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**THEATRE from page 1.**

spent several absorbing hours there. It was a sort of "busman's holiday" for us, and for anyone interested in historic architecture or the lore of long-ago Show Business.

The Grand Opera House was built in 1889. Covering one-third of a city block, it was originally intended to be a "mega-building" which would house a mercantile store and a fashionable hotel. But plans for the hotel were changed before

see THEATRE page 3.

**SMILES AND  
CHUCKLES:  
THE STORY OF  
F. HENRI  
KLINKMANN**

by Rick Benjamin

F. Henri Klickmann wrote some of the most exciting and ingeniously crafted popular music of the entire Ragtime Era. Although his name is unfamiliar to listeners today, it was certainly magic to dancers and band leaders during the second two decades of this century. Klickmann was the celebrated arranger of thousands of pieces for orchestra, and composer of several extraordinary original rags which like, *Smiles and Chuckles*, became staples of the ragtime repertoire.

Frank Klickmann was born in Chicago, Illinois on February 4, 1885. He attended public school in that city, and as a youngster became an accomplished pianist and violinist. He was likely one of the best-trained of any pop music figure of his time; he had studied classical music with distinguished teachers, including the famous concert pianist Alfred Piatti, and with pupils of Scharwenka (piano), Sarasate (violin), and Jaddassohn (harmony and composition).

No one now knows what turned this prodigy from the "Three B's" (Bach/Beethoven/Brahms) to popular music--perhaps economics played a factor. In any case, by the early 1900s Klickmann was working around Chicago as a performer in various theater and dance ensembles. For about five years, he appeared with saxophonist Paul Biese's

famous orchestra, which played the Windy City's top cabarets and nightclubs.

Around 1909 the Victor Kremer Company of Chicago began to publish F. Henri Klickmann's original songs and orchestral arrangements. As a songwriter he achieved momentary fame with a number of works, particularly the 1913 ballad *Sing Me 'The Rosary'* and the jaunty *Floatin' Down to Cotton Town*. His *Sabbath Chimes* for solo piano also made something of a splash. But he was best known during his heyday as an arranger; during the 1910s Klickmann scored hundreds of marches, two steps, foxtrots, waltzes, and other short selections for dance orchestra use; he was considered particularly adept at ragtime and other early syncopated musical styles. Klickmann did so much work of this sort he adopted several pseudonyms, including "Henri Clique," "Roberto Carreno," and "Bruno Camini." Like his arch-rival, Harry L. Alford, he revelled in the comic possibilities of the trombone, and most of his original rags like *Dynamite*, *Knockout Drops*, *Hysterics*, and *Delirium Tremens*, feature that instrument prominently.

From 1911 to 1923, Klickmann was arranger for the

see **KLINKMANN** page 3.

**WORTH QUOTING:**

*"Syncopations are no indication of light or trashy music, and to shy bricks at 'hateful ragtime' no longer passes for musical culture."*



—SCOTT JOPLIN

**KLICKMANN** from page 2.

McKinley Music Company, and in 1916 he succeeded Alford as head of the "Professional Arranging Department" of the Will Rossiter Company as well.

By the early 1920s Klickmann's clever foxtrot orchestrations for Zez Confrey's Novelty Orchestra (remember *Kitten on the Keys*?) and other dance bands led to the offer of a long-term exclusive contract from the prestigious Jack Mills publishing firm in New York. While in New York he crafted a steady stream of fine dance arrangements, as well as pit-orchestra scores for Broadway shows.



Although his career began to fade with the coming of "swing" music in the mid-1930s, he continued to work as an arranger and editor, primarily of classical works, through the late 1950s.

F. Henri Klickmann died in the summer of 1966, probably never dreaming that his early music would one day be enjoyed again. But it lives on to enchant new generations, for whom *Smiles and Chuckles* is indeed a perennial classic.

**THEATRE** from page 2.

construction began, and the interior was redesigned as a magnificent theatre by J. B. McElfratrick of New York City.

In the late 1800s, an American "opera house" was primarily a venue for touring vaudeville and theatrical companies; the classical works of Verdi were certainly less evident than the slapstick comedy of Weber & Fields! At that time, the term "vaudeville" had risqué connotations, and theatre owners found it wise to associate with "high" European art by calling their establishments "opera houses." However, for theatrical producers, the term "grand opera house" was also a technical classification. Requirements for that appellation included size of the stage, number of dressing rooms, size of the orchestra and pit, audience seating capacity, and a protected box office.

By 1902, Meridian had grown into one of the largest inland cities in the South. Five major railroads intersected there, bringing in a steady flow of commerce and entertainment. Through the years, the Grand Opera House featured touring Broadway musicals, Vaudeville and minstrel shows, silent movies, concert band, and yes—even Italian opera! The theatre hosted such legendary performers as Sarah Bernhardt, Norma Shearer, John Gilbert, Madame Modjeska, and Helen Hayes as well as the then unknown Clark Gable, Joan Crawford, and teenage piano-player George Gershwin (who left his signature on a dressing room wall).

Sadly, like ragtime music, many of these beautiful theatres went into decline after World War I. By the 1920s, Meridian's Opera House, like thousands of others, was used mainly for motion pictures. In 1928, the company which leased it for movies planned to gut the inside to build office space, a scheme which was

see **THEATRE** page 4.

