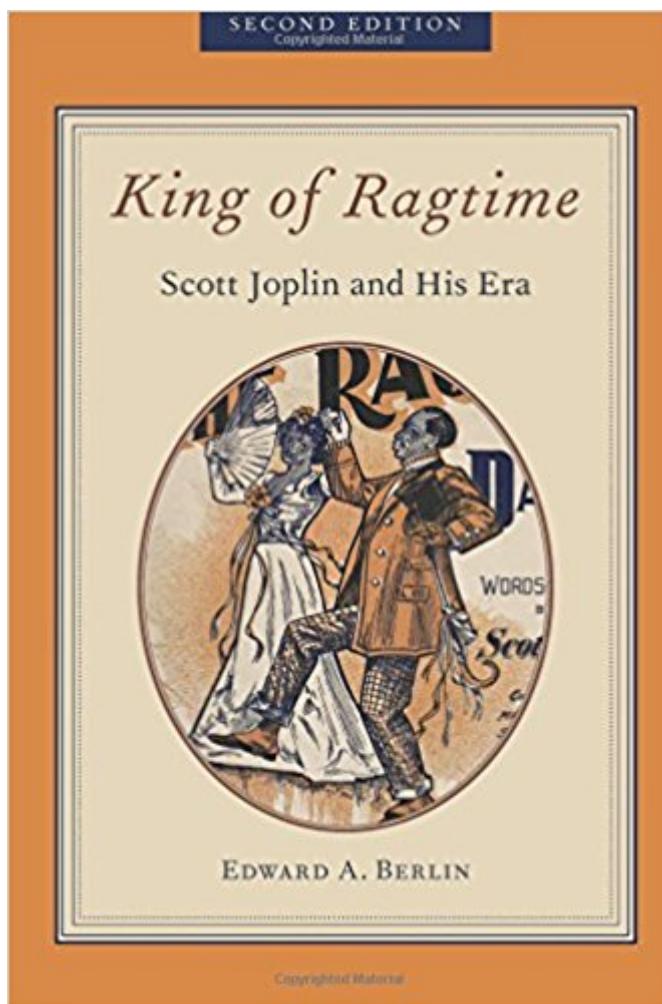


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# King Of Ragtime: Scott Joplin And His Era



## Synopsis

When it was first published in 1994, *King of Ragtime: Scott Joplin and his Era* was widely heralded not only as the most thorough investigation of Scott Joplin's life and music, but also as a gripping read, almost a detective story. This new and expanded edition-more than a third larger than the first-goes far beyond the original publication in uncovering new details of the composer's life and insights into his music. It explores Joplin's early, pre-ragtime career as a quartet singer, a period of his life that was previously unknown. The book also surveys the nature of ragtime before Joplin entered the ragtime scene and how he changed the style. Author Edward A. Berlin offers insightful commentary on each of all of Joplin's works, showing his influence on other ragtime and non-ragtime composers. He traces too Joplin's continued music studies late in life, and how these reflect his dedication to education and probably account for the radical changes that occur in his last few rags. And he puts new emphasis on Joplin's efforts in musical theater, bringing in early versions of his *Ragtime Dance* and its precedents. Joplin's wife Freddie is shown to be a major inspiration to his opera *Treemonisha*, with her family background and values being reflected in that work. Joplin's reputation faded in the 1920s-30s, but interest in his music slowly re-emerged in the 1940s and gradually built toward a spectacular revival in the 1970s, when major battles ensued for possession of rights.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"For those interested in Joplin beyond "The Entertainer" and "Maple Leaf Rag," Berlin's book is the

