

**GENRES OF JAZZ ORIGIN IN THE MOLDOVAN MUSIC
OF THE FIRST HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY:
REGTIM (RAGTIME) BY ȘTEFAN NEAGA**

**GENURILE DE ORIGINE JAZZISTICĂ ÎN MUZICA MOLDOVENEASCĂ
DIN PRIMA JUMĂTATE A SECOLULUI XX:
RAGTIME DE ȘTEFAN NEAGA**

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CZU 78.036.9(478)

[780.8:780.616.433.085.3]:781.6

DOI <https://doi.org/10.55383/iadc2022.02>

This article represents the first attempt in national and world musicology to introduce into the scientific circuit the piano piece named Ragtime written by the classic of the Moldovan national school of composition Ștefan Neaga in 1935. The author analyzes some aesthetic and stylistic features of this genre of early jazz reflected in Ș. Neaga's opus, using the tools of comparative analyses. As for the material for comparison, collections written by the classic of ragtime music, the American composer Scott Joplin, have been studied. At the same time, a non-traditional treatment of the typical genre features has been identified, revealing Șt. Neaga's individual approach.

Keywords: Ștefan Neaga, early jazz, ragtime

Acest articol reprezintă prima încercare în muzicologia națională și mondială de a introduce în circuitul științific o piesă pentru pian numită Ragtime, scrisă în 1935 de Ștefan Neaga, clasicul școlii naționale componistice din Moldova. Autorul analizează câteva trăsături estetice și stilistice ale acestui gen al jazzului timpuriu reflectate în opera lui Ștefan Neaga, folosind instrumentele analizei comparative. În ceea ce privește materialul pentru comparație, sunt studiate colecții scrise de compozitorul american Scott Joplin, clasicul ragtime-ului. În același timp, a fost identificată o tratare netradițională a trăsăturilor tipice caracteristice genului, dezvăluind o abordare individuală a lui Ștefan Neaga.

Cuvinte-cheie: Ștefan Neaga, jazz timpuriu, ragtime

Introduction

The study of the initial period of development of jazz on the territory of the modern Republic of Moldova represents an important scientific task because of many reasons:

1. This period is not studied sufficiently in national musicology because of lack of evidences, documents, memoirs, sound examples.
2. Many documents don't exist anymore and quite often we have to make conclusions based on indirect evidences which sometimes are very subjective.
3. An additional problem represents the oral nature of jazz culture which disappeared without sound recording or sheet music publishing.

In the context of this article we have a happy chance to study one of the unique sound documents of the first part of the 20th century related with jazz because of the discovery of a score written by the classic of Moldovan music — *Regtim (Ragtime)* — Ștefan Neaga. This piece was written and published in the 30s of the 20th century. Let's introduce in more details this opus itself as well as the circumstances of its appearance.

It is important to mention that due to the geopolitical and historical peculiarities of this period, the musical culture of Bessarabia was strongly influenced by the Romanian culture, while Bucharest,

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the Romanian capital, attracted many composers and performers of that era: Șico Aranov and Ștefan Neaga were among them. For both of them, the Bucharest period was a favorable time for getting acquainted with jazz music, mastering the jazz language, and trying to create their own opuses in a jazz manner. However, for Ștefan Neaga it was, most likely, a temporary hobby, while for Șico Aranov it was the period of his professional development as a full-fledged jazz musician, composer and arranger.

It's important to underline that Bucharest in the 1930s was a cultural center with a wide network of entertainment venues engaging *loutars*, performers of classical music and different types of the so-called *light music*. Stages of theaters and cinemas, restaurants and clubs, open terraces were used as performance venues. As for the concert programs of numerous orchestras, they were mostly an eclectic mixture of folk music, the pop music of the time and arrangements of popular classics. At the same time, regularly delivered trendy records, tours by European and American jazzmen, local recording label development formed a favorable environment for mastering the jazz language.

Ragtime by Ștefan Neaga: some historical facts

In this context, particular interest represents the Bucharest period of the classic of Moldovan music, the author of the first symphonic opus in national music, *Poem about the Dniester* by Ștefan Neaga. In the period between the years 1931 — 1937 the composer lived in Bucharest, studying piano and composition at the Royal Academy of Music and Dramatic Art [1] and working in different restaurants in Bucharest. Apparently, in order to expand his own repertoire, he wrote *Ragtime* for piano. This piece has been discovered in the early 1990s by the Moldovan musicologist Ion Pacuraru in the collections of one of the libraries in Bucharest.

