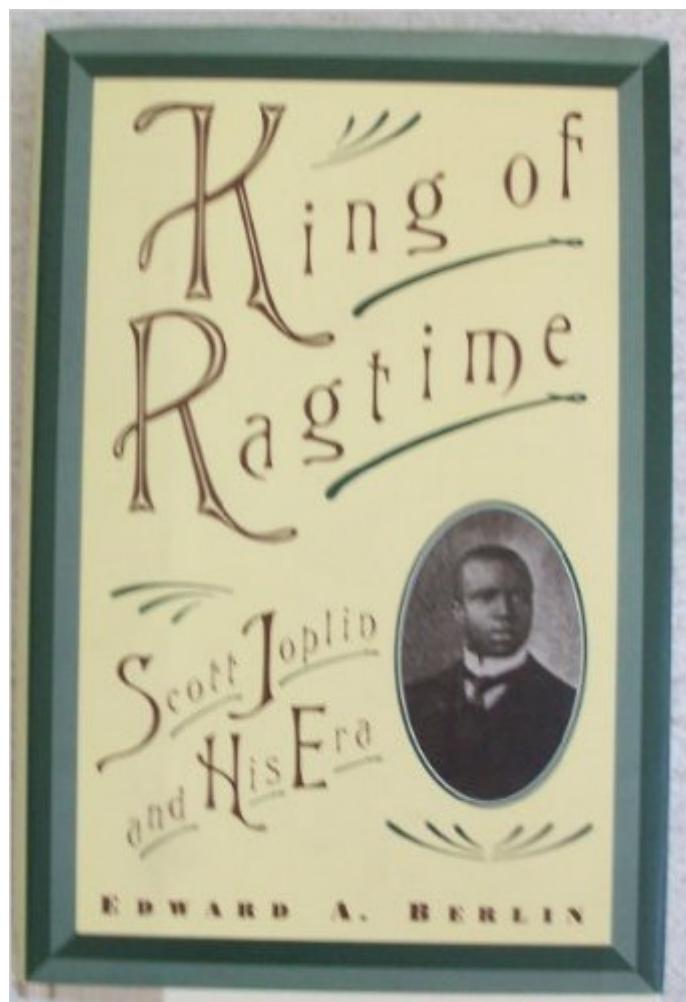


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# King Of Ragtime: Scott Joplin And His Era



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 352 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press; First Edition edition (July 14, 1994)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0195087399

ISBN-13: 978-0195087390

Product Dimensions: 6.4 x 1.1 x 9.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.6 pounds

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (16 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #1,121,839 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #304 in [Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Biographies > Rhythm & Blues](#) #390 in [Books > Arts & Photography >](#)

## Customer Reviews

My review in two words: BUY IT. This book is probably as thorough of a study into the life of Scott Joplin as is possible. Edward Berlin has obviously exhausted every resource available to him, and throughout, the book is well-noted - that is to say he gives credit to probably 99.9% of the sources of his information in the section for notes. Berlin has gone through census records, newspapers, other books on ragtime, interviews with/statements given by numerous people affiliated with Scott Joplin and countless other sources for this book. This book is 99.9% true, solid facts; he seldom states a personal opinion, and when he does, it is made blatantly clear that that is what he is doing. This book also includes a listing of the complete known works of Scott Joplin, and the sheet music for the three songs "Good-bye Old Gal Good-bye", "Snoring Sampson" and "Lovin' Babe". (I would like to say in response to someone else's review that it is very difficult for me to see how the biography of a \*musician\* can be "interrupted" with music scores.)

We have searched for biographies of Joplin to sell in our book shop at the Scott Joplin House SHS in St. Louis and Dr. Berlin's is great. He is the most thorough researcher we have come across in regards to Joplin. He is also a music historian and sometimes it is confusing for non-music people, but all in all you cannot beat the research and the information.

Despite years of detective work by musicologists, Joplin's life remains something of a 500-piece jigsaw puzzle with half the pieces missing. Berlin's work is the most coherent and robust work on Joplin's life to date, and barring some miraculous finding (such as the Sweatman files), it is likely to remain so for the foreseeable future. The depth of Berlin's reportage and the obvious breadth of his detective work (he's a superb "triangulator") give his assertions and educated guesses on Joplin's life, work and motivations far greater academic validity than that of many authors who have chased this musical ghost.

The reason I purchased this book was for my Jazz history class presentation on the 'King of Ragtime'. I could not find any recorded live performances by the classical ragtime composer because talking movies were not invented until 1920's long after his death in 1917. This book is just as good as recorded interviews from people who knew him as a friend, a composer, a performer,

and a teacher. My teacher complimented me on my presentation for the interesting and valuable information I have shared with the class. This book contains speculations and contradicting facts about the composer. The author did a very diligent research on Joplin's life. It is an excellent book.

As reported by reviews which I had read this biography of Scott Joplin is a thorough well written book. In view of race relations in our country today the book is timely and insightful as it places the history of African Americans within yesterday's culture front and center today. Although this book is about ragtime, or "ragged" music, it is much more. How can one love ragtime and not love the genius of Joplin? With the re-awakening of Harper Lee and her fine work this is a wonderful companion piece.

Impeccable scholarship. Amazing research. Important musicological insights (my favorite: interviewing the widow of Joplin's Jewish pupil on the subject of the influence of Jewish music on Magnetic Rag. My other favorite: following the traces of the lost second wife, Freddie, who may well have been the inspiration for Treemonisha). I don't agree with EVERYTHING Berlin says - but that's what makes the world go 'round, no?

A fascinating piece of work that sets out what is known about Joplin's life well but also leaves the reader frustrated that comparatively little is known about this man who was simultaneously the last great American Romantic salon composer and the first great American jazz composer (in my opinion). I'm grateful for Berlin's scholarship but do wish that more were known about Joplin's life. As a side comment, it was also nice to figure out why so many of his piano pieces were written in Bb! I hadn't known about his close association with brass bands before reading this, but that explains his key signature choices very well.

It was really hoping to learn more about Scott Joplin, the man, but I found myself drowning in the building and technicalities of the music. While that was interesting, it seems aimed more at the true musician as opposed to the true story of his life. All in all, I was disappointed.

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