

Souvenirs & Mementos



Aunt Eugenia Koshuba (Kociuba, 1915-2007) was my mother's cousin—technically my first cousin once removed. She was an offbeat (syncopated) character. She shared my love of George Crenshaw cartoons—especially “Simpkins.” Also, she was fond of crazy UFO stories, Tarzan jokes, and rascally cats. When she came to visit, we had hours and hours of laughs together. Otherwise, she would send me all sorts of funny clippings in the mail.

Studying composition and musicology at the University of Toronto, I would go off on my own topical tangents to look at genres not covered in class. Ragtime was one such genre. What had been a delightful mystery in high school, finally became comprehensible. Previously, I had heard music from “The Sting” performed by our high school band, I had tried to include a bit of ragtime in my song “Great Things” (1978), and later that year I had seen “Elite Syncopations” staged by the National Ballet of Canada.

In the spring of 1987, I suffered a career setback at the Faculty of Music. It was Aunt Eugenia's letters that kept me cheered. A year later, in gratitude, I decided to write something eccentric for her—“Eugenia Rag.” But, I was

still under the influence of that Ukrainian artistic axiom—“It is a Ukrainian folksong that makes a piece of music great!” So, I found me a Ukrainian children's play song about a rascally cat and its 4-note melody became the main motif in sections A and B of the rag. Instead of following the classic ragtime form, as defined by Scott Joplin, I took a more rhapsodic approach—blurring the boundaries between sections and chromatically modulating to unrelated keys.

Friday, October 14, 1988, I premiered “Eugenia Rag” at the Ukrainian Art and Literary Club in New York City after my musicological lecture on “Forgotten Pages of Ukrainian Music.” I was asked, as a composer, to perform one of my pieces. Before doing so, I explained that this was a ragtime piece based on a Ukrainian folksong. Oh, the chorus of indignation! How could I besmirch a fine Ukrainian folksong in such a manner? I was taken aback. Was this New York City or was this Mississippi? Unfazed, I sat down at the piano and played “Eugenia Rag.” After a standing ovation, I was asked to encore the piece. I guess, a Ukrainian folksong does make a piece of music great!

 Український Літературно-Мистецький Клуб
Ukrainian Art and Literary Club
136 Second Ave., New York, N.Y. 10003
ДІМ УКРАЇНСЬКОГО ВИЗВОЛЬНОГО ФРОНТУ.

ВІДКРИТТЯ ОСІННОГО СЕЗОНУ!
ЗАПРОШУЮ ЧЛЕНІВ І ПРИХИЛЬНИКІВ КЛУБУ НА
ДОПОВІДЬ МУЗИКОЛОГА

ВАСИЛЯ СИДОРЕНКА
ІЛЕСТРОВАНУ МУЗИЧНИМИ ЗАПИСАМИ ТА ПРОГРКАМИ
НА ТЕМУ:

**'ЗАБУТІ СТОРІНКИ
УКРАЇНСЬКОЇ МУЗИКИ'**
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