Judging by the materials available to us, the piece was published. We also can conclude that the edition appeared in 1935, being produced by the Esanu Publishing House. Noteworthy is the title of the composition, spelled with a mistake *-regtim*, as a „loan-translation” from oral speech, with a subtitle *Danse nouvelle* (new dance) in French. Such details allow us to suggest that Ș. Neaga did not have access to written models of ragtime (e.g. Scott Joplin's collections), and accumulated only auditory experience in perceiving examples of this genre.



Figure 1.

Ragtime genre features in Ș. Neaga's interpretation

It is common knowledge that Ragtime is a „propulsive syncopated musical style, a forerunner of jazz and the predominant style of American popular music from about 1899 to 1917” [2]. Studying the musical material of the piece by Ș. Neaga, here one can see the adherence to the textural and metro-rhythmic features of ragtime: the contrast of the regular-accented pulsation of the „bass-chord” type in the left hand part and the syncopated melodic lines in the right hand part (the so-called *primary rag*). This specific is confirmed by the following statement: „The regularly accented left-hand beat, in $4/4$ or $2/4$ time, was opposed in the right hand by a fast, bouncingly syncopated melody that gave the music its powerful forward impetus” [2].

As for the tempo, the composer indicated the tempo *Allegro moderato*, another sign that demonstrates that Ștefan Neaga studied and perfectly well understood the basic genre peculiarities of ragtime (let's mention the indication in some editions of S. Joplin's collections *Not too fast*). At the same time,

the Moldovan composer was trying to create melodic phrases in the right-hand part, which are not quite typical for this genre, usually based on the cultivation of non-emotional melodic constructions in a percussive manner.

Regarding the architectonics, it's important to note that „ragtime found its characteristic expression in formally structured piano compositions” [2]. Ș. Neaga respected all the rules of the genre, introducing some typical features for ragtime examples including a complex three-part form with a trio-type middle section.

Taking into account the fact that this piece is introduced for the first time into the musicological circuit — both national and international, we will introduce the complete sheet music text following the compositional structure of sections with a short description of each of them.

Here are the main thematic sections of this piece:

Music example 1.

Ștefan Neaga, *Regtim*, Introduction.



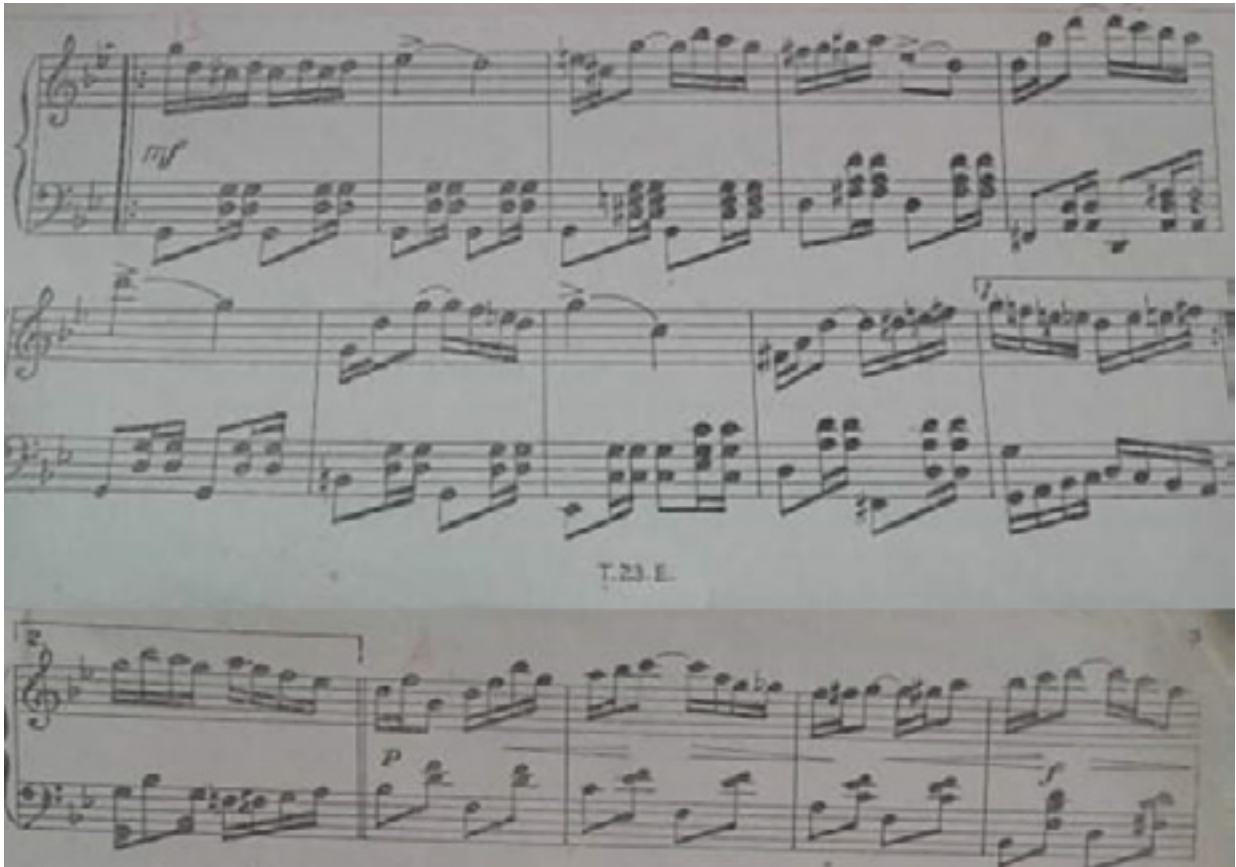
The introduction is quite typical for ragtime traditions — both from the thematic and structural point of view: one can observe an 8-measures construction with cadenza on F7 chord, „ragged” melodic structures based on „general forms of movement” with lack of melodic substance. Here we can observe some similarities with examples of the ragtime written by S. Joplin (such as *Marple Leaf Rag* as a more complex and complicated example for the performers of the genre). Meanwhile it's not so typical for S. Joplin's pieces because of the much more simple texture of the introduction section of the majority of them based on an octave exposition of a simple melody line (e.g. *The Chrysanthemum*, *Rag-Time Dance*, *Eugenia*, *Elite Syncopations*, *Peacherine Rag*, *Palm Leaf Rag*, *The Sycamore*, *Something Doing*, *A Breeze from Alabama*, *Sun Flower Slow Drag*, *The Favorite* etc.) [3].

