

# The RAGTIME BASH

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Mini History presented by Sarah Albright, February 1, 2015



**Jim Dapogney, Bill Albright and Bill Bolcom, 1974**

Good morning. My name is Sarah Albright and I served this congregation as the Music Director from the years 1985 to 2007. This morning I want to share a bit of the music history of this congregation. I'm going to reminisce with you about the Ragtime Bash.

For many years on the 2nd Sunday in December, a familiar sight was a long line of Ragtime enthusiasts waiting expectantly in the cold and snow to buy tickets to crowd into the 1<sup>st</sup> UU Church at 1917 Washtenaw and be enthralled by the sounds of Ragtime and Boogie performed by some of the finest players in the nation.

The first Ragtime Bash took place in February, 1973 when our church was in the process of purchasing a new pipe organ for the sanctuary. Bill Albright, Professor of Composition at the Music School, was the Music Director of the church and well known in the revival of the classical ragtime movement that was taking place nationwide.

So Bill had the idea to put on a Ragtime Orgy (as it was first named) to raise funds to purchase the organ. After the organ was installed and paid for, the Ragtime Orgy became an annual event, always featuring the finest players of Ragtime and Boogie. At some point the Orgy became known as the

Christmas Bash, then the Holiday Bash and finally, the Ragtime Bash.

The Bashes were publicized widely and had some great original posters, the most well known one by Art Poinier, cartoonist for the Detroit Free Press, who was a member of this Congregation.

An important ritual before the concert could take place, was the so called levitation of the piano from the floor to the platform. This took place right after the Sunday worship service when Dick Barber would call for some strong bodies to lend their backs to performing the levitation.

Bill Albright invited many of his friends to perform in the concerts. He was the emcee and always began the program with Scott Joplin's "Maple Leaf Rag", saying, "this is where it all began." He performed several rags and boogies and then called on the next performer to come forward to play.

In reminiscing about the Bashes, who can forget Bill Albright's enchanting performances of Scott Joplin's and Joseph Lamb's exquisite rags and Meade Lux Lewis' boogies. There were engaging stories from Ragtime scholar Mike Montgomery and Pulitzer Prize winning composer Bill Bolcom and his wife Joan Morris' would perform their song "Lime Jello, Marshmallow, Cottage Cheese Surprise?"

There were Jim Dapogny's memorable performances of Jelly Roll Morton tunes and Sister Kate Warren on the banjo and the amazing 90 year old Percy Danforth mesmerizing the audience playing the bones!

The evening always ended with the inimitable Bob Seeley who could play on as long as there was someone to listen. Since he was in a church, he would play spectacular renditions of "Amazing Grace" or "Just A Closer Walk With Thee."

After Bill Albright's tragic death in 1998, I organized the Bashes with a lot of input from Mike Montgomery. At each Bash there was an intermission, arranged by some of our wonderful choir members, where wine, cider and snacks were sold and audience members could purchase CD's from the performers.

Through the years the Ragtime Bash became identified with the Ann Arbor UU Church. Ragtime buffs far and wide knew about the Bash and performers were honored to be asked to participate in the event. Today there are many Ragtime festivals across the country, but people still speak of the happy, fun-filled evenings at the UUAA Church Annual Ragtime Bash.