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NEXT SRS MEETING

**August 30, 2026
Noon to 3 p.m.
Straw Hat Pizza
2929 Mather Field Road
Rancho Cordova**



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Sacramento Ragtime Society Newsletter

Marilyn Norton, Editor

August 2026

Scott Joplin Festival 2026

Innovation, diversity mark the annual music celebration

By Murray Bishoff

There are many ways to make a music festival memorable: through programming, the lineup of performers, individual performances, and the unexpected. The 2026 Scott Joplin Ragtime Festival, held May 27-30 in Sedalia, Missouri, offered all the usual ingredients for a pleasing four-day excursion into America's first truly original music. But one night, one programming concept may have forever changed the festival, breaking down every known categorization of American music as ragtime and all its musical siblings, cousins and descendants. The celebration of ragtime endured. Yet fitting the music into little typed categories no longer seems possible.

First, we have to back up to see how the festival unfolded. For years, the Scott Joplin Festival has been opening the pantheon of musical gods. That trend continued. There were concerts of music by Joplin and his contemporaries, the bedrock of ragtime. Celebrations of new compositions in the ragtime structure and dance music pre-1920 made comfortable companions.

Then the stretching starts. The Morton Trio, led by Andrew Oliver, who has recorded all of Jelly Roll Morton's known compositions, helped usher Morton formally into the godhood among the ragtimers. Morton was always there, peripherally, more seated heavily into what would become jazz, but now his style of high-energy not-so-ragtime selections took center stage in hands that included the Oliver-Smith Incomparables, hot jazz specialists of 1920s music. Arm in arm with them came blues specialist Miss Jubilee, Valerie Kirschhoff, bringing charged performances that mixed hard-times songs to center stage, with rollicking orchestral accompaniments by both the Blue Devils and the Incomparables bands.

Out of these muddy waters emerged exciting performances and more. Pop songs paired with silent movie cinema came back again, another competing wing of the music world. Tin Pan Alley composers like Percy Wenrich, clearly rooted in ragtime, found themselves swept over by the sounds of a rowdier, more musically experimental soundscape that would erupt out of the ragtime era. What had been a ragtime festival became something different; interesting, engaging, but clearly much more than the name implies.

Ragtime roots

Every Scott Joplin Festival has at least one concert showcasing the work of the master, who established ragtime out of Sedalia. The Friday afternoon "Roots of Ragtime" concert anchored the tone. Bryan Wright, festival artistic director, introduced the performances as late 19th century music "ranging from sentimental parlor piano pieces to really lively" selections.

Dave Majchrzak opened with Arthur Marshall's "Missouri Romp" (1907), with an arching line following a march-like introduction, leading into Marshall and Joplin's "Swipesy Cakewalk" (1900), with a nice bouncy feel. Majchrzak confessed before starting that when it came to the axiom of playing "exactly the way Joplin wrote it," that "I couldn't play it that way if my life depended on it." And he didn't, over-enhancing the harmonies to where the piece was barely recognizable except for the introduction.

British guitarist Steve Hicks played the not-especially raggish "Rainbow Schottisch" (1852) by Henry Kleber, anchored in a pleasant tune, followed by "The Sun Do Move" (1899) by John

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SRS Session—July 26, 2026

By Deborah Gale

The July SRS meeting was held July 26, 2026, at Straw Hat Pizza at the corner of Mather Field Road and Folsom Blvd, Rancho Cordova, from Noon to 3:00pm.

Next meeting is Sunday, August 30, 2026. Meeting starts at noon.

First time performer at SRS meeting: Lisette Fletcher, Julia Riley's granddaughter

Performers at the July meeting were Elliott Adams, Bev Anderson, Lisette Fletcher, Gil Hayward, Jack Kersh, Stevens Price, Damit Senanayake, and Julia Riley

Correction to June 28, 2026 second set played by Bev Anderson:

Bev Anderson, washboard & vocal; Julia Riley, flute; Petra Sullivan, piano

Your Cheatin' Heart, Hank Williams in 1952
You Call Everybody Darlin', Sam Martin, Ben Trace, and his brother, Al Trace, who used the pseudonym, Clem Watts. 1946
Waitin' For the Train To Come In, Sunny Skyler, Marty Block 1945
Avalon, Al Jolson, B. G. DeSylva, Vincent Rose 1920

Now for July 26, 2026

Bev Anderson, washboard & vocal; Gil Hayward, piano

You're In Style When You're Wearing A Smile; Gus Kahn & Al W. Brown & Albert Van Alstyne; 1918
Bye Bye Blackbird; Mort Dixon & Ray Henderson; 1926
Crazy; Willie Nelson; 1961
Jambalaya; Hank Williams; 1952

Elliott Adams, piano

On The Turf Of Saratoga; W. de Forest Lappe; 1904
Marigold Rag; Elliott L. Adams; 1972
Grace And Beauty; James Scott; 1909
The Peach; Arthur Marshall; 1908

