



AN OPERA • **SCOTT JOPLIN** • IN THREE ACTS

TREEMONISHA

ANITA JOHNSON • ANNMARIE SANDY • FRANK WARD JR. • THE PARAGON RAGTIME ORCHESTRA & SINGERS • RICK BENJAMIN, CONDUCTOR

TREEMONISHA

OPERA

in Three Acts

by Scott Joplin

SCOTT JOPLIN

Composer

Libretto

PUBLISHED BY
SCOTT JOPLIN
NEW YORK

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TREEMONISHA

An Opera in Three Acts (1911)

Words and Music by
SCOTT JOPLIN

(Story Fictitious.)

Cast
(in order of vocal appearance)

<i>Zodzetrick</i>	Edward Pleasant
<i>Monisha</i>	AnnMarie Sandy
<i>Ned</i>	Frank Ward, Jr.
<i>Treemonisha</i>	Anita Johnson
<i>Remus</i>	Chauncey Packer
<i>Andy</i>	Robert Mack
<i>Lucy</i>	Janinah Burnett
<i>Parson Alltalk</i>	Darren Stokes
<i>Simon</i>	Todd Payne
<i>Cephus</i>	Phumzile Sojola
<i>Luddud</i>	Frederick Jackson
<i>Foreman</i>	Darren Stokes

The Paragon Ragtime Orchestra and Singers
Rick Benjamin, *conductor*

Disc One

Act 1

- | | |
|---|------|
| 1. Overture | 7:30 |
| 2. The Bag of Luck (Zodzetrick, Monisha, Ned, Treemonisha, Remus) | 8:04 |
| 3. The Corn-Huskers (Treemonisha, Chorus) | :45 |
| 4. We're Goin' Around (Andy, Chorus) | 2:23 |
| 5. The Wreath (Treemonisha, Lucy, Monisha, Chorus) | 1:47 |
| 6. The Sacred Tree (Monisha) | 5:26 |
| 7. Surprised (Treemonisha, Chorus) | :18 |
| 8. Treemonisha's Bringing Up (Monisha, Treemonisha, Chorus) | 4:41 |
| 9. Good Advice (Parson Alltalk, Chorus) | 5:05 |
| 10. Confusion (Monisha, Lucy, Ned, Remus, Chorus) | 2:37 |

Act 2

- | | |
|--|------|
| 11. Superstition (Simon, Chorus) | 3:35 |
| 12. Treemonisha in Peril (Simon, Zodzetrick, Luddud, Cephus, Chorus) | 2:49 |
| 13. Frolic of the Bears (Chorus) | 2:06 |
| 14. The Wasp-Nest (Simon, Cephus, Chorus) | 1:17 |
| 15. The Rescue (Treemonisha, Remus) | 1:26 |
| 16. We Will Rest Awhile (Male quartet) | 1:30 |
| 17. Going Home (Remus, Treemonisha, Foreman, Chorus) | :40 |
| 18. Aunt Dinah Has Blowed de Horn (Chorus) | 1:21 |

Disc Two

Act Three

- | | |
|--|------|
| 1. Prelude to Act 3 | 4:16 |
| 2. I Want to See My Child (Duet: Ned and Monisha) | 2:19 |
| 3. Treemonisha's Return (Monisha, Remus, Ned, Treemonisha, Andy, Zodzetrick, Luddud, Chorus) | 3:43 |
| 4. Wrong Is Never Right (Remus, Octet Chorus) | 5:33 |
| 5. Abuse (Andy, Treemonisha, Chorus) | :28 |
| 6. When Villains Ramble Far and Near (Ned) | 5:11 |
| 7. Conjurers Forgiven (Treemonisha, Chorus) | 1:38 |
| 8. We Will Trust You as Our Leader (Treemonisha, Chorus) | 8:13 |
| 9. A Real Slow Drag (Treemonisha, Lucy, Chorus) | 5:49 |

Appendix

- | | |
|--|------|
| 10. Bowing Music: Themes from the Opera in One-Step Tempo (2003) — Rick Benjamin | 2:02 |
| 11. Libretto Preface (read by Scott Joplin's closest living relative, Grandniece Mrs. LaErma White of Texarkana, Arkansas) | 6:32 |



Scott Joplin, c. 1911.
Brun Campbell Collection, Fisk University.

TREEMONISHA.

by Rick Benjamin

" . . . In the need of poems philosophy politics mechanism science behavior, the craft of art, an appropriate native grand-opera, shipcraft, any craft, he is greatest forever and forever who contributes the greatest original practical example. The cleanest expression is that which finds no sphere worthy of itself and makes one. . . ."

—Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*. (1855)

[7.]

Scott Joplin's opera *Treemonisha* is an astounding work of art, and one that resonates on many levels. It is the only opera in existence about the Reconstruction Era African-American experience written by a black man who actually lived through it. This fact alone makes *Treemonisha* a work of tremendous significance. Further, Joplin's music is profoundly expressive

and as stylistically unique as anything ever created in America. There is nothing remotely comparable to it. And through his score and libretto, Joplin vividly documented a culture that has left us few other artifacts: The echoes of the "field hollers," spirituals, fiddle tunes, revival hymns, and ancient African dances of his rural childhood are all heard, as are the

spoken dialects of his people rising up from slavery. Further, *Treemonisha* is a statement of deep racial pride and an act of true artistic heroism—the creation of beauty in the face of almost unbearable ignorance, racism, poverty, and physical and emotional pain.

Yet for all of its obvious significance, *Treemonisha* has been a deeply misunderstood work, both in Scott Joplin's era and in ours. His opera was complex and virtually unprecedented, two reasons why 1910s America could not embrace it. And 1970s classical musicians, although deserving much credit for taking interest, were for the most part not concerned with the opera's cultural origins or historic authenticity—the essential fabrics of this work. But now, on the centennial of this extraordinary creation, it is time to listen to *Treemonisha* with a deeper understanding, in the hope of allowing Scott Joplin to finally sing the song *he* wanted America to hear.

THE FORGING OF AN ORIGINAL AMERICAN ARTIST

Surprisingly, Joplin was not a nationally or internationally famous figure in his own time, a sad fact which presents formidable obstacles for historians. He was best known in two Missouri cities—Sedalia and St. Louis, and especially

within their respective African-American districts. But Scott Joplin's local recognition never blossomed into true nationwide celebrity on the order of (for example) a Sousa or a Victor Herbert. As a consequence, there is little contemporaneous data on Joplin, and only four surviving photographs, all of poor quality. Even his exact date and place of birth are not known. (The widely cited November 24, 1868 date is almost certainly erroneous.) It is *only* certain that Scott Joplin was one of six children born of Florence Givens (freeborn in Kentucky c. 1841) and Jiles Joplin (an ex-slave from North Carolina, born c. 1842), and that in mid-July 1870, the Joplin family lived on a farm in Davis County, Texas, not far from the borders of Louisiana and Arkansas. It is likely that Scott Joplin was born in that vicinity sometime in the second half of 1867. Later, between 1875 and 1880, the Joplins moved north to Texarkana, a new town literally straddling the state line of Texas and Arkansas.

By today's standards the Joplin family subsisted in grinding poverty, but they always had music; Jiles played and taught the violin, and Florence was a singer and banjo player. As a small child Scott manifested tremendous musical talent, and apparently possessed the gift of absolute pitch (i.e., "perfect pitch"). Fortunately, his interests were nurtured by two Texarkana musicians: a woman named Mag

Washington, and one J.C. Johnson. Young Scott sang (both at home and in church choirs) and began to learn how to play the piano and probably the violin. During these critical formative years, he naturally absorbed the sounds and cadences of his community, as well as its strongly held traditions and beliefs.

Later, Scott encountered a very different set of traditions and cultural values, embodied in the person of a German scholar named Julius Weiss (c. 1840–?). This visitor came to Texarkana in the late 1870s as the private tutor for the children of one of the town's leading white citizens. Weiss taught mathematics, astronomy, and German, but his speciality was music. According to local lore, Mrs. Joplin bartered her services as a laundress in exchange for music lessons from Weiss for her son. The details of Joplin's studies are not known, but it would be reasonable to assume that the professor taught his student along traditional European lines: solfège, basic music theory, and keyboard technique. It is also probably safe to assume that this quiet boy eagerly drank in this precious and exotic knowledge. It must be from these lessons that Joplin acquired one of a musician's most important skills—the ability to read and write musical notation. But greater still, the opera-loving Prof. Weiss gave the boy his very first glimpses of the wonders of European classical music, firing within

him an intense admiration for artistry and the ambition for greatness which brilliantly illuminated his life.

