

Composer Forensics

Processing An Unknown Composer's Identity Through Their Music

(Revealing the Identity of Mark Janza)

Written by **William G. Edwards**, in appreciative conjunction with considerable information and efforts put forward by ragtime historians **Richard Zimmerman** and **Tracy Doyle**. ©2002/2005/2015 by Bill Edwards. Updated August 2015 by Bill Edwards, based on information accumulated since the initial publication.

THE INSPIRATION AND HISTORY:

Even before notated music existed, familiar melodies were everywhere. However, over time, the person or persons who originated these tunes have gone unmentioned or forgotten. Who wrote *Shenandoah*, or *My Darling Clementine*? Who actually composed some of the songs that **Stephen Foster** laid claim to? Did **Hayden** actually pen *Joy to the World*? There are many questions such as these that have existed for eons. In some cases conjecture and analysis has answered these questions with little or no doubt. Others linger still, even with the composers alive, and have sometimes been challenged in court. In any case, it feeds basic human needs for knowledge and conclusiveness.

It was the desire to fulfill these needs that led this author on a chase that has lasted for well over a decade, and one that has collected other interested parties on the way. When I started learning ragtime pieces beyond the scope of **Scott Joplin** and other classic composers, I wanted to learn about the people who wrote these rags, as much as I wanted to learn about **Chopin** or **Beethoven** and what motivated them or their music. In the case of rag composers like **Charles L. Johnson**, who wrote under a variety of pseudonyms, it is the desire to be able to find and readily identify more works by that composer. This need has been amplified in my quest to collect and present biographies of ragtime composers on the World Wide Web and potentially in future media. In regards to most women composers of ragtime proved to be a frustrating task, since few of them wrote more than a handful of pieces, and records of their existence had been obscured by married names and an absence of further publication. Yet with persistence I managed to compile an encyclopedia of over 530 of them. Persistence does not always win, but it helps.

In 1985 I was introduced to a piece that I had access to for many years, but finally heard it performed by the only person at that time who was likely playing it in public, pianist and friend **Daryl Ott**. This was the *Lion Tamer - A Syncopated Fantasia*, by a composer named **Mark Janza**. I immediately took to this fabulous piece and within a week had adopted it for life as one of my flashiest standards. Many ragtime pianists have since championed it after I introduced it in larger venues, and it remains quite popular at this writing some three decades later. I obviously wanted to find more pieces by this composer, but was unable to locate anything within a folio. At some point I was able to secure the equally challenging and entertaining *Aviation Rag* by the same composer. Further assistance from ragtime experts such as historian and ragtime performer **Dick Zimmerman** and his partner **Tracy Doyle** led me to only one other piece by Janza, *Bale O' Cotton*. During this period a variety of rumors concerning Janza's true self emerged, including the possibility that the composer was a female using a male pseudonym to get published, and that this female may even have been publisher **Al Marzian's** wife.

In the interim, I searched genealogy databases and libraries in the areas where Janza published in search of some identity. None of the records matched up with any level of probability, so the identity remained obscured. I started searching for common threads with his pieces. All of them were published by Albert F. Marzian of Louisville, Kentucky (or across the river in New Albany, Indiana). Mr. Zimmerman, also in pursuit of the identity of Janza, was able to add further information to this thread. Marzian published only four ragtime pieces, three of them by Mark Janza. The rest of the Marzian Company output was comprised of more mundane intermezzos, waltzes, old-fashioned songs, etc. Then Dick revealed a fact that I knew, but suddenly became more interesting in this context. Marzian also had written a rag, *Angel Food*, but it was published by Forster Music of Chicago, Illinois, rather than by his own firm. Marzian had published some of his own works in his publishing house, such as *Evening Chimes*, a pleasant pianistic emulation of church bells. Why, then, did he not avail himself of the facilities at hand and publish his own rag? Is it possible that he actually did publish his own rags, but used a different name?

Much of the answer to that question lies in speculation, as well as some additional family information sent to me originally from his surviving niece, **Janet Marzian Lee**, then later her brother, named for Albert's brother, **Alfred Marzian**, both responding to the initial publication of this document. Since ragtime had acquired a nefarious reputation to some extent, in many cases not warranted, it is possible that Albert F. Marzian did not want to be directly associated with it as a contributor - at least in his home town since his name does appear on at least one true rag. He was an immigrant from Eastern Europe, which is reflected in the last name, so there is a cultural heritage that naturally includes classical composition.

