

Ragtime Character Breakdown

Coalhouse Walker Jr.

A proud and talented pianist. He is sophisticated, with a romantic demeanor and gentle heart though an intimidating build. He must convey strength, polish, and intelligence. However, internally, he also reflects the unbridled rage experienced by vast numbers of African Americans at the hands of an oft unjust society that was America in this era. Even so, he controls and channels this rage into a highly calculated, systematic approach to his own brand of justice. The actor who seeks to fill this role must exhibit polish, charisma, intelligence, and strength. African-American

Gender: Male

Vocal Range: A4-G2

Tateh

He wears the trials and tribulations of his past on his sleeve but remains optimistic. Full of genuine drive and heart. He displays the struggles of the newly arrived to this country during the turn of the century. As he sits aboard the rag ship that provides his passage to a new life, he dreams of the ease with which he will find success and wealth in America. We witness Tateh's progression from naive optimism, to misery in the face of stark poverty, to a rise and rebound who enjoys absolute success as a pioneer in the motion picture industry. Tateh is an imaginably devoted and loving father to his daughter. His entire being is dedicated to her, and her needs are ultimately the source of his drive to emerge from the abject poverty they endure. Latvian-American.

Gender: Male

Vocal Range: F#4- Bb2

Mother

The consummate wife and mother. A kind woman with incredible moral fiber. Refined, intelligent, and graceful. She is accepting of others. She very much represents the rapidly changing ideals and cultural norms at-play within the country during this era. She both witnesses and is equally changed by the times in which she lives. While it is not a transformation she sought, she nevertheless accepts it and emerges vastly stronger, much to the chagrin of her husband who feels displaced. The actor who seeks to take on this role will display quiet strength. Mother is a reserved woman and is the epitome of elegance and social conditioning. She should reflect polish and formality, but not suggest a sense of being elitist or unapproachable.

Gender: Female

Vocal Range top: F#5- G3

Booker T. Washington

Incredibly intelligent social activist. He is an eloquent and articulate gentleman with no patience for Black Americans leading less than exemplary lives. The voice of restraint and wisdom for his people in the face of the injustices and unimaginably trying circumstances they face. He delivers passionate speeches as a means of swaying the direction his people should take in the struggle for racial justice and equality. He must speak with great conviction and authority. He must be convincing. African-American.

Gender: Male

Vocal Range top: Eb4-D3

Emma Goldman

Social activist. With an unapologetically demanding presence, she is a leader and powerful woman. Staunchly leftist, Goldman spends her entire life tirelessly crusading against the injustices faced by the poor working-class, uneducated masses who struggled to make a life for themselves. Goldman must be played as a tremendously passionate human being. She must speak with the vigorous enthusiasm and influence that would command masses to act, even in the face of jeopardizing their very livelihoods and lives alike. Russian-American.

Gender: Female

Vocal Range top: D5-B3

Evelyn Nesbit

Beautiful vaudeville performer. Thrust into the limelight after the high-profile murder of her lover, the entire world is her stage. Goofy, gorgeous, bombshell young actress and model, period. Full allure and vibrato. A remarkably sharp young woman, who may project the outward appearances of a clichéd mindless beauty, but also shows some truth of her personality revealed in small doses.

Gender: Female

Vocal Range top: D5-B3

Father

Mother's professionally successful husband. Fancying himself an amateur explorer, he is commanding and attractive. Enjoys being the family breadwinner. His sense of nostalgia and connection for the past prevents him from adapting to the realities of the new world in which he exists. He struggles with his own personal biases and perspectives formulated over the course of his life. He should be played as a sympathetic, albeit somewhat short-sighted person.

Gender: Male

Vocal Range top: F4-A2

Grandfather

Mother's very conservative father. He is a retired professor and easily irritated by nearly everything.

Gender: Male

Harry Houdini

The famous magician. With dark features and notable physical ability, he stands as a symbol of the 'American Dream.' In the show, he embodies the story of an immigrant's success in America. He also reflects the rise of the fame and celebrity status that was newly emerging in this era. Hungarian-American.