Like most African-Americans of his hardscrabble and remarkable generation, as a child Scott Joplin had to work to help support his family. His father had left them around 1880, further weakening their already precarious economic position. Young Scott, obviously talented and with the benefit of some training, modestly embarked on a career in music. First, he organized a male vocal quartet for local performances. He also began teaching the mandolin and guitar and playing the piano for dances in Texarkana's black community. This latter activity undoubtedly kindled the close relationship much of Joplin's future music would have with the courtly traditions of black Midwestern social dance.

While still a teenager, Scott Joplin left Texarkana. The year is unknown, as is the reason for his departure. It has been suggested that Julius Weiss's moving away was the cause. At the very least, the German had stirred within the lad a strong yearning to see world beyond western Arkansas. Whatever the case, Joplin began a long period of wanderings as an itinerant musician. He is thought to have roamed throughout the Mississippi and Missouri river valleys, visiting ports of call in Louisiana, Texas, Missouri, Kentucky, and

up into Ohio and Illinois, quietly gathering up the materials for his yet undreamed-of future life as a great American composer. This must have been a grand adventure, but one permeated with hardship and even peril: much of the territory Joplin visited was newly settled frontier. It was isolated, violent, and virulently racist. When imagining Joplin's life during this time, it should be remembered that in nineteenth-century America, all musicians were viewed with varying degrees of suspicion, since the playing (or writing) of music was not generally considered legitimate "work." Being a *black musician* would have nearly assured his ne'er-do-well status in the eyes of most whites he would have encountered. Thus, Joplin's musical opportunities would have been largely restricted to the African-American neighborhoods of the towns where he sojourned. There, he would have been further limited to the sacred—the playing and singing in churches (probably for little or no pay); or the profane: entertaining in bars, brothels, and dance halls and other more or less sordid venues of what was euphemistically called the "sporting life."

There was however one other avenue available to black musicians in Victorian America, and one keenly sought after: "the show business." The idea of professional stage entertainment and entertainers had finally taken root in the United States in the 1830s. The latest and most popular form of entertainment then developing was the "minstrel show"—white performers in blackface presenting comic (and demeaning) portrayals of African-Americans and "plantation life." Minstrelsy quickly became a dominant form of theatrical entertainment, with dozens (if not hundreds) of touring companies crisscrossing the nation. After the Civil War, blacks began to enter the minstrel business, both as members of white-managed companies and as entrepreneurial performer/managers with their own "colored" troupes. To modern readers the very concept of the minstrel show

may be offensive, but it should be noted that the genre was, practically speaking, the only theatrical training ground for nineteenth-century blacks. All of the future leaders and innovators of the post-1900 black musical stage had started their careers as minstrels.



White's Serenader's Songbook, 1854.

As mortifying as it may seem to us today, minstrelsy was the essential first step in bringing blacks into the American theater. (It was also a form, as curious as it may seem, popular with many African-American audiences.) Scott Joplin was closely connected with minstrelsy and indeed, the very first known newspaper mention of him came in July 1891, when he was back in his hometown performing as a member of the Texarkana Minstrels at Ghio's Opera House.

Joplin remains elusive again until 1894, when he arrives in (or perhaps returns to) a town that would be extremely important to his development—Sedalia, Missouri. The reasons for his move were not documented. But Sedalia was a new railroad boomtown, and one gaining a reputation for decent racial relations and for its unusually robust musical life. Its population of about fourteen thousand supported several brass bands, at least two string orchestras, and numerous choruses and vocal ensembles (including a "Liederkrantz Society"). These organizations were racially segregated, but attendance at their performances often was not. Sedalia also boasted frequent formal balls and a theater—Wood's Opera House—which presented touring productions of minstrelsy, melodrama, and "variety" (an early form of vaudeville), as well as concerts and recitals. The town's African-American community was large,

vibrant, and had an educated professional class. Sedalia also had many private clubs and, on a lower social plain, supported numerous saloons, gambling joints, and brothels. In short, this small prairie city offered outsized opportunities for musicians, black and white. All of this must have been attractive to Scott Joplin, but there may have been one deciding factor in his decision to go there. In January 1894, the George R. Smith College (for Negroes) opened in Sedalia, offering Bachelor of Arts degrees in seven disciplines, including music. Since at that time there were only a handful of colleges in America that would allow black attendance, the opening of Smith in Sedalia was a newsworthy event that had to have been an attraction for Scott Joplin. In any case, Joplin did indeed enroll at Smith College, although no records survive to show the exact dates of his attendance or the specific nature of his studies. While he probably had been composing music for years, he was surely finding his childhood training no longer sufficient for his objectives.

Educational advancement aside, Joplin quickly became a very active participant in Sedalia's musical life, and in a variety of ways. He took up the cornet and joined the Queen City Cornet Band, where he played from 1894 until the fall of 1896. Joplin's keen interest in vocal music also continued. Possessing a good baritone singing voice, in 1894 he formed

[12.]



The Geo. R. Smith College.

Above: From the *Sedalia Times*, August 31, 1901.

Opposite: *Sedalia Times*, May 4, 1904; “oag time” is obviously a typographical error.

the Texas Medley Quartette, an eight-man group that he conducted and sometimes soloed with. With Sedalia as its base, the Quartette seems to have traveled widely: in September of 1894 they were a thousand miles away in Syracuse, New York, performing a fundraiser for the Bethany Baptist Church. This group’s

repertoire must have included Joplin’s original music, since the Syracuse concert sparked his very first music publications—a pair of well-crafted parlor ballads, both with words and music by Scott Joplin.

In Sedalia Joplin continued to refine his skills as a composer. His work with syncopated

music—“Rag Time”—began to gain attention. Ragtime was a black Midwestern folk style which had been around for some considerable period. But in the mid-1890s this rhythmic music began to emerge as a nationwide popular music fad. It had transcended its ethnic origins and been embraced (in a love/hate sort of way) by middle-class white America. By the late 1890s there were at least a hundred rags in print, many written by white commercial composers. In those days sheet music was the only method for mass-distribution of new songs and instrumental pieces, and American publishers were industrious in placing new ragtime numbers on the market. The originators of this music—black Midwestern pianists—were largely unschooled improvisers who played “by ear” and who could not preserve their creations in written form. Here, Scott Joplin was exceptional: he had the ability to notate music—to compose for publication (and posterity)—a rare skill among nineteenth-century African-Americans. Better still, Joplin was writing down *exceptional* music; he could conjure beautiful melodies and harmonies, combine them with compelling syncopations, and mold these elements into elegant, delightful, and *artistic* rags. He was becoming (perhaps unconsciously) the Old World model

The famous Queen City Cornet Band will give a grand musical concert at the opera house in California, May 15th, and at Olean on the 15th, and High Point the 17th. These concerts are composed only of high grade marches, medlies, overtures, solos and oag time selections.

of a classical composer, gathering up the sounds of his own people to create a fresh mode of expression.

One of Joplin’s compositions, the “Maple Leaf Rag,” became locally popular, and in September 1899 was published by John Stark, the white owner of a Sedalia music shop. Mr. Stark (1841–1927) was in many ways a remarkable nineteenth-century Missourian; although of humble birth and mainly self-educated, he was philosophical, cultured, and perceptive. His daughter Eleanor (1874–?) was a gifted classical pianist and singer whom he had sent to Berlin and Paris to study with one of the great virtuosos of that era. His son Erilmon (1867–1962) was a violinist and music instructor. The Starks’ home and store (John Stark & Son) resounded with the works of Beethoven and other great masters. Yet the family was not at all snobbish and enjoyed popular music, especially the exciting sounds of authentic black ragtime. And Stark was also

[13.]

[14.]