Further information obtained by Mr. Zimmerman and Ms. Doyle (information that was not substantiated by Ms. Lee at the time this document was originally written, but later found as a reference in a family Bible from Europe) suggests the possibility that the family had origins in Russia in the mid 19th century, and that **Marjanza** or a derivative of it may have been the original family name. It was common for many immigrants to change their names to help assimilate themselves into their adoptive homes. This applies to **Irving Berlin (Israel Baline)** and **Al Jolson (Asa Yoleson or Joleson)** who were also born in Russia, or the **Gershovitz** family, which yielded **George and Ira Gershwin**. So although partially unsubstantiated, this theory lends some credence to the origin of the name Mark Janza, which could also have been derived for Marzian with a little work.

THE HYPOTHESIS:

This is all peripherally circumstantial evidence that suggests Janza's identity, but there are better forensic methods available that can place his relationship with Marzian within a high degree of certainty. This would be through the comparison of *Angel Food Rag* with the rags composed by Mark Janza. It can be argued that while many rags sound somewhat alike, many composers have stylistic elements that are unique to their method of composition or arranging. It can be further ascertained that the particular characteristics that identify one composer's writing will rarely be found in the works of another composer, or at least with a greatly reduced frequency. In order to

present this methodology as a viable means of identification, we must first establish that a composer can be individually identified by these aspects of their works, much in the way that handwriting contains identifiable characteristics to the extent that they stand up in a court of law. So we will start with some known quantities to establish this pattern, then apply it to the four rags in question here: *Lion Tamer Rag*, *Aviation Rag*, *Bale O' Cotton* and *Angel Food Rag*.

The following analyses will assume that the reader has access to either the scores or recordings of the compositions named, and that they further have some level of musical theory knowledge, necessary to comprehending some of the content that supports the analyses.

In the early 1970s, Mr. Zimmerman was able to identify, with collective assistance from other ragtime experts, the identity of the composer of *Silver Swan Rag*, which was found only on a piano roll form with **Scott Joplin's** name on it. Once the expected frills usually added to piano roll arrangements were removed, there were enough elements of Joplin's unique compositional style to bring Mr. Zimmerman and his colleagues to the conclusion that attribution was correct. Let us explore some common elements in Joplin's writing that are found less frequently in the works of other classic rag composers.

For our benchmark we will use the ubiquitous *Maple Leaf Rag* by **Scott Joplin**. Starting in the **A** section, it is patterned as thus:

- Two measures with an initial pattern from **I** to **V** followed by the same two measures repeated.
- A new motive for two measures that is based on an octave emphasizing **vi** and **V**.
- A derivative of that motive emphasizing the minor tonic - **i** using arpeggios.
- Four measures of a more melodic motive that resolves to the tonic, followed by the same four measures repeated an octave lower.

Note that this makes his opening section asynchronous in nature. Many ragtime writers changed the last four measures of a sixteen measure section to provide a cadence, but it was common to either repeat the first four measure theme three times in some form, or to at least present it synchronously in measures 1-4 and 9-12 with minor variations. Better-known examples of this thinking include *Black and White Rag*, *Dill Pickles*, *Wild Cherries*, *Ragging the Scale*, *The Smiler*, *12th Street Rag* and *Russian Rag*, all penned by different composers. The first half of the *Maple Leaf* bears little thematic or motif resemblance to the second half, which in essence completes the theme set up in the first half. A look at the specified sections from the following Joplin rags will clearly indicate similar thinking not found in most rags by other composers:

- *The Cascades* (**A** section)
- *Leola* (**A** section)
- *Sugar Cane Rag* (**A** section)
- *Gladiolus Rag* (**A** section)

- *Magnetic Rag* (A section to a less specific extent)
- *Euphonic Sounds* (B section)
- *The Easy Winners* (C section)
- *Silver Swan Rag* (C section)

While this is not a long list, it does show a repeated pattern with unique characteristics. There are strong characteristics in each piece concerning the other sections as well. Variances of this style also found their way into Joplin's more symmetrical sections.

One of the traits of **James Scott** was the inclusion of the ring shout or repeated call and response pattern. Whereas Joplin frequently composed with four measure phrases, Scott often gravitated towards two measure themes. This would often consist of a one measure syncopated motif followed by the identical phrase an octave higher in the right hand. While Joplin used this idea infrequently, it is prevalent in the rags of Scott, particularly in his **B** and **D** sections. Less frequently he would insert arpeggios based on transitional chord structures within these two measure patterns. Listen to or look at the following examples that indicate this commonality:

- *Frog Legs Rag* (D section)
- *Great Scott Rag* (B section, D section)
- *The Ragtime Betty* (D section)
- *Grace and Beauty* (B section modified pattern, D section)
- *Quality Rag* (Trio)
- *Climax Rag* (A section)
- *Prosperity Rag* (B/D section modified pattern)
- *Honey Moon Rag* (B/D section modified pattern)
- *Efficiency Rag* (B/D section)
- *Paramount Rag* (B section expanded pattern)
- *New Era Rag* (A section)
- *Peace and Plenty Rag* (B section modified pattern, C section)
- *Don't Jazz Me Rag* (A section - up AND down, B/D section)

Another very common Scott characteristic, which the reader can explore on their own, was the introduction of a two measure phrase followed by three identical two measure phrases modified from the original one. An example of this would be the opening strains of *Quality Rag* and *Hilarity Rag*, and the **B** strain of *Grace and Beauty*.

This distinction of composer-unique phrasing can also be found in many of the rags of **Joseph F. Lamb**, in which sometimes densely scored four and eight measure phrases give a beauty and texture to his best works that is rarely found elsewhere in ragtime. *Top Liner Rag*, *American*

Beauty Rag and *Cotton Tail Rag* contain examples of such phrases throughout. Note Lamb's ability to stretch a phrase with syncopations that go over both odd and even-numbered bars, writing rarely found during the ragtime era.

To further codify this theory of compositional signatures and extending it also to arrangers, consider not only the *Pastime Rags* by **Artie Matthews**, but some of the rags that he arranged as well. The best examples of these would be *Agitation Rag* by **Robert Hampton**, and *Jinx Rag* and *Cactus Rag* by **Lucian Porter Gibson**. Each of these has touches added by Matthews that give them continuity with his *Pastime Rags* #1-5. Compare the **A** strain and **B** to **C** interludes of *Cactus Rag* with the same sections in *Pastime Rag* #3. There is a sense of identity that permeates both of these pieces.

If we delve down further into the molecular level of these works, something that would give even greater credence to the identity of the rags of Joplin, Scott and Lamb as well, we can find singularities that are unique in terms of voicing, chord position and melodic enhancements. The first 3 measures of the **A** section of *Cactus Rag* differ from the first 3 measures of *Pastime Rag* #3 only by the rhythmic placement of the right hand chords. Whereas in the *Pastime Rag* they fall on the first tick of the measure leaving the habanera syncopation to the left hand, the right hand chords in *Cactus Rag* fall on the second beat and the sixteenth directly after, emphasizing the habanera pattern more succinctly, but leaving the same progression using the same chord placement and essentially the same bass line, and in the same key signature no less. This is further emphasized in the interlude between the **B** section and the **trio** in both pieces, as they differ ever so slightly but are still interchangeable. In the case of *Jinx Rag*, with its truly one-of-a-kind bass line in the opening strain, the right hand still echoes from the rhythms of *Pastime* #1 and some of the chord cluster ideas put forth in *Pastime Rag* #4. The similarities can be heard also between the complete scores of both *Agitation Rag* (when played at a genteel tempo, as it often is not) and *Pastime Rag* #2.

Saving time and space for the analysis of the Janza/Marzian works, I will simply note that a listen through the piano rags of other composers of the era will reveal many more technical points that can readily identify that composer. **Charles L. Johnson** used the three over four figure (a.k.a. secondary rag syncopation) in many of his pieces, but usually in a way that made it clear it was his work, no matter which pseudonym he applied to it. *Dill Pickles* and *Crazy Bone Rag* are inversions of each other. **George Botsford** similarly uses this figure in rags he composed, but in his own unique flavor. Compare the full scores of both *Black and White Rag* with *Hyacinth Rag* as a good example of this. **Tom Turpin** applied more earthy folk progressions to his works, but the sometimes awkward chord progressions or melodic tricks he uses, and to good effect at that, are rarely found in the works of any other ragtime writer, even from his region. Other composers that do not have a particular identity often copy from the better-known composers, but the volume of their work provides less material for analysis, and the quality of their work often speaks to the dearth of volume as well.

THE ANALYSIS:

So by this time we have hopefully established that many composers have unique compositional signatures at both the highest levels and through several points of close analysis. Using this as the basis for establishing such identity, we will now compare *Angel Food Rag* by **Al Marzian** with *Lion Tamer* and *Aviation Rag* by the fictional **Mark Janza** to further establish the identity of their composers as one and the same. There will also be comparisons drawn with *Bale O' Cotton*, although this particular rag is more commonplace in structure, and therefore contains less individual identity within. Where applicable, however, it will be mentioned.

Let us start at the highest level with some structural similarities in the first three pieces. All of them have the standard 4 bar introduction, followed by a repeated 16 bar **A** section. *Lion Tamer* differs from the other two in that its **B** section is 32 bars in length, but the first 16 bars are resolved and the second 16 bars are simply a variation on the first 16. That the entire 32 bars is repeated does create a minor difference. The **trio** for both *Lion Tamer* and *Angel Food* are 32 bars long, an unusual length for a ragtime era **trio**. All three have a **trio** interlude in the relative minor, distinct commonality between them, although found with some frequency in ragtime. The *Lion Tamer* interlude is a bit more innovative than the others, requiring a total of 24 bars. Finally, all of them end with a 16 bar recap of a previous section. In the case of *Lion Tamer* it is the last 16 bars of the **B** section. For *Angel Food* it is the last 16 bars of the **trio**. *Aviation Rag* has only a 16 bar **Trio**, so it is repeated entirely, although it concludes with a not completely satisfactory final cadence. Still, there is quite a bit of common stylistic ground in the structure of the Marzian rag in comparison with many similar elements of two of the Janza rags.

Bale O' Cotton differs in that the **A** section consists of one 8 measure phrase repeated twice, followed by an expected 16 bar **B** section. The **trio** appears to be either a lengthened 16 bar section with 8 bars inserted, or possibly one of the Janza/Marzian 32 bar sections with 8 bars omitted. The first 8 bars are followed by 8 bars of exposition, then the expected return to the initial pattern. However, instead of completing development of the section pattern by repeating the first 8 bars and modifying the latter 8, the repeat of the initial bars is truncated after 4 measures and completed with a simple 4 bar cadence. This construction is unique and hard to find elsewhere in ragtime, which at the very least speaks of the innovative individuality of its composer. The rag is completed with a 16 bar **D** section unique from the other sections, something not found in the other Marzian/Janza pieces.

Delving in deeper now we will compare the introductions. Many piano rag introductions start on the dominant (V) rather than the tonic (I). In the case of these four rags, each starts on the tonic and remains there for two measures. They also consist of a melodic pattern included in or derived from the **A** section, although this was more of a common practice in piano rag composition. Still, there is that consistency between the four works.

While not all of the patterns are consistent between the four rags, there are some that are nearly identical per corresponding sections between at least one of the Janza rags and the Marzian piece.

When comparing *Aviation Rag*'s **A** section with the corresponding section in *Angel Food*, the first ten measures of each match up quite closely, particularly the chord progression. While it is not unheard of to follow a **I** pattern with a **II** pattern (as opposed to **ii**, **V** or even **IV**), it is not common. The **I I II II V V I (I/V)** of the first 8 measures is further reinforced by some melodic elements. The melodic motive in ms. 3-4 can be readily reduced in both pieces to (in the key of G) **|A G# A |E |** and their musical intent is nearly identical. Note also the interesting use of the secondary rag pattern in ms. 1-4 of *Angel Food* and ms. 5-8 of *Aviation*. In ms. 2 and 4 of *Angel Food* this pattern is broken by an eighth note in a matter very similar to measure 8 of *Aviation Rag*. There is a similar use of the pattern in the right hand of the *Lion Tamer* Trio, ms. 15/16.

Four much more striking signatures found in all of the first three pieces involve the use of specific progressions and the use of the left hand. Compare the *Angel Food* section B ms. 13-16 to *Lion Tamer* and *Aviation Rag* section A ms. 13-16. In all cases, the motion of the left hand stops from the traditional oom-pah pattern and changes to sustained treble chords underneath a repeated right hand riff, the most complex of these being the *Lion Tamer*. A similar change can be noted in *Lion Tamer* Trio ms. 29-32. In both *Angel Food* and *Aviation*, the chord progression is again nearly identical, and can readily be reduced to **|I |I |II V |I |**. This sudden change in forward thrust provides a striking contrast wherever it occurs in these pieces in a place where many rags simply either intensify (*The Cascades B* section/*Dill Pickles A* section) with more activity or minimize the movement (*Black and White Rag B* section/*Dill Pickles B* section) by removing the left hand from the action.

This idea of using stopped motion for contrast is also present to a lesser degree in *Bale O' Cotton Trio* ms. 1-2/5-7/17-19. In the first three rags, there is also a more than a hint of 1st inversion **iv** inserted into all three of the named phrases, providing a strong thematic link between them. A subset of this in near identity is found between *Lion Tamer* section A ms. 15-16 and *Aviation Rag Trio* ms. 15-16, which share the same pattern in both hands. Another commonality between at least two of the pieces, although found in a few other rags, is conveyed in *Lion Tamer* section **B** ms. 13-15/29-31, with great rhythmic emphasis on the right hand at the very height of the descending major sixth arpeggio, with a similar though shorter descending major sixth theme in *Angel Food* section B ms. 13-14.

The second signature is found in the use of the left hand in correspondence with a repeated right hand syncopation. While not totally similar in all three, the intent can be reduced to one and the same with little effort. Compare the *Lion Tamer* Trio interlude ms. 1-4 with *Angel Food* Trio ms. 1-4. Neither uses the oom-pah pattern, with *Lion Tamer* favoring a repeated bass and *Angel Food* omitting the second bass octave. There is a better identity between the same measures in *Angel Food* and *Lion Tamer* Trio interlude ms. 13-16, the main distinction being the lower keyboard placement of both hands in *Lion Tamer*. The right hand syncopation is identical, and the juxtaposition of the chord progressions, while not identical, conveys the same musical idea in many respects in concert with the right hand. Since these two phrases as executed are not as easily found in most better-known piano rags, and they certainly sound as if they are from the same hand,

a high probability exists that they are. Note again the use of stops within this pattern and a similar one in *Aviation Rag*. *Lion Tamer* has built in pauses in the **Trio** interlude in ms. 4/8, *Angel Food* interspersed in the **Trio** ms. 1-8, and *Aviation Rag* in ms. 1 and more interestingly in ms. 5-6.

The third of the signatures found that potentially identifies Marzian as the author of the first three rags, excluding *Bale O' Cotton*, is found in the consistent use of octave-framed patterns. These are held or articulated right-hand octaves in which ancillary notes are played within, allowing the octaves to clarify the intended melodic content. In *Angel Food Rag*, this includes section **B** ms. 5-8 and the **Trio** ms. 1-12. In *Lion Tamer Rag* it is found in the **Trio** ms. 13 and the **Trio** interlude ms. 1-3/5-7. A variation on this idea, using chords instead of a partial arpeggio, is found in *Aviation Rag* section **B** ms. 4/6/8, with a pattern identical to the other two rags found in the **Trio** ms. 5-7.

Lastly, one other interesting pattern of contrary motion is clearly found in *Lion Tamer*, *Aviation Rag* and *Bale O' Cotton* in a manner infrequently heard elsewhere, providing perhaps the strongest link between the three Janza compositions, and therefore a suggested link between *Bale O' Cotton* and *Angel Food Rag* through association. Compare the *Lion Tamer* **Trio** interlude ms. 9-12 and *Aviation Rag* **Trio** interlude ms. 13-16 and *Bale O' Cotton* **A** section ms. 3-4/7-8. Starting on bass octaves and treble chords emphasizing the same pitch, the hands move contrary one half step, back to the initial pitch, then contrary on half step in the opposite direction. To further strengthen this link, they also move the same direction in all rags, starting upward in the right hand and downward in the left hand, then opposite directions. There is a similar suggestion of this motion in *Angel Food Rag* **B** section ms. 5-8, although it is right hand only and moves downward first. Still, this use of half step octave motion returning to the initial pitch is quite unique. It might also be noted that in all four cases listed here, the initial pitch of the pattern starts on the dominant of the currently suggested tonic, be it major or minor.