Lisette Fletcher, piano

Downright Happy Rag; Martha Meir; Not Published

Stevens Price, piano

After The Society Meeting; G; 2003
Soda Jerk; Stevens Price; 2003

Gil Hayward, accordion

Just One Of Those Things; Cole Porter; 1935
Lady Of Spain; Tolchard Evans; 1931
12th Street Rag; Euday Bowman; 1914

Jack Kersh, piano

Medley

Under the Mellow Moon; Wendell Woods Hall; 1923
Allegany Moon; Al Hoffman & Dick Manning; 1956
Get Out and Get Under the Moon; m: Larry Shay – w: Charles Tobias & William Jerome; 1928
Moonlight & Roses; Edward Lemare, Ben Black & Neil Moret; 1925
Shine On Harvest Moon; Jack Norworth & Nora Bayes-Norworth; 1908
Red Moon; m: Henri DeMartini & Max Kortlander – w: John Traver; 1922

Damit Senanayake, piano

The Nonpareil; Scott Joplin; 1909
Gladiolus Rag; Scott Joplin; 1907
Eugenia; Scott Joplin; 1905

Bev Anderson, washboard & vocal; Gil Hayward, piano

Sunday; Chester Cohn & Jules Stein & Bennie Krueger; 1926
Yes Sir That's My Baby; Gus Kahn & Walter Donaldson; 1925
Get Out Those Old Records; Carmen Lombardo & John Jacob Loeb; 1950
Put Me To Sleep With An Old Fashioned Melody; Harry James & Sam M. Lewis & Dick Howard; 1915

Elliott Adams, piano

The Pride of Bucktown; Robert S. Roberts; 1897
The Old Boston Post Road; Galen Wilkes; 1977
The Rag Pickers Rag; Robert J. O'Brien; 1904
The White Wash Man; Jean Schwartz; 1908

Stevens Price, piano

Through The Bottomland; David Thomas Roberts 1980
Foggy Day; Stevens Price; 1907

Jack Kersh, piano

Medley

When That Midnight Choo-Choo Leaves for Alabam; Irving Berlin; 1912
Please Don't Talk About Me When I'm Gone; m: Sam H. Stept – w: Sidney Clare; 1930
Someday You'll Want Me To Want You; Jimmie Hodges; 1944
Lonesome, That's All; Lee S. Roberts & Ben Bradley; 1918
Just A Girl That Men Forget; m: Joe Garren – w: Al Du-bin & Fred Rath; 1923



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Stromberg, the namesake of a famous sermon that became a historical footnote for later reference in the festival. This cakewalk mixed call-and-response, ending in a strain like a pleasant stroll down a country lane.

Taking to the piano himself, Bryan Wright offered Kerry Mills' ragtime foundational piece "Impecunious Davis" (1899), which he said could be an anthem for a ragtime pianist. That led into boogie-woogie specialist Carl Sonny Leyland taking on James Bland's "Carry Me Back to Old Virginny" (1878) and Stephen Foster's "My Old Kentucky Home" (1852), with percussionist Hal Smith. Leyland turned both into boogie-woogie, enhanced by boom-booming on the snare and drum rim by Smith.

Virginia Tichenor tried to bring it back home with the "Mississippi Rag" (1899) by William Krell, the first published rag. She would build and fade, creating an effect like a marching parade, with a clarion call at the center.

Frederick Hodges also took a side route, playing two pieces by operetta composer Victor Herbert. His "Bandinage," meaning "gossip," offered storytelling in a very pianistic style, recounting two girls carrying on a lively exchange until a "dreamy" boy walks by and sends their emotional chat spiraling. Hodges provided no plot to Herbert's "Serenade," telling listeners, "You decide," in a key-board excursion.

John Reed-Torres circled the wagons with Joplin's "Peacherine Rag" (1901) and Abe Holzmans' "Smokey Mokes" (1899) two-step and cakewalk. Then it was a step into the Beyond, as the Oliver-Smith Incomparables took the stage. They turned Kerry Mills' "At A Georgia Camp Meeting" (1897) cakewalk and "Whistling Rufus" (1899), both ragtime standards, into hot jazz romps. The band included Hal Smith on drums, Colin Hancock on cornet, T.J. Müller on trombone, Andy Schumm on clarinet, Andrew Oliver on piano, Gavin Rice on banjo, and Tyler Thomson on bass.

Wright concluded the concert noting these were tunes "floating around in the period," and that ragtime and jazz overlap in performance long before recordings. That made the mix and mutations more natural.

For those who may have needed more grounding, the "Ragtime Old and New" concert at midday on Saturday offered pianists playing classic rags and new pieces.

Pianist Dalton Ridenhour started the trip with Arthur Marshall's "The Pippin" (1908), an easy-going piece that grew into a louder trot. He paired that with "Wrong Rag" (1998) by Scott Kirby, with many of its lines going in unexpected directions, especially harmonically.

Virginia Tichenor and Marty Eggers, both on pianos, gave a buoyant performance of Artie Matthews' "Pastime Rag No. 5" (1918), a little more restrained than their outdoor performance. They paired it with one of the best-known pieces by Virginia's father, Trebor Tichenor, "Buck Snort Stomp" (1964), with his characteristic bounce, leading to a driving finish.