The first edition of *The Maple Leaf Rag*, picturing Bert Williams and George Walker.

unusually progressive in his ideas on racial relations. He respected African-American culture, and appreciated black artistry in an age when those words together would have seemed oxymoronic. This alliance of Scott Joplin and John Stark was a rare and extremely fortunate happenstance, both for them and for the future course of American music.

“Maple Leaf Rag” eventually became a nationwide hit—and Joplin’s most commercially successful composition. Further, Joplin enjoyed a royalty agreement with Stark on its sales, an exceptional arrangement that provided the composer with an income (albeit a modest one) for the rest of his life. It also may have allowed him to begin a withdrawal from performing to concentrate on composing and teaching. The popularity of “Maple Leaf” caused other vital things to happen: John Stark became Joplin’s principal publisher, coining the phrase “Classic Ragtime” to describe his growing sheet music catalog. Stark also invented the sobriquet “The King of Ragtime Writers” for Joplin, and ballyhooed that phrase relentlessly in advertisements and press releases. Under his aegis, Scott Joplin flowered as an original American artist, and began what must have seemed a powerful trajectory toward widespread public and critical acclaim.

It was also while residing in Sedalia that Joplin began to show interest in advancing

from short instrumental pieces (rags, waltzes, and marches) to the creation of larger theatrical works—possibly inspired by (or rejecting) the kinds of shows that African-American touring companies were then offering. Minstrelsy was fading into obsolescence, and a number of young black impresarios and composers were beginning to experiment with more realistic depictions of black life. Scott Joplin’s first documented venture into this world was *The Ragtime Dance*, a suite of stylized social dances with narration for which he created the words, music, and choreography. To perform it, he formed his own “Drama Company” which presented *The Ragtime Dance* in Sedalia at Wood’s Opera House in the fall of 1899.

[15.]

John Stark, his English wife, Sarah, and their daughter Eleanor had moved to St. Louis half a year before the publication of “Maple Leaf Rag.” In this much larger city (its population then was nearly six hundred thousand), John Stark ran a furniture-moving business while another son, Will, remained in Sedalia managing the family’s music store. In St. Louis the talented Eleanor Stark opened a music-teaching studio; soon, she was embraced by that city’s large German-centric cultural elite.

In yet another of a lifetime of relocations, in 1901 Scott Joplin also moved to St. Louis. Several modern biographies have suggested that these frequent moves were a symptom

of “wanderlust,” but I think that after his Sedalia period at least, Joplin’s relocations were expressions of his frustration in finding a viable setting for his life as a serious composer. He needed a community that understood and appreciated his value and the value of his creations. From this understanding would flow income (through publication and teaching) and opportunities to have music for larger forces (ensembles and choruses) performed. For an African-American of that time—even an idealistic one gripped by the promise of the dawning twentieth century—this was a decidedly optimistic notion. Joplin did, however, have encouragement: not long after setting up housekeeping in St. Louis with his new wife, Belle, Joplin was introduced to one of the city’s most important cultural leaders, the German pianist and conductor Alfred Ernst (1866–1916). Maestro Ernst was the conductor of one of the Midwest’s premier musical organizations, the St. Louis Choral–Symphony Society, and was a musician of outstanding pedigree. The meeting between these two contemporaries was so unusual that it was covered by the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. The paper’s report, which appeared on February 28, 1901, is extremely valuable because it is the only known analysis of Scott Joplin and his music by a highly trained European classical musician:

TO PLAY RAGTIME IN EUROPE.

Director Alfred Ernst of the St. Louis Choral Symphony Society believes that he has discovered, in Scott Joplin of Sedalia, a negro [sic], an extraordinary genius as a composer of ragtime music.

So deeply is Mr. Ernst impressed with the ability of the Sedalian that he intends to take with him to Germany next summer copies of Joplin’s work with a view to educating the dignified disciples of Wagner, Liszt, Mendelssohn and other European masters of music into an appreciation of the real American ragtime melodies. It is possible that the colored man may accompany the distinguished conductor.

When he returns from the storied Rhine Mr. Ernst will take Joplin under his care and instruct him in the theory and harmony of music. . . .

“I am deeply interested in this man,” said Mr. Ernst to the *Post-Dispatch*. “He is young and undoubtedly has a fine future. With proper cultivation, I believe his talent will develop into positive genius. Being of African blood himself, Joplin has a keener insight into that peculiar branch of melody than white composers. His ear is particularly acute.

“Recently I played for him portions of ‘Tannhäuser.’ He was enraptured. I could see

that he comprehended and appreciated this class of music. It was the opening of a new world to him, and I believe he felt as Keats felt when he first read Chapman’s Homer.

“The work Joplin has done in ragtime is so original, so distinctly individual, and so melodious withal, that I am led to believe he can do something fine in composition of a higher class when he shall have been instructed in theory and harmony.

“Joplin’s work, as yet, has a certain crudeness, due to his lack of musical education, but it shows that the soul of a composer is there and needs but to be set free by knowledge of technique. He is an unusually intelligent young man and fairly well educated.”

Mr. and Mrs. Joplin lived in a second-floor apartment in a converted old house at 2658A Morgan Street in the city’s black district. (The building still stands and is now a museum.) In 1901 this was a rough-and-tumble center of drinking, gambling, and prostitution, and yet some of the composer’s greatest creations were born there: “Elite Syncopations,” “The Entertainer,” “The Easy Winners,” and a few others. St. Louis was rapidly becoming the nation’s mecca for real ragtime; it was home to a who’s-who of virtuosos rag pianists and pianist/composers, including Tom Turpin (1873–1922), Joe Jordan (1882–1971; see

New World Records 80649-2 for the Paragon Ragtime Orchestra’s comprehensive survey of Jordan’s music), Sam Patterson (c. 1881–1955), Louis Chauvin (1881–1908), Charlie Thompson (1891–1964), and Artie Matthews (1888–1958). Joplin was friendly with all these younger men, but he avoided publicly pitting his own modest keyboard skills against theirs. Rather, living on rising publishing royalties, he spent his time composing and teaching in his apartment. This was quite an atypical lifestyle for a black musician of that era, and especially for one so strongly associated with ragtime. Among his peers, “greatness” was measured by performing prowess. But here was a small, quiet man who *wrote* music. Joplin was different. And he was well liked, and his reputation was spreading. As his friend Sam Patterson later put it, “Everyone had a lot of respect for him . . . he had something to offer. His music was something to talk about.”

Within a year or so after their arrival in St. Louis, Scott and Belle Joplin were financially secure enough to purchase their own house on Lucas Avenue; soon its thirteen rooms were rented by various Sedalia associates and family members. The Joplins were also blessed by the birth of a baby girl. There were tensions, however: Mrs. Joplin turned out to be indifferent to music and to her husband’s career. This upset the composer considerably.

[16.]

[17.]

Far worse, their little girl became ill and soon died (her name is unknown today). This was more than the marriage could endure, and the Joplins separated. Somehow, through all of this Scott Joplin continued to create bright and cheerful music. Professionally, at least, things were going well. A condensed version of *The Ragtime Dance* had been published by Stark and was being performed on the road by a veteran black minstrel company, Dan McCabe's Coontown 400. Then, on December 20, 1902, the African-American weekly newspaper the *Indianapolis Freeman* announced an extremely ambitious undertaking: "Mr. Joplin is writing an opera in ragtime to be staged next season."

The term "ragtime opera" appeared with some frequency in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century theatrical advertising. It was always used as a comic/ironic label for various types of minstrel entertainment; the very juxtaposition of the term "opera" (representing

the loftiest heights of European culture) with the supposedly primitive music of blacks was thought to be hilarious. But Scott Joplin was not joking. It is clear that he valued ragtime as an art form, a view which was not widely shared at that time. His opera—*A Guest of Honor*—is now lost, but Joplin

biographer Edward Berlin compellingly theorizes that it paid tribute to the great African-American leader Booker T. Washington. Joplin finished the libretto and music sometime very early in 1903 (he applied for copyright on February 16). The project gained local attention, and St. Louis's other major newspaper, the *Globe-Democrat*, ran another feature story on Joplin, this one by composer and music journalist Monroe H. Rosenfeld (1862–1918). This article is of great historical interest because it is one of only a handful of stories about Joplin to ever appear in a major white newspaper, and its

author was a leading popular musician who had written several million-selling songs (and who had actually invented the phrase "Tin Pan Alley"). Thus, Rosenfeld's assessment of Scott Joplin is consequential: "This negro [sic] is a tutored student of harmony and an adept at bass and counterpoint; and although his appearance would not indicate it, he is attractive socially because of the refinement of his speech and demeanor." After listing and praising Joplin's many rags, Rosenfeld concludes, "Joplin's ambition is to shine in other spheres. He affirms that it is only a pastime for him to compose syncopated music and he longs for more arduous work. To this end he is assiduously toiling upon an opera, nearly a score of the numbers of which he has already composed and which he hopes to give an early production in this city."

