

"MEET IRENE CASTLE"

**Fashion trend-setter
Animal rights activist
and—above all—half of
the inimitable Ragtime dancing duo:
Vernon and Irene Castle**



Vernon and **Irene Castle** shattered the lowlife reputation of Ragtime - the new, uniquely American, syncopated music – by winning high-society approval with their elegant dancing style. They challenged the color barrier by hiring black musicians, set new directions in fashion, and broke ground in promoting animal rights. For centuries Americans had wanted to emulate Europe. Suddenly, Europe wanted to imitate America.

Vernon and Irene Castle, were responsible, more than any other couple, for the rage in social and ballroom dancing that swept across America in the years leading up to the first world war. They took a dance form frowned upon by respectable society as unseemly, and transformed it with their grace and style into a most elegant and fashionable hobby for rich and poor alike, for old and young. The Castles enchanted the public because here was a *married couple* who showed affection to one another *in public!* In these years before even the silent film industry had taken hold, the Castles laid the groundwork for public fascination with private romance. The story of Vernon and Irene Castle highlights three hallmarks of the American Spirit: entrepreneurial drive, artistic expression, and setting trends in fashion. As Rick Benjamin of the Paragon Ragtime Orchestra noted, “Their brief, almost incandescent career stands as a metaphor of an entire glittering, fragile world soon to be shattered by the horror of world war.”

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