Martin Spitznagel paired one of his own pieces with Scott Joplin's "Paragon Rag" (1909). On the Joplin, he

transposed the key in the middle and added a walking bass. Spitznagel's "Lullaby for Clara," offered a total change of pace; slow and sweet, with surges and a soft ending, the only piece Spitznagel debuted in his 2001 Carnegie Hall concert.

John Reed-Torres paired Joseph Lamb with his original "Belle of Los Angeles" (2012), with its roller coaster progression. William McNally offered two contemporary pieces by Carter Pan, a student of William Albright, and David Thomas Roberts.

Tadao Tomokiyo, one of the Ragtime Kids, played Scott Joplin and James Scott, while classical pianist Christina Austin played two by James Scott. Capping the concert was Richard Dowling, continually setting the gold standard for playing Joplin. He offered David Thomas Roberts' best-known work, his tribute "Roberto Clemente" (1979), played slower, softer, and with more feeling than typical performances, building to a broad "sun coming out" moment at the end. Dowling finished with the Scott Joplin-Scott Hayden collaboration, "Sunflower Slow Drag" (1901) in an up-tempo rendition, building loudly but still working in contrasts.

The ultimate synthesis

That leads to the pivotal concert of the festival: "Scott Joplin: Back to Back," on Friday evening. As Bryan Wright, who programmed the concert, explained, the concert offered each piece, all by Joplin, played twice, each by different pianists and performers. The first time, the pieces would be played as Joplin wrote them. The second "stylized" version would represent "a fresh reworking of the piece," improvised as the player saw fit. The novel approach, never distinctly separated at a festival concert before, split pieces into older sections – "Joplin in Missouri" – and later pieces – "Joplin in New York." Joplin scholar Joshua Rifkin served as master of ceremonies.

Brian Holland and Jeff Barnhart started off with a rather traditional two-piano version of "Original Rags" (1899). Sonny Leyland followed with a not-quite-boogie version, adding harmonies and syncopation closer to rock, with a boogie element injected.

Ethan Leinwand followed with "The Easy Winners" (1901), which Royce Martin, known as a pop music synthesizer, started straight, then injected stomping feet, shifted octaves, trills, speed, and ornaments without the original piece fully disappearing.

Richard Dowling played "Elite Syncopations" (1902) boldly, in "grand piano" style. In the hands of the Morton Trio, the original initially shone through. With Andy Schumm on clarinet, Andrew Oliver on piano, and Hal Smith on drums, the melody stayed with Schumm as Oliver created a different harmonic line on the piano. As it progressed, the piece became looser and louder, subsiding on a soft note.

On "The Entertainer" (1902), William McNally approached in a relaxed manner, bolder in the middle section and ending softly. Jeff Barnhart then entered slowly, layering in unfamiliar jazz harmonies, amplifying the jazz elements before ending softly, concluding by repeating just the first three notes standing alone.

Joshua Rifkin played "Weeping Willow" (1903) delicately and not too fast, a sweet impression. For the second version,

Andy Schumm, bearing a saxophone, jumped in much faster, with T.J. Müller on banjo and Oliver on piano. In true jazz style, the melody was traded to the banjo, elaborated even further back in Schumm's hands, and back through together for a loud finish.

"Something Doing" (1901), a much more rarely heard two-step, received a rapid, jolly interpretation from Bryan Wright. The Incomparables, then, gave it the full-band treatment, discarding any subtlety, going genuine Dixieland in the final repeat.

In the second half, violinist David Reffkin with Dave Majchrzak accompanying on piano gave a lyrical, relaxed reading of Joplin's "Sugar Cane" (1908). Barnhart and Holland came back with an unrecognizable alternative, playing different harmony lines bigger and louder, softening toward the landing then winding up for a boisterous finish.

"Gladiolus Rag" (1907) received a sensitive and delicate reading by John Reed-Torres. Martin Spitznagel responded slower, infusing jazz harmonies, ranging high on the keyboard, switching to a waltz, then a boogie, slowing again to end in a jazz chord.

Dalton Ridenhour introduced "Heliotrope Bouquet" (1907) lightly, milking slow passages for effect, building for drama with crescendo bursts, then ending softly. Eve Elliot, a 2022 Old Time Piano Playing Contest winner, also started slowly, infusing jazz harmonies before hitting a bump-a-bump rocking rhythm, spiced with different syncopation, making the melody more emphatic before ending on a soft jazz chord.

"Fig Leaf Rag" (1908) became a soft stroll in the fingers of Bryan Wright. The Incomparables turned it immediately into a big statement, jazzier, blowing it up to a big finish.

"Solace: A Mexican Serenade" habanera (1909) is deceptively tricky and easily drags. Joshua Rifkin fingered the tighrope gently and slowly. Royce Martin rolled the initial chord, then moved the melody to a higher register while sustaining the mood, tempo and volume. On the repeat, Martin dropped the melody entirely and played the harmony.

"Pine Apple Rag" (1908) sounded like a grand statement in Richard Dowling's hands, building and building. Jeff Barnhart and wife, Anne, on flute, the duo of Ivory and Gold, gave the melody to the flute while the piano explored harmonies. When she released the tune, Jeff took over fully on harmonies, while Hal Smith on drums beefed up the show with rolls. Anne returned with tongue fluttering on the melody to give the three voices one more distinct round.

