sprat, but you remember I told you about the Rosebud Bar that Tom Turpin owned up there in St. Louis? That's where I met Joplin. He really wasn't much of a piano player and the rest of the guys would pound him off the stage. They respected him though, for his compositions. He was, how could I say it, *legitimizin'* the ragtime style of music being played in the bars; not just in the Rosebud and the other joints around St. Louis, but through the whole land! It's because of Joplin that we have the next piece I'm goin' to render for you right now."

Red moved into the recording room to the piano and motioned Jack to follow. "Have you ever heard this piece, Jack?" he asked, his fingers running over the keys and producing a melody of profound melancholy. His touch caressed the keys and



after he finished playing the first section of the rag, Red sat back and sighed. "Pretty stuff, eh, Jack?"

"It sure was, Red. What was the name of that?"

"Joplin called it ***Heliotrope Bouquet***, a name I think goes nicely with the atmosphere of the tune. He had met young Louis Chauvin at the Rosebud in the first few years of this century. Chauvin was the best player at the club, but couldn't read any music. So Joplin set about to write down a couple of strains of Louis' music. They became the first two sections of the rag. Joplin finished up the piece with a couple sections of his own. I think you'll hear the difference. Now shoo, son, I've got to get to playin' here!"

Jack moved back into the engineering studio and prepped the tape. He gave Red the nod and he began to play the piece Jack had heard a moment before, but now it sounded quite a bit different from the first time Red had played it. It was looser, with a good amount of swing and buoyancy. While the melancholic nature remained, now the piece had a lope and swagger that made it sound somewhat more optimistic.

Upon concluding the rag, Red came back into the studio and sat on the couch. He looked impishly at Jack, who exclaimed, "Red, what'd you do, rewrite the whole piece? It didn't sound anything like what you played before!"

"Makes sense, Jack. At the last minute, maybe 'cause I was feelin' youngish and fulla piss and vinegar, shall we say, I played it the way I remember Jelly might have done it. He'd visited St. Louis in the old days and spent some time playin' at the Rosebud. He knew all those guys, Artie Matthews, Sam Patterson, Joe Jordan. I'm sure Jelly would've latched onto ***Heliotrope Bouquet*** on one of those visits. It has the right feel for him and that first section could come right out of one of his early tunes as well. So, I decided at the last minute to play the old rag in the manner of Morton."

"It really sounded unique, Red, and also immediate. It sure didn't sound like you were trying to recreate an old sound."

"Shoot, Jack," Red said, "nothing about this music is *old*, 'ceptin' the time it was written. This stuff will always be changing. These tunes aren't supposed to be put on the shelves to collect dust. It drives me crazy how everyone puts Bach and Mozart and those guys on pedestals and mopes around saying 'I'm not *worthy* to play the great masters' works' 'cause they're afraid they'll make a mistake. Where's the fun in that?!?"

As Red slumped down on the couch, clearly winded by his outburst, Jack calmly said, "I didn't say it *had* to sound old, you know..."

"Course I do. Sometimes I just get tired of people gawkin' at me, saying 'Hey, look at the old guy playin' that old-timey music! Idn't he cute?' Honestly! This stuff is just music, good...no *great* music. Doesn't matter when it was written, or IF it was ever written down."

Red jumped up. "Man, I've gotta get some of this energy I'm feelin' onto the keys! Hang on, boy, and make sure that tape is a-rollin'!" He fairly scampered back to the piano, leaped onto the bench and hollered, "Here we go!"

He launched into a rag that Jack immediately recognized, although he had never heard ***Maple Leaf Rag*** played like Red was pounding through it. He kept

taking the sections and throwing in his own ideas, really everything but the kitchen sink. He wrapped up his version just past the 4-minute mark, when Jack was sure it would have been less than 3 minutes as written. Red was breathless, but after a few seconds he jumped up and strutted back into the engineering room, grinning at Jack like a naughty kid.

“Take that!” Red smiled at Jack, awaiting his response. Jack could only say “Wow...”

“Yep, that’s kinda how I felt too. I’ve never put some of those things I did into that rag before. But that sort of thing is what everyone was doin’ with the pieces written in “ragged” time. You just wanted to be sure you weren’t playin’ it like it was on the page. Hell, any schoolgirl with a couple years of piano training coulda done that! Ol’ Joplin wasn’t too keen on us professors runnin’ riot over his rags, but it sure got the people goin’! ‘Sides, he wasn’t much of a player anyhow. He was a much better composer.”

“Yeah, but you said earlier that people respected Joplin for legitimizing the music being played in the Rosebud Bar and Sporting houses in the Midwest,” Jack countered. “Are you saying at the same time they were appreciating his artistry, they were using his music to show off?”

