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PRELUDE

MARCH 2023 MASTERWORKS #5

SYMPHONIE FANTASTIQUE • MARCH 10 - 12, 2023

Scott Joplin, the composer who was known as the “King of Ragtime” during his lifetime and beyond, was given a posthumous award by the Pulitzer Committee in 1976, in recognition of his significant achievements and enduring contributions to the landscape of American music.ⁱ

Were it not for Marvin Hamlisch and the hit 1973 movie, “The Sting,” starring Robert Redford and Paul Newman, the public might never have known the name Scott Joplin. Hamlisch adapted Joplin’s music for the movie and won an Academy Award for his work.ⁱⁱ His hit arrangement of Joplin’s *The Entertainer* also earned a Grammy award.



Scott Joplin

Ragtime, the genre which influenced the development of jazz, began as the music of “honky-tonk” pianists along the Mississippi and Missouri rivers in the

last decades of the 19th century.ⁱⁱⁱ The heyday of ragtime was relatively short-lived.

Historians are not quite sure of the exact date of Joplin’s birth. Census records place him in the northeast part of Texas in July of 1870 as a two-year-old child, and this, combined with other available documents,

serves to estimate the date of his birth somewhere between June of 1867 and mid-January of 1868.^{iv} Joplin was born on the farm where his father had worked as a slave, and when he was still a toddler, the family moved to the newly established town of Texarkana, which straddles the Texas-Arkansas border.^v Joplin’s mother, Florence, was a singer and banjo player, and his father, Giles, was a violinist.^{vi} Joplin learned to play guitar at a young age, and anecdotes place a young Joplin at the piano in a white-owned home where his mother worked.^{vii} He taught himself the rudiments of music, and it wasn’t long before his talents were noted by a local-German-born music teacher, Julius Weiss. Weiss provided Joplin with formal instruction, placing an emphasis on opera and other European art forms.^{viii} Weiss’ influence may be the foundation for Joplin’s demand for recognition as a classical composer.^{ix}

In the 1880s, the teenage Joplin lived in Sedalia, Missouri and attended Lincoln High School, located in the Black neighborhood north of the railroad.^x The first indication of Joplin’s budding music career was in the summer of 1891, when newspaper reports placed him in performance with a minstrel troupe.^{xi} By 1893, he had found his way to the World’s Fair in Chicago, where he played cornet and led a band.^{xii} Joplin returned to Sedalia, and while the town served as his home base, Joplin led the life of an itinerant musician, often traveling with his own vocal group called the Texas Medley Quartette.^{xiii} In 1896, he attended music classes at George R. Smith College



The Entertainer

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in Sedalia.^{xiv} Sadly, since the college and all records were destroyed in a fire in 1925, there is no evidence of the full extent of Joplin's studies.^{xv}

When not on the road, Joplin worked in Sedalia as a pianist, playing at The Maple Leaf and Black 400, the town's two social clubs for Black men, both founded in 1898.^{xvi} In 1899, Joplin contracted with Sedalia music store owner and publisher John Stark to publish *The Maple Leaf Rag* (named for the social club.) *The Maple Leaf Rag* became the most famous of his piano rags.^{xvii} His publishing contract for the piece specified that Joplin would receive a one-cent royalty on each sale, giving Joplin a small, but steady, income for life. By 1909, roughly 500,000 copies of *The Maple Leaf Rag* had been sold, and that rate continued for the next two decades^{xviii} making it the top-selling ragtime piece ever.^{xix}



Within weeks of publishing *The Maple Leaf Rag*, Joplin completed *The Ragtime Dance*, a composition and theatrical presentation for dancers and a singing narrator.^{xx} The work was staged at Woods Opera House in Sedalia on November 24, 1899, performed by a group of talented young members of Sedalia's Black 400 Club.^{xxi}



The Ragtime Dance

Joplin's collaboration with his publisher, John Stark, continued for years, and when Stark relocated to St. Louis, Joplin frequently traveled to that city to perform and collaborate with ragtime pianist and saloon owner, Tom Turpin.^{xxii} During this time, Stark's publishing firm, The House of Classic Rags, published Joplin's *Peacherine Rag*, *The Easy Winners* and *Cleopha*, among many others.^{xxiii}

Joplin was intelligent, quiet, modest, well-mannered, and well-spoken.^{xxiv} He was generous with his time, willing to assist and instruct younger musicians. He profoundly believed in the importance of education.^{xxv}

The many musicians he mentored included Louis Chauvin, a brilliant young pianist he met in St. Louis, (his co-composer on *Heliotrope Bouquet*) and Joseph Lamb, a young white composer of Irish descent.^{xxvi} On Joplin's recommendation, John Stark published Lamb's *Sensation* in 1908, and Lamb went on to become one of ragtime's most respected composers.^{xxvii}