The concert ended with all the performers on "Maple Leaf Rag" (1899), the National Anthem of ragtimers. Rifkin played an abbreviated introduction before the various pianists took turns or in pairs on the two pianos, speeding up the tempo. Leyland launched it into unrecognizable territory. The Incomparables dove in, the audience clapped along. Reed-Torres danced with Eve Elliot, and it all rang out in an unrestrained symphonic roar.

With that, the audience left feeling full, having heard

practically every style produced at the festival. They had heard a concert, rooted somewhere in ragtime and ending up somewhere beyond description, leaving the question of where the festival could go from here open for another day.

Expanding the tapestry

For the fourth consecutive year, the festival dove into the rich wealth of the music that accompanied silent films, contemporaries of the ragtime era. At the Thursday night concert, "Roaring and Silent Twenties," Frederick Hodges, who plays along to many films during the year, used his pianistic and memory skills to provide a soundtrack to Buster Keaton's 68-minute 1925 movie, "Go West."

Hodges reported later that his playing used authentic mood music written down for piano players of the period. He also injected recognizable songs of the day to emphasize certain scenes, such as playing George Cohan's "Give My Regards to Broadway" as Keaton walked past a New York Railroad car in a train yard as he contemplated where to go.

The concert itself was billed as "a 10-year excursion from the ragtime era," illustrating what emerged from the height of rags and the dominance of pianists ruling the contemporary scene. The Midwest University Six offered five selections from the period. This group included Hodges on the piano, Andy Schumm on cornet, T.J. Müller on trombone, Colin Hancock on clarinet and alto sax, Matt Tolentino on bass sax, Gavin Rice on banjo, and Josh Duffy on drums.

They recreated actual recording sessions from 1925, playing "Them Ramblin' Blues"; "Desdemona," where the main melodic theme traveled between the instruments; "The Camel Walk", where Schumm drove the tune and band members improvised off his framework; "Fallin' Down", where the band matched the clarinet's voice and shared the spotlight without additional solos; and Gene Goldkatt's band number "Howdy Quicksell", originally called "Dustin' the Donkey", where the band held together tightly for a polished finish.

After two numbers by Gavin Rice on the banjo, accompanied on the piano by Dalton Ridenhour, the musical framework pivoted again, this time to the blues. Miss Jubilee, Valerie Kirchhoff, brought out the Blue Devils for tunes popularized by the queens of the blues: Bessie Smith ("Give Me a Pig Foot"), Mamie Smith ("At Miss Jenny's Ball"), Trixie Smith ("Messin' Around"), and Clara Smith ("The Irresistible Blues"). Kirchhoff, able to belt it with the best of them, made an appealing figure, smiling and swaying through her numbers, with the band trying to match, rather than overpower her.

The band included Colin Hancock on cornet, T.J. Müller on trombone, Schumm on clarinet, Ethan Leinwand on piano, Smith on drums, and New Orleans bass player Tyler Thomson.

Kirchhoff and the Blue Devils would return in the finale concert on Saturday with even more vigor, presenting Mamie Smith's "Goin' Crazy with the Blues" (1926), where Kirchhoff's brassy vocals burst through like an explosion, and Euday Bowman's "Twelfth Street Blues" (1924), using Fletcher Henderson's 1924 arrangement and Rosetta Henderson's original for vocal inspiration. The band played it loud and proud, sonically tearing the roof off the theater.

Here and there, different sounds emerged from other instrumental combinations.

In an outdoor set on Thursday afternoon, Nicholas White, a conservatory-trained percussionist, gave a concert of transcriptions from Edison cylinders. He was joined by Schumm on sax and Dalton Ridenhour on piano, with White on xylophone as The New All-Stars. White noted it took four weeks to transcribe a single xylophone part off the original recordings. His transcriptions that they played included "In Siam" (1919), "Alcoholic Blues" (1919), and "Hindustan" (1918). They also played "Sand Dunes" (1918), "Just Blue" (1921), and "Poor Little Butterfly is a Fly Gal Now" (1919), spotlighting White in the lead.

Accordion player Matt Tolentino stressed these peripheral sounds in his performances. On the Thursday afternoon concert, between performers, he played and sang a Neapolitan street song in Italian. In his official set, he played pieces by two of the Tin Pan Alley giants who emerged out of ragtime, Percy Wenrich's "Kentucky Days" (1912) and Walter Donaldson's "When the Bees Make Honey Down in Sunny Alabam'" (1919). Tolentino's rich sound made a welcome contrast to the piano, and his singing reminded the audience that the Great American Songbook takes shape at the same time as ragtime, occasionally intermarrying.

The Thursday afternoon concert itself, "The United States at 250," offered a general diversion from ragtime fare. It started firmly rooted in ragtime. Brian Holland, who has played annually at the festival since 1997, performed one of his earliest memories of contemporary ragtime, Frank French's "Belle of Louisville" (1990) and "American Rag," assembled by Mark Allen Jones that started with "America" and progressed into raggy quotations from Cohan's "Yankee Doodle Dandy" and "You're A Grand Old Flag", Irving Berlin's "Over There", and Sousa's "Stars and Stripes Forever" with lots of swagger.