Joplin began casting while still working on his new opera: On January 3, 1903 the *New York Dramatic Mirror* announced: "F. W. Meiser will star Scott Joplin next season in a ragtime opera which Mr. Joplin is now writing, and he will be supported by what is promised to be one of the finest negro [sic] companies on the road." The thirty-two-member company

included Chester A. Hawkes (a concert baritone), soprano Latisha Howell, and two young men very familiar to piano ragtime fans—Scott Hayden (1882–1915) and Arthur Marshall (1881–1968). The *Dramatic Mirror* notice seems to suggest that Joplin himself was the star of the show. That leads to many intriguing questions. We know that he could sing and dance. But Joplin's friends described

him as extremely reserved and "not much socially." Could he have also been a magnetic presence on the stage? (It is certainly possible. Many famous performers have been notoriously shy people offstage.) Another press item reveals that financing for *A Guest of Honor* was coming from a "strong capitalist" who was making his "first adventure in Negro Opera." In any case, bookings

for a tour of about sixteen shows were quickly secured, commencing on August 30th and running through October 12, 1903. These were the toughest kinds of dates for touring companies—"one-nighters" scattered over five states. The venues were all independent vaudeville theaters, averaging around a thousand seats and staffed with five- to ten-piece orchestras. In early August Joplin's troupe

OUR TRIP TO THE WORLD'S FAIR CITY.

The editor and publisher of the Times spent Monday and Tuesday in St. Louis, and while there called on many Sedalia boys, who appear to be doing well. Our first visit was to Mr. Scott Joplin, who is gaining a world's reputation as the Rag Time King. Mr. Joplin is only writing, composing and collecting his money from the different music houses in St. Louis, Chicago, New York and a number of other cities. Among his numbers that are largely in demand in the above cities are the Maple Leaf Club, Easy Winner, Rag Time Dances and Peachering, all of which are used by the leading piano players and orchestras. We went then to the elegant tonorial parlor, which is owned by Jake Wannagan. This parlor has an elegant outfit for four very fine chairs, together with many other modern improvements. Jake is making good money and is virtually living easy.

Above: *Sedalia Times*, April 26, 1904.



BLACK OPERA, "LUCY DID LAM A MOON"
By White's Serenaders.

White's Serenaders' Songbook, 1854.

[19.]

began its rehearsals in St. Louis. The two-act opera itself consisted of around twenty musical numbers, which Joplin had also choreographed himself (the “drills” as they were called in early theater jargon). The production was advertised as featuring “*Pretty Girls — Sweet Singers — Elaborate Wardrobe.*” and as “The only genuine rag-time opera ever produced.”

The fact that Joplin’s company was billed in so many different ways for this tour provides important insight into the difficulties of marketing black artistry in those times. The variations must have been related to management’s concerns with public perceptions about “ragtime opera.” In April 1903 it was referred to as the “Scott Joplin Drama Company”; in March as “Scott Joplin’s Colored Rag Time Opera Co.” By June it had become “Scott Joplin’s Colored Opera Co.” But by the time the troupe actually hit the road in late August, it was being variously billed as the “Joplin Ragtime Minstrels,” “Guest of Honor Co.,” “Scott Joplin’s Rag-Time Opera Co.,” and the “Scott Joplin Opera Co.”

Under whatever banner, *A Guest of Honor* played its first date on August 30, across the river in East St. Louis, Illinois (probably at

the McCasland Opera House), apparently to a large audience. Two days later, while playing Springfield, Illinois, evil struck: the company’s manager stole the receipts and absconded (a common peril in old-time show business). Several modern researchers have suggested

that this event *may* have ended the tour, resulting in a huge economic setback for Joplin. But recently I have discovered several 1903 trade-paper references to *A Guest of Honor* performances not previously documented, including Sedalia (September 9), Clinton, Missouri (September 10), Carthage, Missouri (September 11), Vincennes, Iowa (September 23), and Fort Dodge, Iowa (October 10). All of these came after Springfield, which was

on September 2. Of the sixteen dates thus far discovered in various period sources, only two were listed as canceled—both in Iowa: Ottumwa (September 29) and Mason City (October 12). So it seems that the tour did continue.

A more important mystery about *A Guest of Honor* is the current whereabouts of its score and libretto. These seemingly vanished after the 1903 tour, and are most likely lost forever, although since the 1940s theories have abounded as to their fate. Since Joplin is not



Arthur Marshall,
1907.

on record referring to the opera again after the fall of 1903, and since he did not finish the copyright process to protect it (which he had begun in February), it can be assumed that he had reasons for not wanting the opera to be performed again. But whatever its challenges and disappointments, *A Guest of Honor* taught the “King of Ragtime Writers” many valuable lessons, which he would soon put to even better use.

1904 was a restless year for Scott Joplin; he visited family in Texarkana and Hot Springs, Arkansas. He also returned to Sedalia for a while. Ostensibly a St. Louis resident, he flirted for the next several years with Chicago, which at that time was developing a positive reputation as a place of opportunity for African-Americans. (Several of Joplin’s St. Louis colleagues had successfully established themselves there.) However, St. Louis was abuzz with anticipation for the upcoming Louisiana Purchase Exposition (the “World’s Fair”) and the 1904 Summer Olympic Games. For months in advance it was assumed that these huge international gatherings would include African-American participation. But appallingly, blacks were not invited to serve in any official capacity by the organizers of either event. However,

the World’s Fair and the Olympics did create significant employment opportunities for black musicians *off* the fairgrounds, in restaurants, hotels, and other resorts catering to the visiting multitudes. Much ragtime was played in these places, and Scott Joplin wrote one of his best

compositions—“The Cascades”—to commemorate the Fair’s celebrated fountains.

This period also contained an episode of great personal significance in Scott Joplin’s life: on June 14, 1904 he married nineteen-year-old Freddie Alexander in Little Rock, Arkansas. The reserved, thirty-seven-year-old musician met this young lady on a prior visit, had fallen in love and, while courting by mail, had even written a charming

piece for her—“The Chrysanthemum: An Afro-American Intermezzo.” However, the couple’s happiness was achingly short-lived: shortly after their wedding, Freddie caught a cold, became bedridden, and died just a few weeks later.

The mourning composer spent 1905 and ’06 wandering between St. Louis and Chicago. He kept writing during these unhappy months, but very few of his published pieces were rags. His state of mind was perhaps best expressed by one of his most reflective compositions, the



Scott Joplin,
c. 1900.

concert waltz “Bethena,” which appeared early in 1905. Joplin kept a very low profile through the remainder of that year and much of the next. However, in the fall of 1906 he was on the vaudeville circuits, touring an act called “Joplin’s Alabama Jubilee Singers.” (This group is thought to have included Louis Chauvin and Sam Patterson as members.) He had also quietly begun a decidedly grander project.

A fine opportunity came to Scott Joplin sometime in the spring of 1907. A fledgling music-business trade magazine called *American Musician and Art Journal* (published 1906–1916) had decided to do a feature story on him. The instigator of this attention was undoubtedly John Stark who, expanding his business, had opened a branch of John Stark & Son in New York not far from the *American Musician’s* new office. Shrewdly, the ragtime publisher arranged to have the magazine personally interview Joplin at the Stark store on East 23rd Street, scores and piano at the ready. The resulting article was a publicist’s dream: Joplin was respectfully portrayed in a manner not usually used to describe pop music composers. His constant habit of carrying music paper on his person for preserving melodic inspirations was revealed. But then came a *really* spectacular revelation: “Scott Joplin has been working a considerable time on a grand opera which will contain music similar

to that sung by the negroes [sic] during slavery days, the music of today, the negro ragtime, and the music the negro will use in the future. . . . The writer . . . heard Mr. Joplin play the overture of his new opera, and to say that it was exceptionally good would be putting it mildly.” Here is the first glimmer of what would become *Treemonisha*.

