Bill McHarris — Short Biography for MSURA Ragtime Performance:

Professor Emeritus of Chemistry and Physics/Astronomy, Bill McHarris has always combined interests in science and music. Originally from Knoxville, Tennessee, he has been organist and/or choir director at churches in Tennessee, California, and Michigan. In 1959 he received a B.A. in Chemistry from Oberlin College in Chemistry, where he also studied musical composition, organ, and choral conducting. Subsequently, in 1965 he received his Ph.D. in Nuclear Chemistry from the University of California, Berkeley (yes, Berkeley in the turbulent ’60’s!). Directly from grad school in Berkeley he came to MSU as Assistant Professor of Chemistry and Physics/Astronomy, where he was one of the original nuclear science faculty at the Cyclotron Laboratory. (He made full professor at age 32.) He has had upward of 200 publications in nuclear science, but some dozen years ago he switched fields to research in modern chaos theory, trying to reconcile it with fundamental quantum mechanics. He formally retired in 2008 but continues to perform research, and his essay, “It from Bit from It from Bit… Nature and Nonlinear Logic,” recently won a $1000.00 prize in the Foundational Institute’s contest and was chosen as the concluding chapter in the resulting book, *It from Bit or Bit from It?* (Springer, 2015), and he has been engaged to write a similar article, “Nonlinear Logic versus Reductionism” for a forthcoming issue of *Scientific American.*

He continues with his musical career as well, still playing organ and occasionally directing choirs in area churches. He has taught the “Science of Sound” course in the Physics Department, where he became enamored of electronic music, even playing a theremin built especially for him by Bob Moog. He has composed more than 100 musical compositions, most of which have been performed and many published. He is also one of the Assistant Carillonneurs at Beaumont Tower, playing at noon on most Fridays. (His composition, “Variances on *Stille Nacht,*” is featured on the just released CD, “Ringing In the Holidays,” the first ever album of carillon music from Beaumont Tower — it is perhaps the first piece ever written for theremin and carillon, and here he plays both instruments.) About ten years ago, Bill also became interested in ragtime music, and since then he has composed a dozen rags (mostly for piano but also for piano-organ duo, vocal, and even chorus). He has played at a number of ragtime festivals around the country (believe it or not, there are some forty festivals at latest count, with some “groupies” going from one to another all year round!), including the so-called World Championship Old-Time Piano Contest in Peoria, Illinois, where he has been invited to play his new rags for five successive years.