One other point was more recently discovered that solidifies the Marzian/Janza link even further, but provides yet another mystery. *Aviation Rag* was sold to Forster Music, who had previously published Marzian's own *Angel Food Rag*, soon after Marzian published it in Louisville,. Another Louisville composer (re-) discovered in 2005, **Fannie Bell Woods**, also had her single rag, *Sweetness*, published by Forster, potentially linking the two musicians with the older Marzian as a mentor or point of contact. Since he was based in Louisville it would be logical that she would go to him for publication. If he had sent two of his rags to Forster by this time, it would make sense that he would also direct Ms. Woods there.

The mystery lies in the fate of the dynamic but challenging *Lion Tamer*. It was published by Marzian (16 January, 1913) after *Angel Food* (16 December, 1911) and even after *Aviation Rag* was sent to Forster (c.1912). Why did he not go to Forster with *Lion Tamer*? Or had he gone there and they did not express interest? It only had one run from Marzian's own press, but has fortunately survived, with perhaps 2,000 or so copies printed. The same applies to the lesser *Bale O' Cotton* published nearly two years later (18 December, 1914).

THE CONCLUSION:

While it can be successfully argued that many composers, the author included, were able to write a variety of rags that had little in common with their other works but might emulate ideas put forward by other composers, this actually reinforces what is found in the four rags being discussed here, as there are at least as many differences between them and other rags of their time as there are commonalities amongst them. A great deal of work went into all of these rags, both thematically and in terms of arrangement, showing methodical thinking while retaining distinction.

Since a significant percentage of rag composers could not notate their work, depending on the discretion and personal input of publishing house arrangers, many of these arrangers simply did their job and turned out little more than a basic retelling of what the composer played for them. There were a few exceptions (such as Matthews), but there was also an edict from many publishers that piano rags be arranged relatively simply so as to not daunt the average pianist and therefore deter them from further purchases of works by that composer or from that publishing house. Fortunately the works of the better classic rag composers rarely suffered from this nearsighted mode of thinking. Marzian's attention to detail in his non-ragtime publications helps to codify that his goal was also to produce the best possible arrangement of his pieces, leaving the consumer to sweat out the details through practice, and likely believing they would feel the end result in their overall performance was worth that effort.

Still, this leaves the question as to why Marzian published *Angel Food*, and later *Aviation Rag* with Forster instead of his own company. We have already looked at the possibility that he did not want to be directly associated as a piano rag composer using his own firm as a ragtime vanity publishing house. I would like to put forth an additional postulation. *Angel Food Rag* is not quite as ambitious in construction or execution as *Lion Tamer* and *Aviation Rag*. *Lion Tamer* has a difficult variation in the **B** section, and a much-discussed off-beat left hand pattern in the **trio** ms. 15/16. The **trio** interlude is also somewhat daunting. *Aviation Rag* has a similarly difficult **trio** with some challenging patterns. So perhaps Marzian may actually have shopped these pieces around as best he could, but they were either rejected or the compensation offered was too low. As a publisher of select works in Louisville, and as part of the musical community there, he would have had some insight as to the expected acceptable price floor.

Knowing the quality of *Aviation Rag* but his desire to not be directly associated as a piano rag composer in his publishing firm, Marzian chose the Mark Janza pseudonym instead and sent it to press in 1910. Then after *Angel Food* was accepted and became a success in 1911, he might have gone through the same process with *Lion Tamer* in 1913. Experienced players might look at that piece and see some challenges not so readily encountered in many Joplin rags. If Marzian believed in the quality of his work, he would certainly desire to have it published and benefit from that. In 1914, since he had already established Mark Janza by that time, the more simplistic *Bale O' Cotton* naturally followed under his own publishing house and the Janza name.

In conclusion, given the forensic evidence stated within, and the fact that the genealogical identity of any person named Mark Janza much less a composer that fit the probable lifespan of such a person has turned up nothing, and based on information from surviving relatives, there is a high degree of confidence that the true identity of Mark Janza is indeed Al Marzian.

Discussion is always welcome, of course, at perfbill@hotmail.com, or through dick@rag-time.com and tracy@rag-time.com.