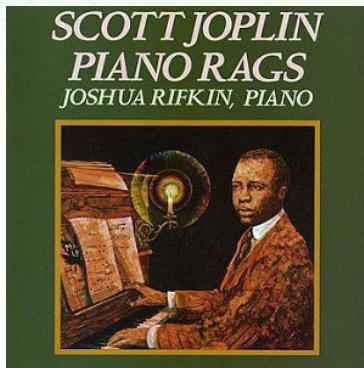


Scott J Joplin

In 1901, President Theodore Roosevelt invited Black leader Booker T. Washington to dine with him at the White House, an event that polarized the nation.^{xxviii} Joplin composed *A Strenuous Life* as his tribute to that event.^{xxix} In 1903, he filed a copyright application for an opera entitled, *A Guest of Honor*; which was based on the famous meeting between Roosevelt and Washington.^{xxx} Joplin organized a multi-state tour of the opera production, but when someone in the company stole the box office receipts, Joplin was left stranded with the company in Pittsburgh, unable to meet payroll.^{xxxi} Because he was unable to pay for the company's housing at a local boarding house, all of his possessions, including the opera scores, were confiscated.^{xxxii} Copies of the score had not been filed with the Library of Congress so unfortunately, that music has vanished, never to be recovered.^{xxxiii}

Following the failed tour of his opera, Joplin met Freddie Alexander, a young 19-year-old, who was to become his second wife.^{xxxiv} Joplin was already married to Belle, but he was so taken with Freddie that his next composition, *The Chrysanthemum*, was dedicated to her.^{xxxv} At the same time, his composition, *Cascades*, written for the opening of the World's Fair in St. Louis, received much publicity.^{xxxvi} When his marriage to Belle ended in June of 1904, Joplin immediately traveled to Arkansas to marry Freddie. Tragically, Freddie contracted pneumonia and died at the age of twenty on September 10, 1904, just ten weeks after their marriage.^{xxxvii} After Freddie's death, Joplin left Sedalia and never returned. Having lost most of his money on the failed opera, he was in poor financial condition, with the result that he spent time in St. Louis picking up insignificant performance jobs for minimal sums.^{xxxviii} Nevertheless,

he continued to compose and publish rags, including *Bethena*, *Eugenia*, and *The Rosebud March*, dedicated to his St. Louis friend and pianist, Tom Turpin, who ran The Rosebud Bar.^{xxxix}



Scott Joplin
Piano Rags

Between 1907 and 1911, Joplin made several trips to New York to find financial backing for his new opera, *Treemonisha*.^{xi} He told friends that he had consulted with composer Irving Berlin, in the hopes that Berlin might lend assistance, but that Berlin had rejected the project. However, in the Spring of 1911, Berlin released *Alexander's Ragtime Band*, one of his greatest hits, and Joplin complained that the song's chorus was taken from the "Marching Onward" section of "A Real Slow Drag" from *Treemonisha*.^{xii} He made the decision not to bring legal action against Berlin and instead, Joplin altered the section and published it himself in May of 1911.^{xliii}

The composer was obsessive in his determination to arrange a performance of *Treemonisha*, but despite his announcement of several productions, Joplin never achieved a fully staged performance in his lifetime.^{xliiii} [It was not until 1975 that *Treemonisha* was fully staged in a Broadway production.^{xliiv}] Joplin married his third wife, Lottie, in 1913,^{xliv} but by 1916, the composer was experiencing devastating physical and mental effects of tertiary syphilis, likely contracted nearly twenty years earlier.^{xlvi} In mid-January of 1917, he had to be hospitalized, and he was quickly transferred to an institution in New York City, where he died on April 1, 1917. Within a few years of his death, Joplin was all but forgotten.^{xlvii} Even his grave remained unmarked until the 1970s.^{xlviii} [He is buried in St. Michael's Cemetery, located in East Elmhurst,

Scott Joplin Memorial



Queens, New York.^{xlix}]

Arguably, Joplin has earned a place on the classical stage. He hoped for a career as a concert pianist and classical composer.ⁱ In his self-published *School of Ragtime*, written in the style of an art music treatise, Joplin outlined his complex bass patterns, sporadic syncopation, stop-time breaks and harmonic ideas.ⁱⁱ He found it perfectly reasonable to combine the syncopated rhythms of ragtime with the larger structures of art music, such as operas.ⁱⁱⁱ Joplin considered ragtime a permanent and serious branch of classical music and during his short life, composed hundreds of short pieces, operas and a set of études.^{liii} The strict form of Joplin's music was disciplined enough to be dubbed "classic," implying an accepted structure, but the term also helped ragtime to migrate from its humble origins to the parlors of the respectable middle class.^{liv}

PLEASE JOIN US!