Gender: Male

Vocal Range top: G4-E3

Henry Ford

His processes for manufacturing lead to the rapid rise of a new class of citizens in this country who enjoyed vastly increased financial gains and creature comforts in the decades that followed. He's an innovator. His passion for his business is felt and reflected in every waking second of his life. I want to see this reflected in his stage time. Show me the energy and enthusiasm this man embodied.

Gender: Male

Vocal Range: tenor

J.P. Morgan

He likes mummies, and he forms a club with his new pal, Hank Ford. Okay, so Morgan represents the upper .0013% of the country at this time in American history. He is a shrewd financier, and the show paints him as pompous, and oblivious to the plight of the common man. The novel gives him greater dimension. Anyway, in audition I want to see a man in somewhat advancing years who reflects status and wealth.

Gender: Male

Vocal Range: Baritone

Little Boy

Mother and Father's son. He is open-hearted and curious with inexplicable clairvoyance. Never passes judgement on others. He's intelligent, has sharp diction, is creative, and somewhat clairvoyant. Must have a solid sense of comedic timing for the delivery of some wonderful one-liners.

Gender: Male

Vocal Range: D5-E4

Little Girl

Tateh's daughter. A confused and vulnerable child in a brand-new home, she is guarded and shy. Loves her father very much. Unusually mature for her age, she is reserved and quiet. She is intelligent and is raised by her father to be a cautious participant in a world of struggles. Her dead-pan delivery of a few lines that provide some wonderful laughs must be played stone-faced. Latvian-American.

Gender: Female

Vocal Range: Bb4-C4

Sarah

Washwoman. Sarah is beautiful and filled with a strong will to live fueled by an innocent spirit. Falls deeply in love with Coalhouse after much resistance. She is uniquely strong-willed for her age and race in this time period. The display between her and Coalhouse shows an amazingly deep, rare, and passionate sense of connection. The actor who seeks to play this role must embody that of innocence, but strong. She is young, passionately idealistic, naïve, and beautiful. African-American.

Gender: Female

Vocal Range: F#5- G#3

Younger Brother

Mother's younger brother. With his wiry frame and obsessive personality, he is an erratic a bit of a lost soul. He is quite intelligent, very idealistic, and very gifted in his trade, but he lacks direction and focus. He needs to be focused, identifiable with his social standing, and played somewhat reserved and awkward.

Gender: Male

Vocal Range: F#4- B2

Willie Conklin

Conklin is the spark that ignites Coalhouse's mini-revolution. He is the very epitome of racial intolerance. His lack of intelligence and utterly palpable displays of racial superiority echo the deep divisions that existed between the various races, creeds, and ethnicities within the country both at the time of the show and our present.

Gender: Male

Vocal Range: tenor

Ensemble Groups:

Baseball Fans

- Fan #1
- Fan #2
- Fan #3
- Fan #4

Coalhouse Supporters

- Coalhouse Follower #1
- Coalhouse Follower #2
- Coalhouse Follower #3
- Coalhouse Follower #4

Harlem Citizens

- Sarah's Friend (F): A friend of Sarah's. She is in attendance at her funeral.
- Harlem Man (M): A man from Harlem.
- Harlem Woman (W): A woman from the Jersey Shore. She moved to Harlem to be with Harlem Man.
- Solo Woman (F): She sings by herself.

Immigrants To America

- Henson (M): His people were also brought here on ships! Pretty much like absolutely everyone else except Native Americans.

New Rochelle Citizens

Reporters

- Newsboy #1 (M/F): He sells papers.
- Newsboy #2 (M/F): He sells more papers.
- Newsboy #3 (M/F): He sells still more papers.
- Newsboy #4 (M/F): He has a novel that's waiting to be written about his childhood career as a newsboy.

Vacationers

Additional Ensemble Roles:

- Conductor
- Policeman
- Charles S. Whitman
- Admiral Perry
- Houdini's Mother
- Kathleen: She is the family's Irish-born maid.
- Bridget: She is the family's impertinent new maid.
- Fireman
- Man
- Town Hall Bureaucrat
- Welfare Official
- Baron's Assistant
- Second Bureaucrat
- Stanford White
- Judge
- Clerk
- Doctor
- Henry K. Thaw
- Mrs. Whitstein
- White Attorney
- Jury Foreman