

RAGTIME

THE MUSICAL

AUGUST 8 - 13

BOOK by
Terrence McNally

MUSIC by
Stephen Flaherty

LYRICS by
Lynn Ahrens

- THE STORY -

Amidst the turbulent change and opportunity of early 20th century New York, three seemingly disconnected social groups find their stories intertwined. In the wealthy white suburb of New Rochelle, Mother's idyllic life is upended when she rescues an abandoned Black baby in her yard. She soon takes in the baby's mother, Sarah, a struggling young woman from Harlem who is in love with the musician and aspiring change-maker Coalhouse Walker Jr. Mother and her son also befriend a Jewish immigrant named Tateh and his young daughter, and their family soon is pulled into the center of societal unrest thanks to both their new friends and Mother's revolutionary Younger Brother. Drawn together in their pursuits of the American dream, these three families navigate the challenges of a changing society alongside each other, hoping that the promises of progress will yield a better future for everyone.

- THE CHARACTERS -

MOTHER: A compassionate, nurturing woman

FATHER: A successful businessman seeking adventure

LITTLE BOY: Mother and Father's curious and kind-hearted son

YOUNGER BROTHER: Mother's passionate, rebellious younger sibling

COALHOUSE WALKER JR.: A charming, talented pianist with a hunger for justice

SARAH: A young Black woman with a gentle heart and strong will

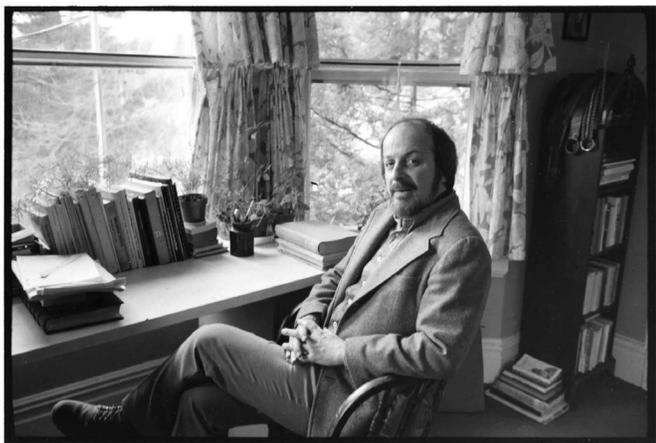
TATEH: A resilient, driven man from Latvia seeking a better future

LITTLE GIRL: Tateh's scared, vulnerable young daughter

MAKING THE MUSICAL

FROM NOVEL TO MUSICAL MASTERPEICE

In 1989, theatrical producer Garth Drabinsky brought *THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA* to the Pantages Theatre in Toronto. Andrew Lloyd Webber's smash hit had become the apex of the 1980s "megamusical," a genre of musical theatre shows known for their grand scale, large ensembles and lush scores full of power ballads. Canadian audiences flocked to *PHANTOM* in droves, and Drabinsky became a powerhouse producer known for his lavish stagings. After the success of *PHANTOM* and his massive 1993 production of *SHOW BOAT*, Drabinsky began searching for a new project to develop into the next big megamusical. Inspiration struck when he encountered E.L. Doctorow's 1975 novel *Ragtime*.



March 10, 1975 *Joe Krumholz*

E.L. Doctorow at his writing desk in New Rochelle, N.Y., in March, 1975, the year *Ragtime* was published

Doctorow was an acclaimed American author best known for his works of historical fiction that weaved real-life figures into fictional narratives. *Ragtime*, considered by many to be his best work, told a sprawling story of three interconnected social groups and their experiences in turn-of-the-century New York City. Drabinsky saw potential in the sweeping drama and hoped that it could follow in the footsteps of other literary stage adaptations like *LES MISÉRABLES*, which had taken the world by storm in the 1980s.

The first person Drabinsky recruited for his team was playwright Terrence McNally, who promptly delivered a 60-page treatment script. Songwriters were invited to audition for the project by submitting tapes with four songs inspired by McNally's draft. The duo of lyricist Lynn Ahrens and composer Stephen Flaherty won out, with Ahrens taking inspiration from McNally's script to write poignant lyrics reflecting the

characters' inner thoughts, and Flaherty crafting three distinct, historically accurate musical sounds for the three communities represented in the show. Along with choreographer Graciela Daniele and director Frank Galati, the team continued to craft the show with a developmental workshop and a concept album.

RAGTIME premiered in Toronto in December 1996 with a production that lived up to Drabinsky's megamusical dreams, with a 26-person orchestra, a 54-person cast and a set that included a full-size replica of the Ford Model T and dazzling fireworks. Critics responded warmly to the show, and the main cast moved to Los Angeles for the U.S. premiere in July 1997 while the Toronto production continued. The Broadway production of **RAGTIME** opened on January 18, 1998, at Drabinsky's newly-built Ford Center for the Performing Arts to mixed reviews, with many critics noting that the high production value sometimes overshadowed the story. In a highly competitive season that also featured Disney's blockbuster production of *THE LION KING*, **RAGTIME** lost Best Musical at the 1998 Tony Awards but still walked away with four trophies.



Original Broadway Cast of RAGTIME, 1996

The original Broadway production was considered a hit, but the lavish staging also meant it was expensive to keep running, and the show closed after just two years. Despite the show's struggles in New York, it gained a following through several national tours and dozens of international productions and revivals, some of which re-envisioned the show on a more intimate scale. Doctorow's epic tale, filtered through McNally's words and Ahrens and Flaherty's music, has moved thousands of audience members with its messages of resilience, connection and hope for the future. With the first production at Broadway At Music Circus since 2003, **RAGTIME** continues to be a powerful, innovative and timely piece of theatre that is bound to impact Sacramento once again.