starting point. Then, one can simply listen."--The American Interest"What a scrupulous historian and musicologist Mr. Berlin is, rigorously sorting through the facts of Joplin's life and era....The history of popular music needs this."--The New York Times"Not only was no stone left unturned [by Berlin], but very few pebbles are left for other scholars to pick up."--San Francisco Chronicle"The most comprehensive and accurate published source of information about Joplin and a valuable complement to Berlin's earlier book, *Ragtime: A Musical and Cultural History*....The King of Ragtime contains every fact about Scott Joplin that could possibly be unearthed....His book, a milestone in the extended Joplin revival, goes a long way toward correcting a widely disseminated misinformation."--American Music"It is a thorough and many-faceted profile of America's first black classicist and catalyst for a popular music sensation that went unabated for twenty years. Berlin's role here is not so much a biographer, but an investigative reporter....No one deserves this type of fair, admiring, intense historical and musicological research more than Joplin, one of the greatest of American composers. And no one was more up to the task of honoring him than Edward Berlin."--Notes"In telling Joplin's story, the author examines the red-light district of St. Louis, where both Joplin and the great blues composer W.C. Handy lived around the turn of the century."--The Washington Post Book WorldR"Berlin, an expert on the world of ragtime whose two previous books on it are standards, proffers a splendid new study of the acknowledged king of the music....This biography will be essential in any library concerned with American music."--Booklist"[Berlin] examines and explains Joplin's many compositions in language that even the musically untrained can understand."--JazzTimes"A state-of-the-art volume."--West Coast Rag"The most substantial account of Joplin's life and experiences we have."--Chicago Tribune"[A] first-rate study....Black musical history has few happier endings than this celebration of the genius of Scott Joplin."--San Francisco Chronicle"Recommended for American music collections."--Library Journal"A masterful demonstration of the scholar's art, revealing previously unknown aspects of Joplin as ragtime musician, teacher, composer, and student....Enlightens as it challenges, traversing the worlds of music, culture and politics in describing Joplin's publishing arena and the cultures of prostitution, the church, the social club, and family life. The thorough discussion of Hoplin's famous "Maple Leaf Rag," of his opera *Treemonisha*, of the tour schedule for his first opera *A Guest of Honor*, and of his relationship to his second wife, are significant and alone are worth the reading of this book. King of Ragtime: Scott Joplin and his Era is a major contribution to American musical scholarship."--Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., author of *The Power of Black Music*"Berlin has done a dogged job of digging up what little documentary evidence exists; he even proves that Joplin had a second wife, who died shortly after their marriage....Berlin's insights into Joplin's compositional process are enlightening....Berlin

edges out the competition, thanks to his more thorough knowledge of music."--Kirkus Reviews"The most accurate and informative Joplin biography. Berlin has a sure grasp of the ragtime era....Berlin's analysis is always illuminating and expert."--Time"Berlin brings the story full circle with a comprehensive summary of the fate of ragtime from its eclipse in the 1920s and 1930s to its comeback in the 1940s and the revival of Joplin's work still going on today."--Publishers Weekly"The most thorough and useful biography yet of Scott Joplin."--The New York Times"Edward A. Berlin's meticulously researched 'King of Ragtime: Scott Joplin and His Era' is a welcome addition to the growing literature on American popular music. Berlin's careful accounting of Joplin's life, his achievements as well as his failures, is greatly enhanced by a generous array of photographs, reproductions of the covers of sheet music, programs and advertisements of events in which Joplin participated, census records, legal documents such as marriage certificates, and Joplin's music itself."--Charles Merrell Berg, Magill's Literary Annual 1995"King of Ragtime: Scott Joplin and His Era is a comprehensive, knowledgeable biography of the composer."--On the bookshelf"At last, the most reliable biography of Scott Joplin has been expanded and updated! After more than 20 years of adding to his massive collection of data, newspaper articles, photos and serious conjectures, Ed Berlin presents the second edition, which is again more than the sum of its many parts. With a reorganization of chapters and an extra hundred pages, the story of Joplin's life and work not only brings the full scope of Ed's research into focus, but his craft of biographical writing makes it a worthy reading experience."--Ragtime Music

Reviews"Recommended."--Choice"The first edition of this book was published in 1994: this second edition is a hundred pages longer. Berlin sets the biographical scene in detail, covering Joplin's early life and performing activities in vocal and instrumental groups. His analytical comments on scores, with music examples, are basic and never intimidating. He tries to disentangle legends about Joplin's activities and is candid about what he has not been able to discover. This book contains a useful chronology; a catalogue of works; and two songs not easily available elsewhere. It is most unlikely that anything further will be discovered after Berlin's tenacious research over such a long period. Anyone interested in Joplin and in the whole scene must be unreservedly grateful." -- Musical Opinion Quarterly

Edward A. Berlin, Ph.D., is a major speaker and writer in today's ragtime world. His book *Ragtime: A Musical and Cultural History* is the most widely cited study of the subject, and his monograph *Reflections and Research on Ragtime* is winner of an ASCAP-Deems Taylor Award.

The book contains new information that was not in the first edition, and is the authoritative Joplin biography. But nothing explains his genius ! Though I especially liked the inclusion of portions of the sheet music illustrating Berlin's analysis, readers do not have to know how to play music to appreciate this book. It is rich in historical and social information as well.

A great ragtime book

Great book. New material in second edition most informative.

