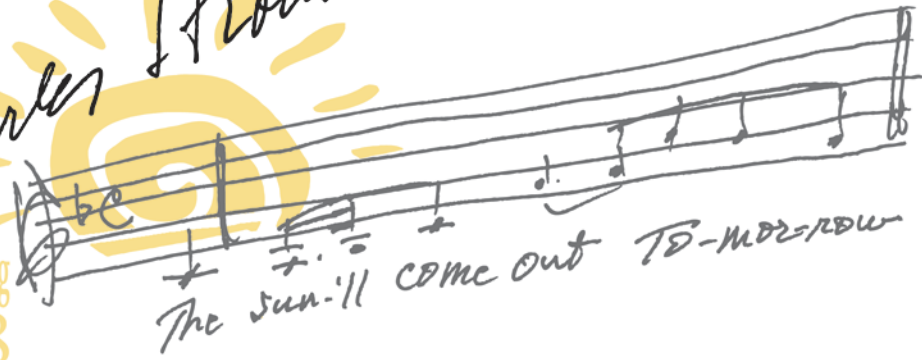


Charles Strouse

Celebrating  
80  
2008



January 28, 2010

To Friends and Performers of *Rags*:

Of all my shows, *Rags* holds a very special place in my heart.

The idea that America was a great melting pot of cultures that happily simmered together simply isn't true. However, the one area where immigrants mixed together, simmered and created something unique was music. This is why *Rags* is so special to me. I imagine that for immigrant musicians wandering the streets of New York, the air was filled with the sounds of celebration and struggle that each ethnicity brought from the old country. In this cacophony of culture, certain sounds came together and became a musical tradition that still exists today and can only be described as American.

The music of *Rags* is, perhaps, the most difficult I have written for a musical. That is why I was extraordinarily impressed to learn that Mary Jane Davidson decided to challenge her students with this piece. It speaks to her belief in their capability as musicians, and to Mary Jane's dedication to inspiring her students to aspire to even greater performances.

Life for immigrants in America wasn't easy. Immigrants lived in different neighborhoods than those "American" families, in difficult conditions, while they struggled to carve out new lives for themselves. I like to think that one of their comforts was the music traditions that they brought with them, and that in sharing that music with others they felt themselves participating in what it means to be an American- a free exchange of ideas and cultures.

I hope you enjoy the show, as much as I enjoyed writing it.

Sincerely,

Charles Strouse