David Refkin, whose violin has frequently been the main musical contrast to piano dominance in a ragtime concert, went back to roots and leapt to the post-ragtime period. He and pianist David Majchrzak played Harry Guy's "Cleanin' Up In Georgia" (1899), lyrically emphasizing the original "Clean Up" dance step while the piano added a raggy accompaniment. They ended with George Meyer's "San Francisco" from the 1924 San Francisco-Pan American Fair, injecting drama, an abundance of syncopation, octave switches, clowning, and a final romp.

Jeff and Anne Barnhart as the piano-flute duo of Ivory and Gold offered two selections from the edges. Galen Wilks' "Niantic by the Sea" (2020), with its sweet melody rising and falling like waves, the flute echoing the piano, was more of a tone painting than a rag, for which Wilks is known. Lewis Muri and Maurice Abraham's "Ragtime Cowboy Joe" (1912) had Anne singing and Jeff injecting ragtime on the piano accompaniment.

Clinton Davis, who specializes in Old Time Music, picked up his guitar for the East Texas Serenaders' "Mineola Rag", one of their "fiddle rags" that Davis ar-

anged for guitar. Then he traversed styles for a gentle, roarless version of stride piano king James P. Johnson's "Harlem Strut" (1921), sounding less like Johnson or ragtime and more akin to Joplin's "Solace."

To complete the distant excursion, Richard Dowling presented one of the great 19th century piano concert showpieces, Louis Moreau Gottschalk's "The Union" (1863), with quotes from the "Star Spangled Banner", "Hail Columbia", "Yankee Doodle", cannon fire, a "bah-rump, bah-rump" in the left hand with a march in the right, ending with a repeat of "Yankee Doodle" in the broadest grand style.

Beyond the hall

Most of the performances at the festival took place outdoors in downtown Sedalia or in the Katy Depot across town.

A chance walkabout may have provided an encounter with William McNally playing the very orchestral "Punch" (in the English translation from Spanish, 1935) by Argentinian composer Heitor Villa-Lobos, with a deliberately "wrong" last note, jazz trumpeter Bix Beiderbecke's composition "Flashes" (1931), or Zez Confrey's African suite "High Hat-tin'" (1924). Bryan Wright could be heard playing Tom Shea's "Corn Cracker Rag" (1960) or a two-piano version of Confrey's "Kitten on the Keys" (1923) with Hodges.

The real outdoor fun came on Saturday afternoon. Organizers even moved up the midday concert to reduce competition for the free popular offerings.

For the third year, the game "Guess the Pianist" was offered under the Stark Tent. Hodges, Spitznagel, and Jeff Barnhart served as the unwitting blindfolded panel, tormented by Majchrzak as judge and wielder of the air horn, sounded to indicate and punish wrong answers. Through 11 rounds, the panel had to guess who was performing, some playing exceptionally badly, and some, like Richard Dowling on Eubie Blake's "Poor Katie Red" (1907) and Eve Elliot playing Jelly Roll Morton, tried to dazzle and ended up identified. The panel earned four-and-a-half points, the half-point awarded by the audience, which Majchrzak called "a moral victory," topping their predecessors in the hot seat.

For the seventh year, the Spitznagel and Wright two-piano show offered amusing diversions. Wright said this would be his last, turning the spotlight over to Ethan Leinwand next year. Spitznagel threw in a variety of jokes he "had to get off his chest," like the waiter saying, "No m'am, I can't seat you away from the ragtime." Wright gave Spitznagel a "master class" in how to play Joplin's "Sugar Cane," ending in the two of them cranking up the tempo to a nearly unplayable pace. They concluded with James P. Johnson's "Charleston" (1923), with additional help from the Incomparables.

With the return of Jeff Barnhart after a three-year absence, the final set on Saturday afternoon brought back the Holland and Barnhart Show. Tossing subtlety aside, the duo played two-piano renditions of Nat Ayers' "King Chanticleer" (1912), Willie "The Lion" Smith's "Echoes of Spring" (1935), and Irving Berlin's "Old Maid's Ball" (1913) with vigor, Barnhart singing on the Berlin. They wrapped up with Papa Charlie Jackson's "Shake That Thing" (1925), the traditional closer, where Barnhart improvised lyrics that invit-

ed the other festival performers on stage to pound out a chorus on the piano.

Other festival activities included Dining with the Stars on Thursday, free Saturday morning cartoons at the Liberty Center, a period fashion show, a historic tour of Sedalia in a trolley, free dance lessons led by Jeanette Watts, and the Ragtime Dance in the Fox Theater, next to the town square, on Saturday. The planned parade was rained out. After-hours mingling and playing moved back to the Best Western Motel this year, escaping unpredictable weather and potential noise issues for those living near the downtown Pavilion.

Programs were printed for each paid concert, listing the pieces played but not their dates.