Once again Scott Joplin moved. His home now would be New York City, that vast and mighty capital of American art, music, and theater. His arrival time is of course unknown. But since he had come to New York for his *American Musician* interview sometime in May or early June of 1907, one wonders if he simply decided to remain there. In any case, by July of 1907 Joplin was living in a small and dismal boardinghouse at 128 W. 29th Street in an African-American neighborhood on the southern fringe of Manhattan’s “Tenderloin” district. The composer’s new home was very near New York’s major theaters and music publishing companies. And twenty blocks North was “Black Bohemia,” a bustling community that was home to many of the nation’s leading black theater performers, musicians, and intellectuals. (Refer to the Paragon Ragtime Orchestra’s recording *Black Manhattan* [New World Records 80611-2] to hear the music of Black Bohemia by Joplin’s contemporaries.)

America’s leading popular music publishers were all located in Manhattan, and Joplin lost no time introducing himself to them (undoubtedly to John Stark’s discomfiture). He soon sold two excellent rags, “The Searchlight” and “Gladolus” to Joseph W. Stern & Co. This was a major coup for Joplin, since Stern’s roster of composers was distinguished, and included almost all of the era’s top African-American writers. (Joplin made quite an impression on Edward B. Marks, the firm’s manager. Twenty-five years later Marks wrote, “Joplin’s was a curious story. His compositions became more and more intricate, until they were almost jazz Bach.” The veteran publisher also recalled that Joplin often lamented his lack of recognition when in the company of other “colored songwriters.”) Continuing to hustle, Joplin also purchased an advertisement in *American Musician and Art Journal* offering his services as a “ragtime arranger.” His relationship with the magazine was growing; a few weeks later, it ran a second piece on him:

SCOTT JOPLIN.

Apostle of High Class Ragtime Is a Serious Worker.

. . . Of the higher class of ragtime Scott Joplin is an apostle and authority. Joplin doesn’t like the light music of the day; he is

delighted by Beethoven and Bach, and his compositions, though syncopated, smack of the higher cult. . . . those who play Joplin’s music carefully will find a suggestion of profound thought in it. His melodies are intensely sentimental and distinguished from most other modern creations by being new. Their harmonic treatment is masterly and as he turns out the finished products they appeal to the cultured as well as the amateur, and will bear repetition without number, growing more popular with age. . . .

New York’s African-American weekly, the *New York Age*, also began to cover Joplin, and was especially intrigued by his opera project. The first sentence underscores the fact that several other black composers were then at work on operas or operettas:

There are many colored writers busily engaged even now in writing operas. Music circles have been stirred recently by the announcement by Scott Joplin, known as the apostle of ragtime, is composing scores for grand opera. . . . he came to New York from St. Louis and it was the opinion of all that his mission was one of placing several of his ragtime instrumental compositions on the market. The surprise of the musicians and publishers can be imagined when Joplin

[24.]

The site of *Treemonisha*'s creation; Scott Joplin's boarding house at 128 W. 29th Street in Manhattan (indicated by the white pointer on the sign). The composer lived here from 1907 until c. 1913, longer than any other place during his adult life. Courtesy John Keen and the New York City Municipal Archives.



announced that he was writing grand opera and expected to have his scores finished by summer. From ragtime to grand opera is certainly a big jump—about as great a jump as from the American Theatre [a New York vaudeville hall] to the Manhattan and Metropolitan Opera Houses. Yet we believe that the time is not far off when America will produce several S. Coleridge Taylors who will prove to the public that the black man can compose other than ragtime music. The composer is just in his thirties and is very retiring in manner. Critics who have heard part of his new opera are very optimistic as to his future success.

This very good press must have been heartening and helpful to Joplin. However, although circulated nationally (and a godsend to historians), the *New York Age* did not even come close to approaching the multi-million mass readership of that era's leading white newspapers. Thus, researchers must carefully weigh the potential public impact of *New York Age* coverage bearing this fact in mind. In 1910 New York was a city of nearly five million people. Serving this population were no less than *eighteen* major daily newspapers, and eighteen major weeklies. Only about one hundred thousand of these multi-millions of New Yorkers were African-American. So even if every black person in the five boroughs read

the *Age*, it would still have meant that only a very small percentage of the city's population would have been aware of its content at any given time. A comparable demographic situation existed with the country's other leading black weekly, the *Indianapolis Freeman*. Even together, and considering their thousands of out-of-town subscribers, the circulations of both the *Age* and the *Freeman* combined were dwarfed by that of contemporary white newspapers. Nevertheless, both provided sporadic coverage of Scott Joplin's activities, which was far more than any other news organizations of that time could claim. It is to the everlasting shame of New York's mighty dailies—the *Times*, the *Herald*, the *Tribune*, the *World*, the *Sun*, the *American*, the *Telegraph*, the *Globe*, the *Evening Mail*, the *Post*, and the *Evening Journal*—that they printed not one word about Scott Joplin during his decade in New York. None even carried his obituary.

By the spring of 1908, Scott Joplin had discontinued his business relationship with John Stark. The old publisher was struggling for survival in New York's cutthroat business environment, and was unwilling (and probably unable) to pay composers the fees that had formerly been his custom. Joplin balked and took up with a new, small Tin Pan Alley firm called Seminary Music. Naturally, Stark was unhappy at his star's departure. In his private

[25.]

ledger he wrote, “Joplin’s case is pitiful—When he hawks a manuscript around and finally sells it for a few dollars the next publisher he meets tells him, ‘Why I would have given you \$500 for it.’ This torments him and keeps him scheming to beat his last publisher.” Losing ground, within two years Stark closed his New York operation and retreated back to St. Louis, holding Tin Pan Alley and “Gotham” in bitter contempt until his death in 1927.

Scott Joplin quietly continued laboring on his opera. He was not becoming famous in New York, but he was earning a living and creating beautiful compositions. By 1909 he had sixteen new works in print, including an instruction manual (*The School of Ragtime*, self-published), a waltz, a habanera, and thirteen rags. On August 12, 1909 the *New York Age* hinted, “Scott Joplin is busy finishing his opera, which will likely be given a public hearing before long.” The composer had also joined the Colored Vaudeville Benevolent Association, a new professional organization founded to fight for better working conditions and wages for black stage performers. Joplin’s work for the C.V.B.A. would bring him into contact with some of the foremost African-American theatrical performers and musicians of that time.

At last, sometime in the second half of 1910, Scott Joplin finished his opera, which he named *Treemonisha*. It was a remarkable achievement

by any standard, encompassing twenty-seven musical numbers presented over three Acts. Included were arias, recitatives, duets, a quartet, a quintet, and extensive (and expert) choral writing in up to eight parts. More impressively, unlike most theater composers, who work as part of a team of specialists, Joplin had created it all—libretto (story and lyrics), music, and choreography. His specifications in each of these areas were notated in hundreds of painstakingly handwritten pages of a single manuscript document—the “score.” This consisted of a two-stave piano accompaniment part, and above, the vocal lines—the solos and choral parts, with their lyrics. This type of document is referred to as a “piano/vocal score.” Now to be of practical use, this had to be published; since operatic performance is an intensely collaborative art, dozens of people (from potential backers to the performers rehearsing on stage) need to have copies of a score. Having it in print was also a mark of prestige and was a composer’s “demo” in that era before tapes, CDs, and mp3 files. But in 1910, the only way to duplicate such a thing was through the expensive and lengthy process of engraving, printing, and binding it into book form. To avoid this expenditure and to assure some measure of distribution and sales all composers sought to “place” their manuscripts with established music

companies. In this effort Joplin was frustrated: John Stark & Son had turned *Treemonisha* down while he was still working on it (as they had in 1903 with *A Guest of Honor*); his new publishers, Seminary Music and Joseph W. Stern & Co. also rejected the opera. Joplin apparently “shopped” it around to other New York music firms, all without success.

