



Jelly Roll Morton

October 20, 1890 – July 10, 1941

Ferdinand Joseph LaMothe, known globally as “Jelly Roll Morton,” was an American ragtime performer, jazz pianist, and composer. His jazz compositions are known for their unique organization, and he is often considered to be one of the first arrangers and inventors of the genre.

Born in downtown New Orleans, Morton had a challenging childhood. At the age of three, his father left, and his mother remarried shortly after. At the age of twelve, he suffered from a deep depression, struggling on his own for weeks until finally receiving help.

Throughout these different trials, Morton portrayed a natural musical talent and passion for performing. When he was only fourteen, he began

working as a piano player. In 1904, Morton began touring throughout the South, performing often and composing in his downtime. During this period, he composed “Jelly Roll Blues,” “New Orleans Blues,” “Frog-I-More Rag,” and “King Porter Stomp,” some of his greatest hits. By 1910, he branched out, finding himself in places like Chicago and New York City where fellow “stride” musicians like James P. Johnson and Willie “The Lion” Smith took a liking to him.

From 1912-1914, Morton toured with Rosa Brown, his girlfriend at the time. They eventually settled in Chicago where he began focusing even more on getting his compositions on paper and out to the public. In 1915, “Jelly Roll Blues” became the first jazz composition to be published. In 1917, he began to find fame in Hollywood with his sensational hit, “The Crave.” From then on, Jelly Roll Morton was a widely recognized name, and he received gigs in major cities.

In 1926, Jelly Roll Morton received his first contract, making records for the Victor Talking Machine Company, the largest record company in the United States. He took this opportunity to record his own arrangements, which are now considered 1920s jazz classics. There was much to celebrate in this period, as Morton also married Mabel Bertrand in November 1928.

Shortly after, they moved to New York City, with Morton continuing his work with the Victor company. However, once the Great Depression hit, Victor did not renew Morton's contract, and he struggled financially as a performer. He had a brief radio show and toured as a part of a band for an act to make a living.

He eventually moved to Washington, D.C., becoming the manager and piano player of a bar known as the Music Box. In 1938, after hearing Morton perform at the bar, Alan Lomax, a folklorist, invited Morton to record music for the Library of Congress. These recordings turned into long sessions of storytelling and piano playing. This collection of recordings later won two Grammy Awards, with Morton being honored as a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award winner.

Morton left Washington shortly after being stabbed outside of the Music Box one night. He suffered wounds to the head and chest. He was unable to find quick treatment, as segregation kept him from the closest hospital. After this incident, he was never the same. He suffered from respiratory problems for the rest of his life. Still, he held onto hope and planned to put together a new band and resurge as a ragtime and jazz artist.

This dream never came true, as he passed away a few years later on July 10th, 1941. While Jelly Roll Morton is now well known, at the time, his arrogance and boastful claims pushed many of his great colleagues away, meaning not many were in attendance at his funeral proceedings. He has been inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and the Louisiana Music Hall of Fame, serving as an influence to jazz pianists still today.

Classical Pieces

Week 1 - Hesitation Blues

Week 2 - Wolverine Blues

Week 3 - Jungle Blues

Week 4 - Spanish Swat

Week 5 - The Crave

Week 6- The Finger Breaker

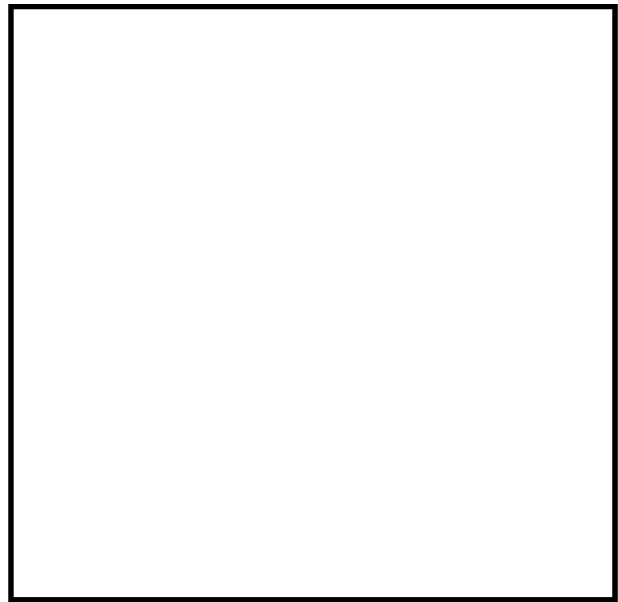
Composer Study

Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Place of Birth: _____

Composer Fun Facts:



Instruments Used: _____

Famous Compositions: _____

Further Study:
