

Scott Joplin
(1868-1917)



Scott **Joplin**, the "King of Ragtime" **music**, was born near Linden, **Texas** on November 24, 1868. He moved with his family to Texarkana at the age of about seven.

Even at this early age, Joplin showed his extraordinary talent for music. Encouraged by his parents, he could already play the banjo, and was beginning to play the **piano**. At age eleven he was learning the finer points of harmony and style from his teacher Julius Weiss. As a teenager, he worked as a dance musician.

After several years as a traveling pianist playing in bars throughout the Midwest, he settled in St. Louis about 1890. There he studied and led in the development of a music **genre** now known as **ragtime**--a unique blend of European classical styles mixed with African American harmony and **rhythm**.

In 1893, Joplin played with his eight-member Texas Medley Quartette as far east as Syracuse, New York. One of his first compositions, *The Great Crush Collision*, was inspired by a spectacular railroad locomotive crash staged near Waco, Texas in September of 1896.

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*,

another well known Joplin composition published in 1902. Many people enjoyed dancing to Joplin's music. A popular dance of that time was the **Cakewalk**.

Over the next fifteen years, Joplin added to his already impressive collection, which eventually totaled some sixty compositions. In 1911, Joplin moved to New York City, where he concentrated on the production of his operatic work, *Treemonisha*, the first grand **opera composed** by an African American. In 1915, the opera was performed in New York.

Joplin died on April 1, 1917 at the age of 49 in Manhattan State Hospital. At the time of his death, Ragtime was losing its popularity. People were becoming more interested in a new kind of music called **Jazz**.

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.