Rejected but not thwarted, Joplin made a momentous decision: he would publish the opera’s piano/vocal score himself. This—for a man still living in an antiquated boardinghouse probably without indoor plumbing or electricity—was audacious. In 1910 the cost of engraving and printing a simple four-page pop song was around \$35 (\$815 in today’s dollars). Since Joplin needed well over *two hundred* such pages for *Treemonisha*, publishing it himself would be a tremendous financial strain. But once again he overcame, partially by spreading out the cost of the opera’s

Members of the Colored Vaudeville Benevolent Association, the *New York Age*, January 10, 1910.



hundreds of printing plates by having them engraved in small batches over many months. When at last he had acquired all of these, they were hauled over to the pressroom to begin the printing process. Weeks passed. Finally, on May 19, 1911 Scott Joplin took possession of the first edition of *Treemonisha*. (One can imagine his feelings of pride as he hefted his book for the first time.) Taking great care to correctly register his copyright, Joplin personally made the trip to the Copyright Office in Washington, D.C. to fill out the paperwork and present two file copies of the volume. (One is still on deposit today.) Returning to New York, he began handing out review copies to whomever he thought could help promote it. Altogether, the writing and self-publication of *Treemonisha* was a tremendous achievement. Happily, Joplin's circle of friends understood this and shared in the composer's delight. On June 14 two of his friends, the Misses Christie Hawkins and Stella Lewis, celebrated the opera's publication with a reception for Joplin and twenty-five invited guests. There was a fine meal and dancing, and one hopes that the composer enjoyed himself to the fullest.

By the turn of the new twentieth century, America's classical music community (a small, yet rich and influential one) was much excited about the topic of "American opera." There were only a handful of true opera companies

in the entire country, and their unswerving mission was the presentation of the grand masterworks by the Italian, German, and French romanticists. As the U.S. emerged as a major world power after 1900, progressive music lovers (and nationalists) began to press for an American "school" of operatic expression. New England Conservatory professor Frederick S. Converse (1871–1940) was first to answer the call, in 1906, with his one-act fantasy *The Pipe of Desire*. In 1910 this became the first American work ever presented by the Metropolitan Opera and, simultaneously, the first it had ever presented in English! As a follow-up to this novelty, the Met then announced a nationwide \$10,000 contest for ". . . the best grand opera written in English and composed by an American." The following year in Chicago, the beloved operetta composer Victor Herbert (1859–1924) premiered his first serious opera—*Natoma*. Soon afterward (also in 1911) the Met announced the winner of its American Opera Contest—*Mona* by Yale University's Horatio Parker (1863–1919). This epic was set in Roman-occupied Britain in the year 100.

Through 1910 and 1911 the nation's newspapers and magazines followed this activity with dozens of articles on "American opera" and its new class of academician-composer. As the leading critics and musical

journalists engaged in their frenzied appraisals, little did they realize that unheralded, a much more worthy work had also just appeared. But Joplin still did have a supporter at the *American Musician and Art Journal*, most likely the magazine's editor, William A. Corey (1856–1916). Not just a trade journalist and music critic, Corey was also a skilled organist, bandmaster, composer, and impresario. He was a classical musician who had remained close enough to the pulse of real American life to comprehend the extraordinary value of Joplin's achievement. The composer had provided a review copy of *Treemonisha* to Corey's magazine, and on June 24, 1911, the following amazing, un-attributed article appeared in its pages—the first and apparently only article on the opera to appear in a contemporaneous white magazine:

A MUSICAL NOVELTY.

Scott Joplin, well known as a writer of music, and especially of what a certain musician classified as 'classic rag-time,' has just published an opera in three acts, entitled 'Treemonisha,' upon which he has been working for the past fifteen years. This achievement is noteworthy for two reasons: First, it is composed by a negro [sic], and second, the subject deals with an important phase of negro life. The characters, eleven in

number, and the chorus are also negroes. . . .

A remarkable point about this work is its evident desire to serve the negro race by exposing two of the great evils which have held his people in its grasp, as well as to point them to higher and nobler ideals. Scott Joplin has proved himself a teacher as well as a scholar and an optimist with a mission which has been splendidly performed. Moreover, he has created an entirely new phase of musical art and has produced a thoroughly American opera, dealing with a typical American subject, yet free from all extraneous influence. He has discovered something new because he had confidence in himself and in his mission and, being an optimist, was destined to succeed. . . .

The principal theme of the opera is one of entrancing beauty, symbolic of the happiness of the people when they feel free from the spells of superstition animated by the wiles of the conjurors:



Scott Joplin has not been influenced by his musical studies or by foreign schools. He has created an original type of music in which he employs syncopation in a most artistic and original manner. It is in no sense rag-time, but of that peculiar quality of rhythm which Dvorák used so successfully in the 'New World' symphony. The composer has constantly kept

in mind his characters and their purpose, and has written music keeping with his libretto. ‘Treemonisha’ is not grand opera, nor is it not light opera; it is what we might call character opera or racial opera. . . .

There has been much written and printed of late concerning American opera, and the American composers have seized the opportunity of acquainting the world with the fact that they have been able to produce works in this line. Several operas by American composers have been produced recently, and there is promise of several others being heard next year, among which will be Professor Parker’s ‘Mona,’ which won the \$10,000 Metropolitan Opera prize. Now the question is, Is this an American opera? And the correlative question is, Are the American composers endeavoring to write American operas? In other words, are they striving to create a school of American opera, or are they simply employing their talents to fashion something for the operatic stage and satisfactory to the operatic management? If so, American opera will always remain a thing in embryo. To date there is no record of even the slightest tendency toward the fashioning of the real American opera, and although this work just completed by one of the Ethiopian race will hardly be accepted as a typical American opera for obvious reasons, nevertheless none can deny that it serves as an opening wedge, since it is in every respect

indigenous. It has sprung from our own soil practically of its own accord. Its composer has focused his mind on a single object, and with a nature wholly in sympathy with it has hewn an entirely new form of operatic art. Its production would prove an interesting and potent achievement, and it is to be hoped that sooner or later it will be thus honored.

While soliciting for press for *Treemonisha*, Joplin was surely scouting for performance opportunities as well. Due to its casting requirements, subject matter, and provenance, it was simply out of the question for him to even approach any white opera company for a premiere. But with decades of experience with and contacts in black show business, Joplin would have approached the leaders of the various active African-American musical/theatrical troupes to suggest a collaboration. While none had been staging full-length serious works, a few had presented programs highlighting extended excerpts from famous European operas. It would not have seemed a tremendous stretch to advance from that to a complete and refined Negro opera. But there were no takers. In time, Joplin wearily realized that if he ever wanted to see *Treemonisha* on the stage, he would have to undertake the huge task of putting it there himself. For this he needed financial help.

On October 5, 1911 came a flash of welcome news: the *New York Age* announced that Thomas Johnson, a leading African-American businessman and former director of Harlem’s top theater—the Crescent—had agreed to finance *Treemonisha*. This was a huge step forward, not only because Johnson (1843–1918) was a prominent community leader, but because he also worked for the nation’s most powerful theater magnates—Abe Erlanger and Marc Klaw. As the receptionist for the partner’s private office above their flagship New Amsterdam Theater (one of Broadway’s most prestigious and home of the Ziegfeld *Follies*), Thomas Johnson was an insider in the “control room” of American show business. And he was more than just an office staffer: for decades he had also been Klaw & Erlangers’s confidential go-between for matters involving their nationwide Theater Syndicate. Having someone with Thomas Johnson’s connections and experience backing *Treemonisha* would at least assure its launch, and with luck, perhaps performances in the Trust’s vast circuit of theaters. Accordingly, it was announced that the opera was to go into rehearsals “at once,” with “Some of the leading colored singers in this country. . .” which was to include eleven principals and forty choristers. Then, following the usual pattern of the day, the fledgling company would go to Atlantic City

for previews. Eventually, the fully polished opera would return to New York for its formal opening.