RAGTIME IN REAL LIFE

While **RAGTIME** tells a fictional story, the characters cross paths with many historical figures. Take a moment to learn a bit more about some of those key people here.



BOOKER T. WASHINGTON (1856–1915)

Booker T. Washington was born into slavery, and after emancipation, he pursued an education at the Hampton Institute. He later went on to teach, first at Hampton and then as the head of the Tuskegee Institute, a school training formerly enslaved people to become educators. Washington became a prominent and controversial advocate for racial uplift, the idea that Black people were responsible for elevating their own status through education and hard work.



EMMA GOLDMAN (1869–1940)

After growing up in Russia during the nihilist revolution, Emma Goldman grew disillusioned by American life and became involved with a growing anarchist movement in New York City. Her early years with the movement were marked by political violence, but Goldman grew into a powerful writer and speaker and spent years sharing her political critiques and vision for a better future with audiences nationwide. While she was deported in 1919, she continued to aid various revolutionary movements throughout Europe for the rest of her life.



EVELYN NESBIT (1884–1967)

Considered by some to be “America’s first super-model,” Evelyn Nesbit began her career at age 14 as an artist’s model and then became a chorus girl in Broadway shows. She gained a new level of fame in 1906 when her violent husband, Harry Thaw, killed her lover, Stanford White, resulting in a high-profile court case. Nesbit’s career continued long after the trial, with modest success in film, vaudeville and burlesque.



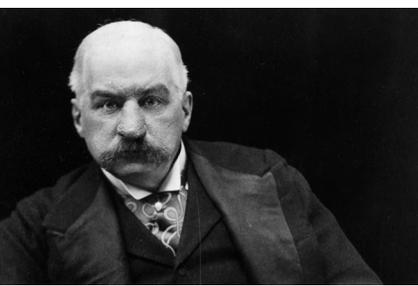
HENRY FORD (1863–1947)

Henry Ford was interested in mechanics from an early age, building his first steam engine at age 15. His professional career began as an engineer in Detroit during the 1880s, and he learned much from his friend and mentor, Thomas Edison. Ford built his first car, the Quadricycle, in 1896, and established the historic Ford Motor Company in 1903. His groundbreaking Model T car was the first widely affordable automobile, and he also revolutionized the manufacturing process by popularizing the assembly line concept.



HARRY HOUDINI (1874–1926)

Born Erich Weisz, Houdini was the son of Hungarian immigrants and began his performing career at nine years old as a trapeze artist in a circus act. His childhood interest in magic tricks grew into a touring magic show in the 1890s, first with his friend and then with his younger brother. Houdini’s daring escape acts caught the attention of vaudeville producer Martin Beck, and he toured the U.S. and Europe for many years, wowing audiences with death-defying feats.



J.P. MORGAN (1837–1913)

John Pierpont Morgan started out as an accountant in 1857 before working for his father’s banking company. He co-founded the banking firm Drexel, Morgan & Co. in 1871, which became a primary source of government bonds, and used his growing power to reorganize and stabilize several competing railroad companies. Morgan’s domineering influence helped steer the banking industry through two stock market panics around the turn of the century, cementing his status as a global titan.

THE SOUND OF RAGTIME

Ragtime music rose to prominence in the 1890s, taking inspiration from African American spirituals, European folk melodies and military marches. It was often piano-based, with the left hand playing a rhythmic bassline and the right hand playing a swinging, syncopated melody. The style is said to have first gained prominence at the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago, but it had been developing for some time among Black musician communities in the Midwest.



Ernest Hogan's 1895 composition, "La Pas Ma La," was the first widely-known ragtime piece and helped spread this new style across the country. Over the next few years, the sound developed into a more sophisticated genre with songs like Scott Joplin's "Maple Leaf Rag" and Tom Turpin's "Harlem Rag." Joplin is widely known as the "King of Ragtime" for his contributions to the genre, composing more than 40 songs during his career and spreading the sound across the nation.

Ragtime became the popular sound of the new century, hinting at all of the exciting developments that were yet to come in the early 1900s. It was the first popular genre in the U.S. to have a distinctly African American influence, and it paved the way for other innovative styles like jazz and swing. Those new genres had taken prominence by the 1920s, but the development of recorded music led to a revived interest in ragtime during the 1960s and 70s. Ultimately, the ragtime sound endures because it is quintessentially American: drawing from a melting pot of influences to create something new and exciting that drives the culture forward.

- THINK ABOUT IT -

- The three social groups depicted in **RAGTIME** all feel very separate, but some characters find themselves brought together by their shared dreams. How do you see these groups as similar, and what makes them distinct? When have you been able to overcome differences with someone by finding common ground?
- How do the various musical styles of **RAGTIME**'s score reflect the different communities portrayed on stage? If your family was in a musical, what would it sound like?
- Some characters, like Coalhouse, strive for change; some, like Mother, grow to embrace it; still others, like Father, are resistant to it. What do you think makes some people so afraid of change, and what motivates others to fight for it? Is there a right perspective to have?
- A lot of the conflict in **RAGTIME** is prompted by racial discrimination. How do you think things have changed in America in the 120 years since this story? What issues do you still see reflected in society today?