Composer David Thomas Roberts received the Outstanding Achievement Award from the Scott Joplin Foundation this year for significant contributions in ragtime, an honor given since 1989. Jerusha White received the foundation's Chrysanthemum Award, given to a volunteer for exceptional contributions to the festival, an award given since 2019. The Ragtime Kid program continued, naming Anderson Pries, 16, a standout at the World Championship Old-Time Piano Playing Contest, as the 2026 winner. Pries spoke about organizing the Fox River Ragtime Festival near Chicago in Elgin, a major undertaking for a teenager.

Music Hall

Performances for the festival concluded with the free -wheeling Music Hall concert on Saturday night. The concert provided a showcase for sampling much of the festival's attractions.

Richard Dowling gave a relaxed reading of Joplin's "Nonpareil" (1907). David Thomas Roberts played the "Franklin Avenue" section from his 15-part "New Orleans Streets" composition (1985-89). Sonny Leyland offered a medley of compositions by early boogie-woogie pianist Doug Suggs. Joshua Rifkin gave a majestic reading of Joplin's "Bethena: A Concert Waltz" (1905). Martin Spitznagel could not resist the chance to play "What Do You Do With A Drunken Sailor" tucked into Percy Grainger's "Scotch Strathspey and Reel" (1939), so he played this classical selection. Pianist Tom McDermott, unexpectedly at the festival, was squeezed in to play Joplin's "Swipesy" that he "choro-ized" with Brazilian rhythms from Ernesto Nazareth. Royce Martin, who never plays pure ragtime, offered his original "Higher", into which he injected rap and stride.

Pairs and ensembles had their moment as well. Virginia Tichenor and Marty Eggers, both on pianos, played an energetic, very accented version of May Aufderheide's standard "The Thriller" (1909). The Barnharts performed Fred Ebb's "Life is a Cabaret" from the musical "Cabaret" (1966), with Anne singing the first verse and Jeff the second. Dowling and Hodges on two pianos played F. Henri Klickmann's "Smiles and Chuckles" (1917), as a tribute to David "Smiley" Wallace, a longtime festival friend and ragtime supporter who passed at 93 in the past year.

The Morton Trio served up Jelly Roll's "Frog-I-More" (1918) in their typical spirited manner. Holland and Barnhart collaborated on the two-piano version of fan favorite "Stompin' 'Em Down" by Alex Hill (1929), played with the zestful chemistry when the two perform together. They were joined by the Incomparables for Chris Smith's "Down in Honky Tonk Town" (1916), kicking up the octane of performances further. The Incomparables held the stage for all-out performances of James Scott's "Grace and Beauty" (1909), in a manner far from Scott's original version, and Jelly Roll Morton's "The Perfect Rag" (1924), played with intensity as a fitting close to the show and the festival.

Symposiums

Morning symposiums recounted history and research for serious fans on Thursday and Friday.

For the second year, Virginia Tichenor spoke about her father, the renowned ragtime scholar, collector, composer, and pianist Trebor Tichenor, this time focusing on his compositional strategy. She noted her father drew on Missouri-themed influences, folk ragtime tradition with early roots, bluegrass fiddle and banjo, plus traditional jazz. His piece, "Boomtown Echoes," resonated Tom Turpin and Brun Campbell's syncopation with blue notes, a piece Virginia then played. In "Hickory Smoke Rag," published in 1976, Tichenor injected the banjo sound into the piano's voice. "It's A Long Way Home" (1966), one of his favorites, added in cakewalk structure, plus blues and folk styles.

Trebor's solo CD recordings in the 1980s and 1990s further captured his compositional legacy. Virginia noted her father, with the St. Louis Ragtimers, the band he started in 1960, gave their last performance, fittingly, at the Scott Joplin House in St. Louis on Nov. 20, 2013.

Virginia and her brother, Andy, recalled their father as a quiet man, someone you had to "lean in" to hear. His work continues to influence composers and performers to the present day.

Pianists Spitznagel, Royce Martin, and McNally conversed in another session about how to connect ragtime with "today's ears." They posed an array of questions, including "What are the best ways the festival and the performers can honor Scott Joplin's legacy? As an ambassador of the music, what is a performer's obligation to ragtime? How can a performer break through preconceived ideas about ragtime?" The panelists offered ideas from the perspectives of educators, performers, and composers, speaking from their personal experiences. They left the door open for continuing the dialogue in future forums.

One session on the Ragtime Kid program introduced Anderson Pries as this year's winner. Pries played and spoke about learning Joplin's "Swipesy Cakewalk." Brian Holland weighed in on the performance, noting, "Practice should sound terrible, because, in practice, you push yourself." Holland urged "practice perfection" and "question your decisions through each practice." As for improvisation, Holland said to first learn the piece note by note, as the composer wrote it, "then choose whether or not you want to honor it." He added each player must consider improvisational style, the way other composers handled playing options over time. Holland ad-

vised always playing the original version first, paying attention to the melody, then moving forward with the interpretation.

