

Circus Rag

after Thomas Fats Waller 1904-1943

Misha V. Stefanuk

Thomas "Fats" Waller was born in New York on May 2, 1904. His first teachers were his mother, who taught him how to play church music on the organ, and the pianola, a player piano which showed him how to play ragtime. As a boy, Thomas sang in the choir of Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem. In 1918 he won a contest playing "Carolina Soot," which he transcribed from the pianola. The connection with the composer of the song, James F. Johnson was established after that competition. Fats took piano lessons from him, and later the two wrote music together for Johnson's show "Keep Shufflin'."

The most known Fats Waller's song, "Ain't Misbehavin'," is a part of the 1930 musical "Hot Chocolates" featuring Louis Armstrong. In 1932, Fats got his own radio show called "Fats Waller's Rhythm Club" in Cincinnati. Two years later he moved to New York and the show got much wider exposure. At a party at George Gershwin's house he met an executive from Victor, the largest recording company of the time, who decided to replace Jelly Roll Morton's Red Hot Peppers with Fats Waller's Rhythm Club, now called Fats Waller and his Rhythm. The group recorded sometimes up to ten songs per day and had many best selling albums. Fats also toured United States and Europe. The last recording of Fats Waller and his Rhythm was released in 1942.

Fats Waller continued his studies of music and playing theater and church organ throughout his life. He is considered to be one of the best selling jazz pianists of all time.

♩ = 110

