



King of Ragtime: Scott Joplin and His Era

Edward A. Berlin

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In 1974, the academy award-winning film *The Sting* brought back the music of Scott Joplin, a black ragtime composer who died in 1917. Led by *The Entertainer*, one of the most popular pieces of the mid-1970s, a revival of his music resulted in events unprecedented in American musical history. Never before had any composer's music been so acclaimed by both the popular and classical music worlds. While reaching a "Top Ten" position in the pop charts, Joplin's music was also being performed in classical recitals and setting new heights for sales of classical records. His opera *Treemonisha* was performed both in opera houses and on Broadway.

Destined to be the definitive work on the man and his music, *King of Ragtime* is written by Edward A. Berlin. A renowned authority on Joplin and the author of the acclaimed and widely cited *Ragtime: A Musical and Cultural History*, Berlin redefines the Scott Joplin biography. Using the tools of a trained musicologist, he has uncovered a vast amount of new information about Joplin. His biography truly documents the story of the composer, replacing the myths and unsupported anecdotes of previous histories. He shows how Joplin's opera *Treemonisha* was a tribute to the woman he loved, a woman other biographers never even mentioned. Berlin also reveals that Joplin was an associate of Irving Berlin, and that he accused Berlin of stealing his music to compose *Alexander's Ragtime Band* in 1911.

Berlin paints a vivid picture of the ragtime years, placing Scott Joplin's story in its historical context. The composer emerges as a representative of the first post-Civil War generation of African Americans, of the men and women who found in the world of entertainment a way out of poverty and lowly social status. *King of Ragtime* recreates the excitement of these pioneers, who dreamed of greatness as they sought to expand the limits society placed upon their race.

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