Clement Sechaud offered a musicological dissection of the elements of ragtime, defined by Joplin, James Scott, Joseph Lamb, and other contemporaries. These foundational composers laid out how melody lines progress, how to infuse traditional folk music, and incorporate technical challenges. Sechaud cited influences from Beethoven and Chopin, and went on to suggest how the ragtime style in melody, harmony, and rhythm influenced their successors, like George Gershwin and Thomas “Fats” Waller.

The most technical talk came from Joshua Rifkin, who is preparing a definitive scoring of all Joplin’s pieces for the German music publisher G. Henle Verlag, the “urtext” edition that will stand with the works of the great piano masters. Rifkin asserted that no manuscripts of Joplin’s work have survived. He has pursued finding every printed version of Joplin’s pieces, which will comprise two volumes, and, as editor, comparing them meticulously for any variations. “Corrections” found in the first and best-known collection of pieces, published by the New York City Library, Rifkin is “trying to remedy.”

He observed that the plates from John Stark’s publishing company remained the same from edition to edition. However, in the “Maple Leaf Rag,” Rifkin found a missing note that the editor added. Rifkin explained how the change occurred, then put it back in between parentheses with an explanation. Each piece in the new edition has a preface detailing publishing history and critical sources.

Rifkin commended Joplin biographer Ed Berlin for his considerable help. In one case, Rifkin explained his search for the origin of the “King of Ragtime” attribution to Joplin, coming from a conversation between Joplin and Arthur Marshall quoted in “They All Played Ragtime.” The quote was traced back to notes by Harriet Janis. Its authentication and Joplin’s desire to have that printed on “Maple Leaf Rag” “tells us a different side of Joplin,” Rifkin said. “He understood promotion. He knew what he had.” The title does appear on the 1901 version of “Maple Leaf” and all the subsequent editions.

Illustrating his meticulousness, Rifkin recounted his pursuit of a word balloon that showed up on the cover of the 1902 edition of “The Entertainer” that he traced to the famous 1882 sermon “The Sun Do Move” by John Jasper that became a cakewalk and two-step by John Stromberg, published by Stark. It seems to have been an in-house promotional gimmick that has by now lost all its meaning.

Asked if the Henle edition would have a biography of Joplin included, Rifkin doubted it, noting he would write prefaces and refer readers to Ed Berlin’s book. Rifkin added the new edition, unlike the New York Library version, would not include the original covers. He observed that Joplin does not provide dynamics markings, and the pedaling is “often ambivalent.” The proof sheet to the opera “Treemonisha,” he added, is “absolutely profes-

sional. Joplin was an educated musician, on top of everything that goes into printing music.”

Overview in retrospect

This was Bryan Wright’s final year as festival artistic director. The board, he said, expected a five-year commitment. The Covid pandemic interrupted that, prompting Wright to stay another year after the suspension of performances in 2020 and 2021. For the coming year, Ethan Leinwand, who lives in St. Louis, will take up the task.

“I thought this year would be more of a collaboration with Ethan,” Wright said, “but Ethan had health issues. He’s doing better. I ended up taking the reins more than I wanted to. He was still there for a lot of it.”

The 2026 festival was marked by the return of the Barnharts, after schedule conflicts for three years. Other notable absences were pianist Adam Swanson, who took over the symposiums last year and had been coming since he was a teenager, percussionist Danny Coots, or any stride piano specialist, represented most recently by Stephanie Trick. The festival has a rotation policy on which performers are invited annually.

In the case of Coots, Wright explained the Midwest University Six had its own drummer who was familiar with their repertory, and Hal Smith played with the Oliver-Smith Incomparables. “Did we need a third drummer? Probably not,” Wright said. “Danny understands.” Fortunately, Hal Smith filled in with other performances as needed, though not nearly as often as Coots had.

“Having Jeff [Barnhart] back was great,” Wright said. “We booked for this year two years ago to be sure he had it blocked off.”

Scheduling has its unpredictability. Wright recalled Vincent Johnson’s father passed away two weeks before the festival, forcing Johnson to cancel. Marty Eggers was available and came in to help. In addition, Wright learned pianist Tom McDermott was available 48 hours before the festival. He stepped in and played one of Johnson’s sets.

Another surprise was the return of Joshua Rifkin, who attended in 2025 and committing to return when the Henle Joplin edition was published.

“I was as surprised as anyone when Joshua Rifkin said he’d come back,” Wright commented. When William McNally, as symposium director, was filling in the speaking slots, Wright recalled, “Rifkin said, ‘I’m free this year.’ He drove out with his wife and daughter.”

Another notable glitch came in the scheduling software. The computer booked the Incomparables into the Fox Theater at the same time on Thursday morning as a scheduled dance lesson. The band figured out how to resolve the problem by staying to play for the dancers. “That’s a testament to the sense of humor, willingness to cooperate, and professionalism that these musicians have,” Wright said.

The innovation of adding film again proved popular. Wright noted that after the concert with the Peachierine Ragtime Orchestra sold out in 2023, it seemed logical to have an evening where the first half was jazz, and the second half was a film, made possible by the presence of Frederick Hodges, “one of the world’s best accompanists.”

This year's introduction of cartoons on Saturday morning was part of a strategy to attract more kids. At its conclusion, dance lessons for kids were added, something tried before without much success until this year. Hodges played for the silent cartoons and drew a sizable crowd.