Scott Joplin was now committed to the arduous but exciting task of building a production: He would need to oversee casting and auditions, “design” (sets, flats, drops, props, lights, and costumes), scheduling, rehearsals, and attendant and innumerable business details. (One hopes he had very capable assistants helping with these efforts.) Since there is no evidence to the contrary, it seems as though he also planned to direct the staging of the work himself. The opera’s music also needed to be orchestrated, a major job Joplin is documented to have also undertaken himself with the assistance of Sam Patterson. In summary, Scott Joplin had given himself a workload that theater professionals of *any* era would have deemed impossible for a single individual to manage.

Treemonisha’s shadowy production history is the composite of fragments of information from a small handful of period sources and two or three modern-day interviews with elderly Joplin associates. Over the years these bits have been interpreted in a variety of ways. However, viewing the information with a knowledge of early twentieth-century theatrical production methods brings certain pieces into clearer focus. At some point in the fall of 1911, the

composer presided over a “performance” of the opera in a Harlem hall—probably the Crescent Theatre. The cast sang in street clothes, there were no sets or drops, and Joplin provided the accompaniment on the piano. A reported seventeen people attended, and the event—usually described as a “backer’s audition”—was deemed a failure. Previous writers have pointed to this story to illustrate their assumptions that Joplin was such an amateur that he was unable to prepare a more impressive performance, thus dooming his project. (Several of these writers also place this event in 1915, which is almost certainly inaccurate.) But the description passed down to us is not of an audition, but a “reading” of a production already under way. This was a typical part of the rehearsal process in the commercial theater, used to demonstrate to one’s backers the progress being made on a new show. I speculate that Thomas Johnson had advanced some start-up money to Joplin, and possibly assisted in assembling a cast or in securing rehearsal space. But after attending Joplin’s reading a few weeks later, for unknown

reasons he withdrew his support. In any case, Johnson departs early in the *Treemonisha* saga. With him went perhaps the greatest chance the opera had of ever gaining a solid foothold on the stages of that era.

There are almost no glimpses of the opera during 1912. Scott Joplin offered only one rag for publication during the year, indicating that his energies were being applied elsewhere. He must have been preoccupied finding a producer for *Treemonisha*. But it is also worth

considering the idea that this dearth of Joplin rags could also be a symptom of artistic ennui: after having completed a beautiful, intricate, large-scale creation, could the composer have felt constrained by

the formulaic conventions of the two-minute piano rag?

1912 also brought the news that Joplin had decided to revise the opera in consultation with the African-American classical composer H. Lawrence Freeman (1869–1954). The two men had much in common, including a shared admiration of *Tannhäuser*. Indeed,

Freeman was referred to as the “Colored Wagner,” and is said to have been the first black to compose an opera. Although largely self-trained, Freeman had been experimenting since the early 1890s in Denver with his own operas as performed by his own semi-professional company. Unlike Joplin, who based *Treemonisha* on African-American folk material, Freeman usually relied on ancient mythology for his themes. Revealingly, Freeman subsidized his artistic ambitions by working as a musical director and conductor for several leading black vaudeville and musical comedy companies. In 1908 Freeman and his opera-singing family moved to New York City, where he founded several cultural enterprises, including the Negro Choral Society (1912). There is no record of the advice Joplin might have received from Harry Freeman. But given their similar backgrounds, rarefied interests, and close proximity, the two men must have had much to talk about.

In his superb 1994 biography of the composer, Edward Berlin revealed his tantalizing discovery of newspaper mentions of a possible 1913 *Treemonisha* performance, but presented few further details. Nonetheless, Joplin enthusiasts and *Treemonisha* lovers have always believed that the opera was never professionally staged for paying audiences during the composer’s lifetime: this is the

cherished central heart of the tragic “Joplin legend.” But it is a mistaken assumption, and the historical record needs to be corrected. In combing through thousands of pages of historic newspapers and theatrical trade journals over the past eighteen years, I have been lucky enough to encounter several forgotten pieces of information which do demonstrate that Joplin *did* in fact perform *Treemonisha* in some form and with some degree of success. By putting a dozen or more of these fragments together, the following narrative emerges:

Sometime in the late spring of 1913 Scott Joplin began once again to move forward with a production of his opera. This meant that he had a performance or performances lined up, and principal soloists under contract. He must have had a new backer too. On June 14, 1913 the *Indianapolis Freeman* announced that, “Mr. Joplin, known as the Ragtime King, has started his rehearsals, which will last four weeks. This company will consist of twenty-eight or thirty people. A comic opera of his own, called *Treemonisha*.” Five days later, in the *New York Age*, the composer placed his chorus call: “Wanted—Chorus people, especially sopranos and tenors. Rehearsals held by Scott Joplin at Moses Hall. 127 W 30th street, New York, every evening at 8 o’clock.” So, rehearsals were still under way. On June 21 the *Freeman* continues, “Scott Joplin is very busy rehearsing



A 1913 newspaper advertisement for the *Crescent*, Harlem’s first purpose-built theater (1909). For a short time it was that community’s leading showplace.

his comic opera company.” Two weeks later: “Prof. Scott Joplin, known as the ragtime King, is working hard on his comic opera, and has some of the best talent with him. The rehearsals are interesting now. It looks like business. He opens in a few weeks.” On July 12 came a piece of vital information: “Prof. Scott Joplin, the Ragtime King, is still rehearsing. He has his show in very good working order. Madam

Moss is leading lady, McKisic of McKisic & Shasty, has the staging of the production.” So we now know who was singing the title role—black soprano Laura Moss. And stage director “McKisic” is Stanford McKissick (1873–c. 1940), the black song-and-dance man who had been a headliner in big-time white vaudeville.

Two days later the troupe, billed as “Scott Joplin’s Merry Makers” opened at the Washington Park Theatre in Bayonne, New Jersey. This thousand-seat playhouse, built in 1902, was part of a waterfront resort complex that included a picnic-park, banquet hall,

restaurant, a game arcade, and several large dance pavilions. The Park was truly a summer venue—open only May to September, when almost all other theaters were closed due to hot weather (air-conditioning was not yet in widespread use). It was linked to New York by a short ferryboat ride, and to other points via trolley car. The Park Theatre’s only offerings were summery fare: vaudeville,

minstrel shows, and the occasional light drama, all at low prices. After 1909, motion pictures were added to these attractions. The Park was a popular “break-in” house for new acts and shows, and although white-owned and patronized, regularly booked all styles of African-American

talent. Joplin’s company would have arrived a day or two before the show to load in, review their blocking, and rehearse with the Park’s six-piece pit orchestra. Finally, at 8:00 P.M. on July 14, 1913, the company took to the stage. Their show had been given the minstrel-esque title “A Real Slow Drag.” (In



The Washington Park Theatre, Bayonne, N.J., c. 1910.

those days theater managers had the right to advertise and “bill” their acts in any way they pleased. *Treemonisha* was no doubt thought too nondescript a title to sell tickets.) No printed program has surfaced, but since *Treemonisha* is a small opera—about an hour and a half in duration—“A Real Slow Drag” could have been a complete presentation of it. (The reported month’s worth of rehearsals would seem to support this theory.) It is also possible that this performance was a Tab version (i.e., “tabloid” or abridged) of the opera, hitting the high points and ending with “A Real Slow Drag.” In either case, given the setting—warm evening breezes, trees, ice cream, beer, Joplin’s lovely music, and “10 Pretty Girls — Singers — Dancers”

on the stage—it would be hard to imagine this performance not being well-received. According to local newspaper advertisements, “A Real Slow Drag” was to be repeated on the evenings of July 15 and 16 as well.

We have evidence that at least the first of these three performances actually occurred: on July 19, the *Freeman* reported that, “Professor Scott Joplin, the Rag Time King, now has his show together. Their first stand, Monday, July

14, Washington Park, Bayou [sic, Bayonne] N.J. Scott Joplin’s Rag Time Opera of Twenty People.” In period theater parlance, a “stand” was the term for a *completed* performance or set of performances. (Upcoming events were “dates,” “engagements,” or “bookings.”) A theatrical columnist reporting an act’s stand from five days previously was saying that their show had been played without incident. Thus, *some* version of *Treemonisha* was indeed performed at the Washington Park Theatre in the summer of 1913. Unfortunately, its

offerings were never reviewed, and as interviewer Monroe Rosenfeld had earlier noted, Scott Joplin “. . . rarely refers to his productions and does not boast of his ability.” So it does not seem odd

that his new opera company’s trial run did not generate further reportage or comment.