“Jack, that’s always the way these things go. For those guys—and me, come to think of it—any tune that was *ever* written was fair game. Remember when I played the opera aria a while back?”

“I do, yes; the one by Puccini, wasn’t it?”

“Well, YOU figured that one out! I just play the tunes. Here’s another one that I like doing, and this tune is one that I know where it came from. A show called *Samson and Delilah* by this guy Saint-Seans.”

“Red, I think they refer to it as an *opera*,” Jack gently suggested.

“Whatever it is, this great tune...er...*aria* came from it. It’s fun to play straight and then, as my old New Orleans friends would say, great to rag it. Lissen here!” Ray fairly ran into the piano room, received the thumbs up from Jack and began arpeggiating a sweet and recognizable melody. Once he completed his time through it, he went into rhythm with a hot interlude as if he were setting up a band and proceeded to pound that piece in a way Saint-Seans would never have dreamed possible—“or desirable, perhaps,” Jack thought wryly.

Red finished up and returned to Jack once again with a grin on his face. “Any idea what the name of that old saw is, Jack?”

Jack straightened up and mockingly intoned in a stentorian voice, “Why, my good sir! Everyone knows the name of that aria. It is **most** popular. Its tantalizing sobriquet is *Mon cœur s’ouvre à ta voix*. Nearly everyone knows that!”

Red simply stared at him. He waited a couple of beats and asked, “How do you know that, Jack...really?”

Jack looked at Red, blinked, and couldn’t help laughing. “Remember that soprano I recorded a while back? The one who sang the other opera aria you played earlier? I remembered she also sang the melody you played just now, so while you were finishing up your rendition, I dug around and got the name. Ha, ha, ha!!! You should have seen your face!” Jack sat heavily on his chair, wiping his eyes. “Hey, how was my French?”

“Terrible, son. You ain’t no linguist!”

“Isn’t that a pasta?” Jack started laughing again and this time Red joined him.

“Don’t mention food; I’m hungry but I have a couple more tunes I’d like to do. Actually the next thing I’ll play is a pair of tunes, written by a guy named Tony Jackson. He was playin’ in New Orleans back in the day and was the only player Jelly wouldn’t go up against. They were pretty close, ol’ Jelly and Tony. Jackson was one of the only pianists Jelly truly respected. In addition to being the best piano player in town, he sang, told jokes, entertained in a real flamboyant manner; sometimes he’d jump up at the piano and do a buck and wing *while* playing. There was a lot to admire.”

“Why don’t we know more about him, Red?” Jack was intrigued by this shadowy figure of the past.

“Well, he never traveled quite as much as Morton. Also he died pretty young in 1921, back when recording piano players was still mainly somethin’ that happened in other places than Chicago, where he spent the last years of his life. He was a really cool dude, Jack. He was one of them guys who, er...liked guys and not gals, if you get what I’m getting’ at.”

“Jackson was homosexual?” Jack prompted.

“Yeah, I guess that’s the fancy word for it. He liked guys. The thing about him was that he was open about it; everyone knew he liked to mess around with other guys and no one really cared. It’s funny, but I think Jelly and Tony’s close relationship was one of the things that made him go into pimpin’ for a spell; Jelly was worried that people would begin to think he was a homo because he was always hangin’ around Tony.”

“Did *you* ever meet Jackson, Red?”

“Nope. He’s one of the ones I never had a chance to catch up with. And, I’ll tell you, if I had, I wouldna cared what anyone thought; I’d’ve been hangin’ on Jackson like a fly on meat in order to catch all of the music from him I could. Hell, I still would. When he and Jelly were both in St. Louis at the same time, Artie Matthews claimed Jelly was a better player, but Jelly never thought that—and he thought Matthews was the best player in St. Louis!”

Anyway, only a handful of Tony’s tunes are around for people to play and know. I’ll do two of the best and try and get a bit of Jackson in there, although I’ll only be doing that based on stories I heard and demonstrations by Morton and a couple of others. I’ll start with a tune called ***Some Sweet Day*** and then finish up with his biggest hit—people still know this one today actually—called ***Pretty Baby***. I’m headin’ in!”

Red began playing the piece and Jack heard a different piano player coming out of that room, with a more relaxed, loping style. Tremolos in the right hand, melody in the left hand the second time Red played the chorus; stops and breaks and a breathtaking chorus, where he doubled the tempo of the rhythm while still keeping the melody at the same initial speed and feel. Jack could picture Jackson playing that way to accompany the dancers in the bar, or perhaps just show off.

Red transitioned to ***Pretty Baby*** and kept up the quicker speed he’d established at the end of ***Some Sweet Day***, starting with what Jack assumed was the verse, with which he was unfamiliar. Once Red got to the chorus, Jack absently

began singing the words until Red's variations began to get too elaborate. Once he finished, Jack let out a cheer. "Fantastic, Red," Jack enthused as the old piano player walked back in the studio. "Now do you want to do it while I have the tape rolling?"

