Joplin, Scott

(b. Nov. 24, 1868, Bowie county, Texas, U.S.--d. April 1, 1917, New York, N.Y.), American black composer and pianist known as the "king of ragtime" at the turn of the 20th century.

Studying piano with teachers near his childhood home, Joplin traveled through the Midwest from the mid-1880s, performing at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. Settling in Sedalia, Mo., in 1895, he studied music at the George R. Smith College for Negroes and hoped for a career as a concert pianist and classical composer. His first published songs brought him fame, and in 1900 he moved to St. Louis to work more closely with the music publisher John Stark.

Joplin published his first extended work, a ballet suite using the rhythmic devices of ragtime, with his own choreographical directions, in 1902. His first opera, A Guest Of Honor (1903), is no longer extant and may have been lost by the copyright office. Moving to New York City in 1907, Joplin wrote an instruction book, The School Of Ragtime, outlining his complex bass patterns, sporadic syncopation, stop-time breaks, and harmonic ideas, which were widely imitated. Joplin's contract with Stark ended in 1909, and, though he made piano rolls in his final years, most of Joplin's efforts involved Treemonisha, which synthesized his musical ideas into a conventional, three-act opera. He also wrote the libretto, about a mythical black leader, an