

# WASHINGTONIAN

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WHERE AND WHEN

## MUSICAL MELTING POT

**Ragtime**—the 1998 Broadway musical based on E.L. Doctorow's novel about African-Americans, immigrant Jews, and wealthy WASPs in New York at the turn of the last century—comes to the Kennedy Center's Eisenhower Theater April 18 through May 10. Susan Davidson talked with director and choreographer **Marcia Milgrom Dodge**.

**Your name might be familiar to Washington theatergoers.**

I spent a lot of time at Arena Stage in the late '80s as a choreographer. I did *On the Town*, *Merrily We Roll Along*, and *Of Thee I Sing*.

**Ragtime mixes real characters with fictional. Who are the real ones?**

Henry Ford, Emma Goldman, Harry Houdini, J.P. Morgan, Admiral Peary, Booker T. Washington, architect Stanford White, and his mistress, model Evelyn Nesbit.

**Who are the fictional characters?**

They're archetypes—an affluent, white, upper-middle-class family

living in New Rochelle; immigrant Jews from Latvia; a Harlem jazz pianist whose property is destroyed by bigoted firemen—that's the crux of the plot—and the mother of his child.

**Stephen Flaherty's score for Ragtime is sort of jazz meets shtetl.**

Yeah, there are a lot of influences—klezmer, African, European, banjo, American marches like Sousa, Dixieland. The score is emotional, very original.

**How do you define the music-and-dance style known as ragtime?**

It's truly American, the precursor to jazz. On piano, the left hand plays a steady one-two rhythm while the right hand's melody syncopates, or "rags." The dances include the cakewalk, the grizzly bear, and the turkey trot. As people shed the restraints of the Victorian period, they used their bodies more expressively.

**For tickets (\$25 to \$90), call 202-467-4600 or visit [kennedy-center.org](http://kennedy-center.org).**



**"As people shed the restraints of the Victorian period, they used their bodies more expressively," says Marcia Milgrom Dodge.**