Sections *a* and *b* of the first compartment (A) of a simple three-part form *aba* for the external sections of the piece:

Music example 2.

Ștefan Neaga, *Regtim* (section A).





It is interesting to mention that the use of a specific rhythmical pattern in the left hand of section *b* is not very typical of ragtime. This is one of Ștefan Neaga's novelties introduced in the genre with a quite high rate of constant elements.

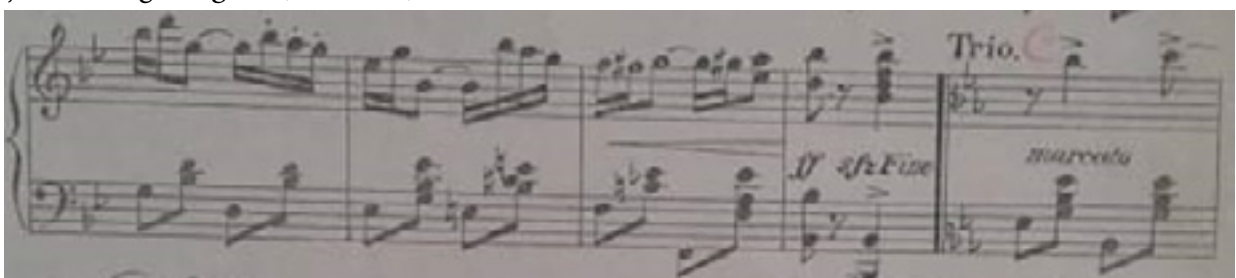
In the *b* section, one can observe the composer's attempt to vary the melody and harmony means through involving the following harmony changes: *t-DD2-9-D -D9-D6 -D7 -t -D65- D7→s D7- D65- t*. The melodic elements differ from the typical ragtime melodic patterns thanks to their sentimental treatment, more characteristic of a Romanian romance or song.