The big disappointment this year was canceling the parade at the last minute due to rain, after the vehicles and paraders had lined up.

The biggest surprise of the festival was the "Joplin: Back to Back" concert, which was Wright's brainchild. He noted, "When I got into this music, I jumped in feet first – ragtime and the era, adding a working knowledge. It's always been this gumbo stew. Classic ragtime is part of this bigger picture. I hoped five years ago to move a little more from classic ragtime to closely related things. 'Joplin: Back to Back' was one way to do it. The festival has a tradition of having a Scott Joplin concert. You try to invite musicians who have diversity of approach. I tried to build concerts that showcase what goes beyond the basics. It could have not worked. The musicians we had here are of such high caliber... we owe the success to them."

Other than the regret of not having some performers present, Wright said, "This year was very satisfying. There's only so much stage time. There's only so much money to pay people to come. I'm really happy with the lineup we had. The hard part is choosing.

"I'd like to think I'd come back to be among friends. When I started coming, I came on my own. I'd just met my wife. Now both of us have full-time jobs and a six-year-old. There's a lot more to consider. For me, it's always been like a homecoming."

Please share any comments on my work as I get little feedback. Encourage anyone to write me at murraybish-off@gmail.com



Valerie Kirschhoff (Miss Jubilee) performs with Hal Smith, left, and pianist Ethan Leinwand, the next artistic director of the Scott Joplin Festival.



Guitarist Steve Hicks played his arrangements.



Virginia Tichenor and Marty Eggers played under the Stark Tent.



The Oliver-Smith Incomparables: Tyler Thomson, bass; Andrew Oliver, piano; Gavin Rice, banjo; Andy Schumm, clarinet; Colin Hancock, cornet; T.J. Müller, trombone.



Richard Dowling dressed to play Gottschalk



Gavin Rice played his vintage banjo on works by Bernard Barnes and Michael Pingitore, with Dalton Ridenhour, piano.



Violinist David Reffkin and pianist Dave Majchrzak.



Nicholas White played his xylophone transcriptions from Edison cylinders with Andy Schumm and Dalton Ridenhour.



Royce Martin



Matt Tolentino on the accordion.



Jeff and Anne Barnhart playing Galen Wilks' "Niantic By The Sea."



Jerusha White, left, received the Scott Joplin Foundation's Chrysanthemum Award from Becky Imhauser, right.



Clinton Davis playing fiddle rags.



The final installment of the Brian Wright-Martin Spitznagel show.



William McNally played classical to pop.



Composer David Thomas Roberts received the 2026 Outstanding Achievement to ragtime award for 2026. Looking on at rear are William McNally and David Rifkin.



During the Music Hall concert, dance instructor Jeanette Watts and Dave Majchrzak danced across the stage, here encircling Brian Holland as he played.



The Master Class Symposium with, from left, William McNally, Brian Holland, and Anderson Pries. Shannon Roth photo



End-of-festival group photo of the performers.

June 3-6, 2027

REMINDER: Next year will be Thursday - Sunday!

UPCOMING EVENTS

NEXT SRS MEETING

August 30, 2026
Noon to 3 p.m.
Straw Hat Pizza
2929 Mather Field Road



Note from Larry Applegate:

I have moved to Argentina with my wife of 6 years Rosa Suarez, to the apartment that she owns. We have begun the process of renovating it.

I will be buying a violin first, and then later an electric piano. I haven't touched a piano for a long time. To start I will be able to print out songs from sites offering to sell the books.

I hope that those of you who remain are doing well and am eager to hear from you!

Regards,
 Larry

Email address: larryapplegate@mac.com



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**September 14, 2026 5:30-7:30 pm.**

### Virginia and Marty.

Virginia Tichenor and Marty Eggers will play ragtime and early jazz at the American Legion Hall in Larkspur, 5:30-7:30 p.m. Immediately following our show the Zenith Jazz Band will perform from 7:30 to 9:00. Our own Virginia Tichenor is pianist with Zenith, and Marty will play with the band on tuba or some other bass instrument. Please stay after our show to hear this fine band!

LOCATION American Legion Post 313, 500 Magnolia Ave. Larkspur, CA Easy parking. ADA ramp accessibility. Room for dancing. BYO food & Drink. Nearby restaurants for Dine-in or Takeout. We're following current Marin County Covid-19 guidance. Please visit [corona-virus.marinhhs.org/masks](https://corona-virus.marinhhs.org/masks) for the latest. For more information call (510) 655-6728 or email Marty Eggers at [marty\\_eggers@juno.com](mailto:marty_eggers@juno.com)

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Don't Forget Ragtime Radio

SUNDAYS Ragtime with Joy hosted by Joy Rushing, 5—7 a.m. (Pacific Time) KOPN 89.5 FM, Columbia, Missouri, <http://www.kopn.org> (programs are now available to stream for two weeks after each broadcast)

FRIDAYS Rhythm Retrospective hosted by Carl Sonny Leyland. 7:30 p.m. on KCBX, San Luis Obispo. Also streamable the following week at www.KCBX.org