There are few composers who have dominated a genre of music as completely as Scott Joplin did ragtime. His dozens of compositions, ranging from "Maple Leaf Rag" to "The Entertainer," became the music of their era and contributed to the development of jazz. Nor did Joplin limit himself to composing instrumental tunes, as his ambitions to be regarded as a composer of classical music led him to write a ballet and two operas as well. Yet for all of his success and the enduring influence of his music, Joplin died in poverty, virtually ignored by his contemporaries. Many of the details of Joplin's life are unfortunately lost to us, and what remains is often confused or contradictory. Writing Joplin's biography is practically a tale in itself, and one that Ed Berlin describes at the start of this book. Originally written a quarter-century ago, it reflected years of research, yet even then provided at best a hazy understanding of many parts of Joplin's life and career. When undertaking a revised edition, Berlin was able to utilize the Internet to access a far wider range of sources than had previously possible, particularly newspaper articles and notices of Joplin's early career as a performer. With them he was able to fill in some of the gaps in our understanding of Joplin, resulting in the best biography yet of the composer. Yet in spite of Berlin's efforts, some of the most basic information remains elusive. Even the date of Joplin's birth remains unknown, with Berlin having to rely upon deduction to approximate it around 1867 or 1868. The reflected the impoverished circumstances of Joplin's family, yet Joplin's family worked to overcome this poverty to give young Scott a musical education. Berlin credits Julius Weiss, a German immigrant who served as Joplin's music teacher, as key in providing Joplin with his education in music as well as his aspirations for acceptance within the classical tradition. After a period spent as a performer traveling with various groups Joplin settled in Sedalia, Missouri. By describing in detail the community in which Joplin lived Berlin is able to infer some of the particulars of Joplin's life during this period, one in which Joplin began publishing compositions with John Stark, who became an important figure in Joplin's life. Yet the growing success Joplin enjoyed with "Maple Leaf Rag" and other compositions was tempered

with tragedy in his personal life and setbacks in his career. Joplin's first marriage soon ended after the death of their infant daughter and his second wife died just ten weeks after their wedding, while his first opera, *A Guest of Honor*, was lost when the theatrical boarding house seized the materials for it for nonpayment of bills. Though Joplin remarried after his move to New York in 1907 and wrote a second opera, *Treemonisha*, his physical and mental health soon declined as a result of syphilis, resulting in his death in 1917. Berlin's book is a remarkable study of Joplin's life and music. While much remains unknown (and with some of the details disputed by other authors) Berlin's assiduous detective work is nothing short of impressive, while his analysis of Joplin's compositions are illustrated with musical notations within the text and provides readers with a deeper appreciation of his music. While much about Joplin may remain frustratingly unknown, Berlin provides us with the best understanding yet of the times in which Joplin lived and his legacy as an artist. It should be read by anyone interested in the man or his music.

When Dr. Ed Berlin's biography of composer Scott Joplin came out in 1994, it was widely and justly acclaimed as the last word in Joplin bios. But Berlin was unsatisfied with the many questions that remained unanswered, and set out to remedy that. 23 years later, we have the 2nd edition, an even 100 pages longer, and with a wealth of new material on Joplin. Not only on Joplin. Berlin's research uncovered a great deal of new information on other ragtime pioneers, and on the genre itself. But properly, Joplin remains at the center of the story throughout, the other subjects revealing themselves in the light cast by the King of Ragtime. Much of the new material is integrated into existing chapters from the first edition, but Berlin has added entirely new chapters to his work. "The Early Years," 10 pages in the first edition, has been expanded into 2 chapters, 22 pages, "Childhood and Family Background," and "A Career Before Ragtime." A new chapter is devoted entirely to "Ragtime Before Scott Joplin." The material on Freddie Alexander, Joplin's highly-influential but short-lived wife, is greatly expanded, as is the information and analysis of Joplin's opera, "Treemonisha." And a new chapter, "Final Years, Final Productions," covers the composer's sad decline to death. His legacy is amply reported and analyzed in 2 chapters, covering twice the territory it did in the first edition. Berlin includes a clever and intriguing feature: "Echoes of Scott Joplin," in which he analyzes other ragtime compositions likely inspired by or poached from "Maple Leaf Rag" and other compositions. After having read every book I could find on Joplin and ragtime over the past 10 years, I left Berlin's work with a sense of knowledge of the field I've never had before. This is a scholarly work of the highest order, but is still eminently readable and enjoyable as a story of a man who struggled to overcome overwhelming and unfair obstacles to create a truly

American music form. That he was not properly appreciated until years after his death is sad. Still, he apparently knew he would eventually prevail, and even correctly predicted the time that would happen. I recommend "King of Ragtime" to anyone with any interest in ragtime. It's the last word, and will remain so until and unless Dr. Berlin pursues a third edition.

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