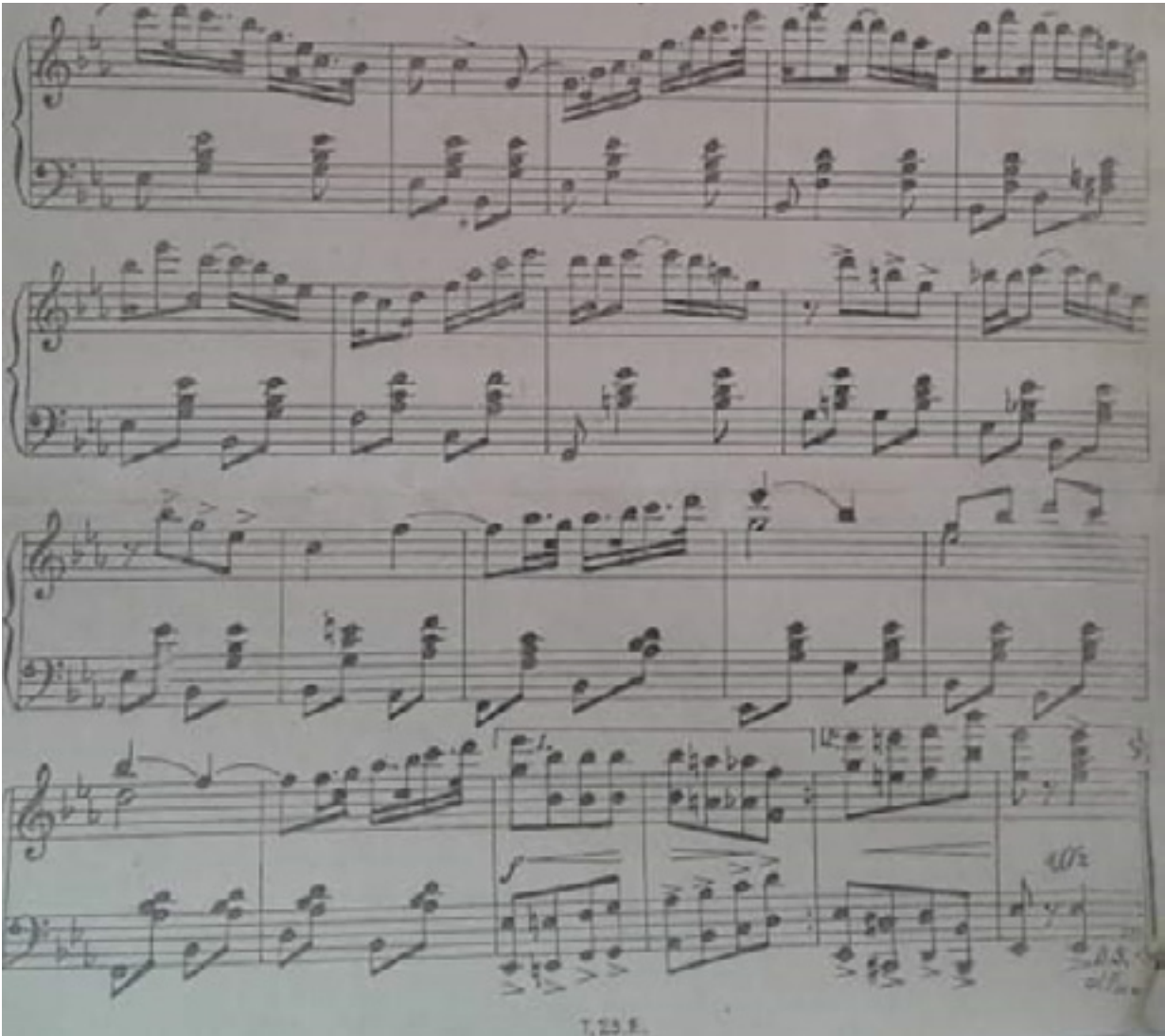
Another novelty of the composer within this compartment is the idea to divide the second eight note of the first beat in 2 sixteen notes. It is not very typical for Joplin's ragtime despite the fact that we have found some similar but not exactly copied examples (e.g. *The Easy Winners* on p.30, last bar of p.30 or *Swypsy*, p.58) [3]. Therefore, we can conclude that the implantation of rhythmical patterns *eight-two sixteens* is a novelty in the ragtime genre introduced by Ștefan Neaga.

Section C as a middle section of the trio type:

Music example 3.

Ștefan Neaga, *Regtim* (section B).





The middle part named *trio* develops the percussive style of ragtime using different types of dotted notes, passages embraced the right part of piano keyboards (like the 11-12 measures of S. Joplin's *The Cascades* ragtime) representing the most optimistic and mechanical part of the piece. The effect is amplified by using a higher part of the piano register, which gives a specific timbre solution.

Conclusions

As conclusion we can confirm that the *Ragtime* for piano written by Ștefan Neaga demonstrates a detailed study of the early jazz genre features, on the one hand, and the intuitive attempt of the composer to introduce some melody patterns typical for the national music culture, on the other hand, using specific melodic elements, more developed harmonic structures and other tools.

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