Red looked horrified for a few seconds and again Jack couldn't keep a straight face. He burst out laughing and said, "Only kidding, only kidding. Do you want to hear the tape back?"

"No, Jack...I trust you, but DON'T do that again. I'm an old man and that sort of thing is not good for the ol' ticker!"

"Not a problem, Red. Sorry." Jack grinned again, not looking even mildly abashed, and said, "No matter what age either of us is, I'm about done in; it's been a long day, Red."

"Sure has," Red agreed, "but I've got one more tune I'd like to run down before we leave for the night. You got one more in you, Jack?"

"What d'you have in mind, Red?"

"Well, as you know, I like tunes with a story and this one has a great one. Seems young George Gershwin was looking for a way to get more recognition in New York. He wrote tune after tune and none of them were doin' much. He and his friend Irving Caesar came up with a song he thought would be a smash hit and called it *Swanee*. After all, Tin Pan Alley was still obsessed with the South, it had a catchy tune and was easy to play and remember. They wrote it in Papa Morris Gershwin's house in fifteen minutes, really upsettin' the card-playin' friends Pop had over in the next room."

They stuck *Swanee* in a show, and though the audience loved the show and the song, no one bought a copy of the sheet music in the lobby as they left. George was pretty depressed about this. To cheer himself up, he wandered over to catch a show starring Al Jolson, the biggest name on Broadway at that time. After the show was finished, Jolson invited George to join him at the after-show party bein' thrown for him. As luck would have it, the place had a piano. One thing Gershwin never suffered from was shyness, so he went over to play it and went through some of his own tunes, including his great disappointment: *Swanee*. Jolson hadn't been payin' much attention until Gershwin got to that one, and loved everything about it; the key change between the verse and the chorus, the simple but memorable tune. The words even had a 'Mammy' reference, so Jolson was sold. He sang it in his show *Sinbad* and recorded it too."

Red paused for a moment. "I love the stories behind the songs I play, Jack. People need to know how a song came about. I'd like to finish with this one. It's still one of my favorites and I've been playing it for 25 years!"

"I know the song well, Red, and it is a great one. Go give it a good treatment!"

Red returned to the piano in the recording room, received one last OK from Jack and began with a quasi-classical octave arpeggio down the keys. He played the melody to the verse simply, as if someone were singing it; it sounded like Jack imagined it might have in the show. As Red started the melody for the chorus, he added more characteristic pianisms, returning to his simple style for the interlude. Then he joyously romped through another chorus, moving farther away from the melody. Back to the interlude, into a second time through the verse, and *then*, Red slowed the tempo down, beginning the final chorus slowly and loudly, steadily

picking up the tempo until he reached the midpoint where he simply took off, racing to the end, throwing everything he had into it. A tag, a crashing ending that Jack could only interpret as “triumphant” and Red slumped down over the keys, utterly spent.

He stayed there for quite some time and Jack, concerned, went in to check on him. He had his forehead on the keys and was breathing harshly. Jack called out, “Red! Red, are you OK? Gee, man, that last one was really going and I...”

Red waved Jack to stop talking, stayed slumped over for another few seconds, and with a deep breath, lifted his head off the keys. He rested his forearms on the top of the open key cover and placed his chin on his arms, giving Jack a weary but happy look. “That’s it, son. I’m done for now. It’s time for ol’ Red to go to the nearest waterin’ hole and order anything *but* water! Care to join me? After all, it’s one of those places where we first met!”

“If you can give me a couple of minutes to wrap up and close the studio, you’re on. Who knows, maybe if there’s a piano and you’re playing a “catchy tune,” someone important may hear you.”

“Everyone who listens to me is important, Jack. And I’m waay to old to be ‘discovered’ or catch that ‘big break.’ I’m just havin’ a good time, makin’ music and tellin’ my stories. I’ll let the young kids try and make it big. You’ve got great ears, Jack. Since you prefer to work behind the scenes, you’ll need to make it big in other ways, but I really think you will.”

Jack blushed a bit and said, “Well, Red, I hope to be wherever there’s good music happening, and if I can capture some of it, all the better! I have to say I’ve sure heard a lot of it since I met you. Let’s go get that drink.”

“Great! First one’s on me,” Red declared.

Jack was bemused. “Red, since I’ve known you, you’ve never offered to pick up a drink. Really, you hardly ever have to buy one for yourself or anybody. I’m flattered.”

“Good. I got the first round. You can pick up the second, third, fourth...” Red kept counting higher as Jack turned out the light and closed the door to the studio, mindful of locking it to keep safe all of the amazing music he’d experienced over the previous three days.