

Broadway Cast Recording & Stephen Flaherty

"Prologue: Ragtime"

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In 1902, Father built a house at the crest of
The Brodview Avenue hill in New Rochelle, New York
And it seemed for some years thereafter
That all the family's days would be warm and fair

The skies were blue and hazy
Rarely a storm, barely a chill
The afternoons were lazy
Everyone warm, everything still

And there was distant music
Simple and somehow sublime
Giving the nation a new syncopation
The people called it ragtime

Father was well-off, very well-off
His considerable income was derived from
The manufacture of fireworks and bunting
Other accouterments of patriotism
Father was also something of an amateur explorer

The house on the hill in New Rochelle was Mother's
domain
She took pleasure in making it comfortable for the men
of her family
And often told herself how fortunate she was to be so
protected
And provided for by her husband

Mother's younger brother worked at Father's fireworks
factory
He was a genius at explosives, he was also a young
man
In search of something to believe in
His sister wondered when he would find it

Grandfather had been a professor of Greek and Latin
Now retired and living with his daughter and her family
He was thoroughly irritated by everything

The days were gently tinted
Lavender pink, lemon and lime

Ladies with parasols
Fellows with tennis balls

There were gazebos
And there were no Negroes
And everything was ragtime
Listen to that ragtime

In Harlem, men and women of color forgot their
troubles
And danced and reveled to the music of Coalhouse
Walker, Jr
This was a music that was theirs
And no one else's
One young woman thought Coalhouse played just for
her
Her name was Sarah

Booker T. Washington was the most famous Negro in
the country
He counseled friendship between the races
And spoke of the promise of the future
He had no patience for Negroes who lived less than
exemplary lives

Ladies with parasols
Fellows with tennis balls
There were no Negroes
And there were no immigrants

In Latvia, a man dreamed of a new life for his little girl
It would be a long journey, a terrible one
He would not lose her as he had her mother
His name was Tateh, he never spoke of his wife
The little girl was all he had now
Together, they would escape

Houdini
Look it's Houdini
Ohh aah
Ohh aah

Harry Houdini was one immigrant
Who made an art of escape
He was a headliner in the top Vaudeville circuits
Ich bin die Mutter des grossen Houdinis

He made his Mother proud
But for all his achievements
He knew he was only an illusionist
He wanted to believe there was more

Hello, sonny
Warn the Duke
What did you say?

And there was distant music
Changing the tune, changing the time
Giving the nation a new syncopation

Certain men make a country great
They can't help it
At the very apex of the American Pyramid
That's the very tip-top

Like Pharoahs reincarnate, stood J.P. Morgan
And Henry Ford
All men are born equal
But the cream rises to the top

Let me at those sons of bitches
These men are the demons who are sucking your very
souls dry
I hate them
Someone should arrest that woman

The radical anarchist Emma Goldman
Fought against the ravages of American capitalism
As she watched her fellow immigrants' hopes
Turn to despair on the Lower East Side

But America was watching another drama
Evelyn Nesbit was the most beautiful woman in
America
If she wore her hair in curls, every woman wore her hair
in curls
Her lover was the eminent architect, Stanford White
Designer of the Pennsylvania Station on 33rd street

Her husband, the eccentric millionaire, Harry K. Thaw
Was a violent man
After her husband shot her lover
Evelyn became the biggest attraction in Vaudeville
since Tom Thumb

Bang
Bang
Bang

And although the newspapers called the shooting
'The crime of the century', Goldman knew it was only
1906

And there were ninety-four years to go

And there was music playing
Catching a nation in its prime
Beggar and millionaire
Everyone, everywhere
Moving to the ragtime

And there was distant music
Skipping a beat, singing a dream
A strange, insistent music
Putting out heat, picking up steam
The sound of distant thunder
Suddenly starting to climb

It was the music of something beginning
An era exploding, a century spinning
In riches and rags and in rhythm and rhyme
The people called it ragtime
Ragtime, ragtime, ragtime

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