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Black Heritage Stamp Series: Scott Joplin

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Issue Date: June 9, 1983
First Day City: Sedalia, Missouri
Designer: Jerry Pinkney
Croton-on-Hudson, New York
Modeler: Ronald C. Sharpe
Press: Gravure
Colors: Yellow, magenta, cyan, brown, black and ochre

Image Area: 0.84 × 1.44 inches or
21.3 × 36.5 millimeters
Plate Numbers: One group
Stamps per Pane: 50
Selva: U. S. Postal Service 1983©
® Use Correct ZIP Code
® Mr. ZIP (running position)

Scott Joplin Commemorative Stamp

A 20-cent commemorative stamp honoring ragtime composer Scott Joplin was issued June 9 in Sedalia, Missouri. The first day of issue ceremony was held at the former site of the Maple Leaf Club.

Scott Joplin, whose father had been a slave, was born in 1868 in Texarkana, Texas. He developed a musical interest at an early age and, in his teens, left home to earn his living playing the piano in the bordellos, vaudeville houses and gambling parlors along the Mississippi River. He finally settled in Sedalia, Missouri, in 1894. While there, he worked in a honky tonk, studied harmony and composition at a local black college and, in 1897, composed *Maple Leaf Rag*. Published in 1899, it rewarded Joplin with instant success which allowed him to leave the waterfront saloons and move to St. Louis, where he taught and composed. In 1907, Joplin moved to New York where he began work on *Treemonisha*, a folk grand opera. He was unsuccessful in his attempt to find a publisher and, in 1911, published the opera at his own expense. In 1916, desperate and unable to find a producer, Joplin staged an unsuccessful piano version of *Treemonisha*. He died the following year in poverty.

Throughout his life, Scott Joplin, known as the "King of Ragtime," fought for recognition. In the 1970s, ragtime finally began to receive academic recognition and respect. In 1977, Joplin was awarded the Pulitzer Prize posthumously for *Treemonisha*.

The Scott Joplin stamp was unveiled July 16, 1982, during a ceremony aboard the Goldenrod Showboat at Riverboat Landing in St. Louis, Missouri. The stamp, designed by Jerry Pinkney, features a head and shoulders portrait of Joplin based on a photograph found on the title page of *The Collected Works of Scott Joplin II*, edited by Vera Brodsky Lawrence. Superimposed to the lower right of the stamp is a drawing of Joplin playing an upright piano.

The vertically-oriented stamp is included in the Black Heritage USA series of stamps which was begun in 1978, to recognize the contributions Black Americans have made to the growth and development of the United States.



FIRST DAY OF ISSUE



AMERICAN COMMEMORATIVES

SCOTT JOPLIN



Although Scott Joplin didn't invent ragtime music, he perfected it by writing such classics as "The Maple Leaf Rag," "The Entertainer," and "The Magnetic Rag." And although Joplin didn't live to see ragtime become popular nationally, he left behind a legacy of music that would lead to the rediscovery of ragtime 60 years after his death.

Born in 1868, in Texarkana, Texas, Joplin grew up in a poor but musical family. He began his musical career on the guitar, then took up the piano at age 7.

Little is known about how Joplin progressed from child pianist to professional musician, but it is likely that he left home in his teens to seek his fortune in towns along the Mississippi River. Like other itinerant black musicians, Joplin found work in waterfront honky-tonks, gambling halls and cafes.



By 1885, Joplin had made his way to St. Louis, where he settled and worked steadily as a performer while composing ragtime pieces that combined elements of jazz, black and folk music.

Success came to Joplin in 1899, with the publication of "The Maple Leaf Rag," which sold an unprecedented 75,000 copies in six months. Joplin soon gave up his nightclub piano playing to become a full-time teacher and composer. Although ragtime gave Joplin a comfortable living, he wasn't content to create music just for entertainment's sake.

Seeking greater recognition



as a "legitimate" composer, Joplin spent the last years of his life working on marches, symphonies, and even an opera. But it was not until nearly 60 years after his death in 1919 that Joplin received the recognition he deserved, when a revival of ragtime brought Joplin's work to the attention of critics and music lovers alike.

The stamp honoring Scott Joplin, designed by Jerry Pinkney of Croton-on-Hudson, New York, was issued June 9, 1983 in Sedalia, Missouri.



UNITED STATES
POSTAL SERVICE 1983



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Patricia Lawrence Murray