

Scott Joplin

Scott Joplin, known as the "King of Ragtime" music, was born near Linden, Texas on November 24, 1868. Joplin demonstrated his extraordinary talent for music at an early age, and encouraged by his parents, he became proficient on the banjo, and the piano. By age eleven and under the tutelage of Julius Weiss, he was learning the finer points of harmony and style. As a teenager, he worked professionally as a dance musician.

Joplin spent several years moving throughout the Midwest, playing in saloons and brothels. Around 1890 he settled in St. Louis, where the unique combination of European classical music styles and African-American harmony and rhythm led to the creation of a new genre of music. The syncopated rhythms were referred to as "ragged time," which was eventually shortened to the word most easily associated with Joplin – Ragtime.



Joplin found inspiration for his compositions in his experiences, often naming them after places or events that had made an impression on him. In the late 1890s, Joplin worked at the Maple Leaf Club in Sedalia, Missouri, which provided the title for his best known composition, the Maple Leaf Rag, published in 1899. This was followed a few years later by The Entertainer which has also become a standard. Over the next fifteen years, Joplin added to his repertoire, which eventually totaled over sixty compositions. In 1911, Joplin moved to New York City, where he focused on creating a work of grand opera called Treemonisha, the first composed by an African American.

Joplin died on April 1, 1917 in Manhattan State Hospital from complications resulting from a case of syphilis he had contracted years before. Although Joplin's music was popular and he received modest royalties during his lifetime, he did not receive recognition as a serious composer for more than fifty years after his death. Then, in 1973, his music was featured in the motion picture, The Sting, which won an Academy Award for its film score. Three years later, in 1976, Joplin's opera Treemonisha won the coveted Pulitzer Prize.