MARCH 10 - 12, 2023

Please join the HSO and enjoy the toe-tapping *Ragtime Dance* and *The Entertainer* by Scott Joplin, the magnificent *Dance for Cello and Orchestra* by Anna Clyne, and Hector Berlioz's enthralling *Symphonie fantastique*, in a performance by the Hartford Symphony Orchestra entitled *Symphonie Fantastique*, March 10 – 12, 2023.

Note: If you want to learn more about Hector Berlioz, the composer of *Symphonie fantastique*, please see the prior issue of Prelude dedicated to him in October of 2017: [MWPrelude2-October2017_10-23-17.pdf](http://www.hsorchestra.wpenginepowered.com/MWPrelude2-October2017_10-23-17.pdf) (hsorchestra.wpenginepowered.com)

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Are you now interested in hearing more music by Scott Joplin and perhaps exploring the world of ragtime?

Check out these recommendations.

Feeling like you need a smile? Enjoy this lively orchestral arrangement of Joplin's best-selling composition of all time, *The Maple Leaf Rag*, by the Toronto Symphony:

[Scott Joplin's Maple Leaf Rag - Toronto Symphony Orchestra - Bing video](#)

A solo piano performance of Joplin's *Gladiolus Rag* by pianist Cory Hall will make you appreciate the complexity of the music:

[JOPLIN: Gladiolus Rag \(at 84 bpm\) | Cory Hall, pianist - YouTube](#)

Pianist Cory Hall performs *Chrysanthmum*, a rag that Joplin wrote in dedication to his second wife, Freddie Alexander, who tragically died just ten weeks after their marriage:

[The Chrysanthemum by Scott Joplin | Cory Hall, pianist-composer - YouTube](#)

A Strenuous Life was a tribute from Joplin to President Theodore Roosevelt, memorializing the historic occasion when Black leader Booker T. Washington was invited to dine at the White House, performed by pianist Cory Hall:

[The Strenuous Life by Scott Joplin | Cory Hall, pianist-composer - YouTube](#)

Enjoy this scene from "The Scott Joplin Movie" about a piano cutting contest between Scott Joplin and another gifted musician, Louis Chauvin, which features Billy Dee Williams (as Joplin), Clifton Davis (as Louis Chauvin), Eubie Blake and Art Carney (as publisher John Stark):

[Piano Cutting Contest \(Billy Dee William, Clifton Davis, Eubie Blake, and Art Carney \) - YouTube](#)

Together, Scott Joplin and Louis Chauvin created *Heliotrope Bouquet*, Chauvin's only published rag, performed here by pianist Cory Hall:

[Heliotrope Bouquet by Joplin/Chauvin | Cory Hall, pianist-composer - YouTube](#)

Enjoy another clip from "The Scott Joplin Movie," which features Joplin's publisher, John Stark (played by Art Carney), and focuses on the collaboration between Chauvin and Joplin in the creation of *Heliotrope Bouquet*. Chauvin died only a few months after their collaboration:

[World Fair and Heliotrope Bouquet | Scott Joplin Movie - YouTube](#)

Last, but not least, enjoy a performance of *A Real Slow Drag* from the opera *Treemonisha*:

[Treemonisha - YouTube](#)

WONDERING HOW THE MUSIC OF OUR FEATURED CONCERT WILL SOUND?

Try HSO'S LISTENING GUIDE, with links to the pieces you'll hear on our concert stage – and more!

Clyne's *Dance for Cello and Orchestra* is performed here by cellist Inbal Segev, who will perform the piece on our program, with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Marin Alsop:

[Anna Clyne: DANCE, I. when you're broken open - YouTube](#)

Listen to this lively orchestral arrangement of *The Entertainer*:

[Scott Joplin The Entertainer - YouTube](#)

Enjoy this orchestral arrangement of *The Ragtime Dance* performed by the Peacherine Ragtime Society Orchestra: [The Ragtime Dance | Peacherine Ragtime Society Orchestra - YouTube](#)

A performance of *Symphonie fantastique* by l'Orchestre philharmonique de Radio France:

[Berlioz : Symphonie fantastique op.14 \(Mikko Franck / Orchestre philharmonique de Radio France\) - YouTube](#)



CASEY'S CLASSICS

Want the best recordings of the pieces you'll experience on the concert program? **Coleman Casey**, HSO's dear friend, Director Emeritus and beloved in-house audiophile, offers his recording recommendations of selections featured in our upcoming Masterworks Concert.

Anna Clyne's beautiful *Dance for Cello and Orchestra* is memorably performed by Inbal Segev with Marin Alsop conducting the London Philharmonic Orchestra, and beautifully recorded too! (AVIE).

Hector Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* is totally mesmerizing under the baton of Sir Thomas Beecham with the characterically French orchestral sound and playing of l'Orchestre National de la Radiodiffusion Francaise (WARNER).



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