In the weeks following the Bayonne performances further casting notices appeared, signaling that these July stagings were indeed encouraging “previews.” Joplin was now moving on to the next phase. The composer began to enlarge his troupe, not rebuild it. On July 26: “Scott Joplin, the ragtime King, wishes to add to his company three more

CHORUS PEOPLE WANTED.
Wanted—Chorus people, especially soprano and tenors. Rehearsals being held by Scott Joplin at Moses Hall, 127 W. 30th street.. New York, every evening at 8 o'clock.

New York Age, June 19, 1913.



Images of a rehearsal in Norembaga Park, Newton, Massachusetts on September 8th, 1897, of J. W. Gorman's Alabama Troubadors, of which veteran performer Sam Lucas was reportedly a member. While the performance is not of *Tremonisba*, of course, the images provide some sense not only of the opera's precedents, but also perhaps something of the flavor of the Washington Park performances of Joplin's work. The image on the following page is an enlargement of the one at right. Collection C. Ware.





people” (the *Freeman*). On August 9: “Scott Joplin, the ragtime king, has signed several contracts, iron-clad, for the appearance of his big comic, ragtime opera in some of the larger theaters in and around New York” (the *Freeman*). And again he advertised, this time in the *Age*: “Singers Wanted at Once CALL OR WRITE SCOTT JOPLIN 252 West 47th St, New York City State Voice You Sing.”

On the same day this ran (August 14, 1913), in the adjacent column the *Age*’s respected theatrical writer Lester A. Walton revealed what was going on: Benjamin Nibur, director/manager of Harlem’s newest and best theater—the Lafayette—had agreed to present *Treemonisha*

there with a cast of forty and a twenty-five-piece orchestra! It would open in just a few months, in the fall. This was splendid news—the “big break,” finally. But Joplin’s only comments indicated his concern with public perception of the piece: “I am a composer of ragtime music, but I want it thoroughly understood that my opera ‘Treemonisha’ is not ragtime. In most of the strains I have used

syncopations (rhythm) peculiar to my race, but the music is not ragtime and the score complete is grand opera.” Did the *Freeman*’s repeated mislabeling of *Treemonisha* as a “comic opera” exasperate him? Joplin was marching onward in any event, and taking pains to make sure his intentions were clear.

At this time we learn something fascinating about Scott Joplin himself: he was once again taking music lessons. This glimpse comes to us

through a short social interest item in the *New York Age*. On September 25, 1913, Mme. Alma Jupiter Greene hosted an intimate dinner party in her apartment for Prof. B.V. Giannini, his student Scott Joplin, and Henry Pleasant.

It is possible that this gathering was

connected to ongoing *Treemonisha* activities. Greene was a noted soprano soloist in New York’s black churches (later including Harlem’s Abyssinian Baptist Church); Pleasant was a classical African-American tenor and future member of the famed Lafayette Players. Bruto Valerico Giannini was a vocal coach, pianist, composer, and piano pedagogue. Since the mid-1890s Giannini had maintained a teaching

Singers Wanted at Once
CALL OR WRITE
SCOTT JOPLIN
252 West 47th St., New York City
State Voice You Sing

A post-preview performance casting ad from
The New York Age, August 14, 1913.

[39.]

studio at Carnegie Hall, and later on Broadway between West 65th and 66th Streets. The Professor specialized in “vocal culture,” but he also taught piano; *The Etude* and other music magazines published his teaching pieces. Giannini also had a strong connection with New York’s African-American community, and taught many of the serious singers and pianists of “Black Bohemia” and Harlem. The legendary stride pianist James P. Johnson (1894–1955) was another Giannini student, beginning in 1913. As Johnson recalled, “old professor Giannini” gave him his “. . . harmony and counterpoint for just a dollar a lesson. He taught me for four years. I had to throw away my fingering and learn to put the right finger on the right note. I was on Bach, and double thirds need good fingering.” But when did Scott Joplin begin studying with B.V. Giannini? An April 1909 St. Louis newspaper article mentions that Joplin was studying in New York; he was still doing so in the fall of 1913. Was he honing his vocal talents? Or trying to improve (or regain) his modest keyboard skills? Perhaps he wanted to learn about the operas that the Professor had seen staged in Milan. Sadly, these

questions will probably never be answered. But this episode adds two more “brush strokes” to the emerging portrait of the elusive Scott Joplin: it shows us a middle-aged professional musician who continued to be interested in artistic advancement. Further, we see that while hobnobbing with an Italian *maestro* and black church singers, he was certainly not hanging out over at the Clef Club.

In early October 1913, we have one more line about *Treemonisha*, and it is positive: “Scott Joplin has again started rehearsals of his comic opera. He now has twenty-

two people” (the *Freeman*). And then, silence. Nothing more is heard about the production during Joplin’s lifetime. What happened? This failure could have been caused by any number of circumstances. There was nothing unusual about *Treemonisha* getting this far and then folding. When studying the musical stage of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century New York, one sees that many new “shows” foundered before their formal openings. The reasons for *Treemonisha*’s failure could have been quite mundane—the withdrawal of a star performer, “creative differences” between Joplin

and management, or even shakeups within the producing organization or venues he was dealing with. (As a matter of fact, the theater business in Harlem was just then entering a period of turmoil; the control and ownership of the Lafayette changed hands several times. And the Johnson Amusement Company, the firm of Joplin’s 1912 backer Thomas Johnson, was soon to go into bankruptcy.) It had been a long journey for Scott Joplin but, whether he realized it or not, he had gone as far as he would be able to with his beloved opera.

The composer’s life in general must have begun its sharp decline at about this time, mainly due to other forces well outside of his control. Joplin’s primary source of income—the instrumental rag structured in traditional march form—was fading into obsolescence. This style had never enjoyed a

huge mass market; it was a niche favored by pianists who possessed good technique and enjoyed practicing. It required effort (and a “good left hand”) to learn a classic rag. On the other hand, the vast majority of pop music buyers preferred *songs*—that is, simple verse/chorus tunes with lyrics that related a story,

accompanied by a simple piano part. Much of what was considered “ragtime” during the ragtime era was in fact syncopated pop songs, not the florid Joplin, James Scott (1885–1938), and Joseph F. Lamb (1887–1960) piano solos that the 1970s ragtime revivalists championed.

Although Joplin wrote a few songs during his career, it was not a genre he excelled in. Also, by the early 1910s

America was gripped in the “Dance Craze”—an absolute mania for ballroom dancing. The music for this fad valued powerful rhythm,

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The focus of one of Joplin’s ambitions; the Lafayette Theatre, Harlem’s new (1912) music hall. Despite the composer’s “iron-clad contracts” to produce his opera, management presented the “Darktown Follies” there instead.

“novelty,” and repetition above melody, harmony, and nuance. And the new dances themselves were aesthetically far different from the genteel Victorian mainstays like the two-step, schottische, and waltz. These had given way to the faster and more athletic one-step, Hesitation, and the Animal Dances (the Turkey Trot, Bunny Hug, Grizzly Bear, Fox Trot, and others). The tempo of Scott Joplin’s music was too slow, and melodically it had too many notes per beat to be effective for these boisterous new dances. “The King of Ragtime Writers” was unwilling or unable to modify his style to conform to these emerging trends. Thus, by 1913, Joplin found it increasingly difficult to sell his new rags to established music publishers at what he thought to be a fair price. He tried to sidestep this problem in October 1913 by forming the “Scott Joplin Music Publishing Company.” He was not giving up on his art; if Tin Pan Alley could no longer recognize the value of his compositions, he would retail them directly. But to make ends meet, Joplin relied more and more on his private teaching income; he charged fifty to seventy-five cents for a piano lesson. His new residence on West 47th Street was ostensibly a boardinghouse run by his companion, Lottie Stokes (1873–1953). It was in fact a bordello. Still, Joplin soldiered on, searching for a producer for his opera, self-publishing sheet music excerpts from it in

[42.]

addition to his final piano work, the haunting “Magnetic Rag.”

In December 1914 Scott Joplin at last joined the ongoing African-American exodus from the West Side to the burgeoning community of Harlem. He announced this in the *New York Age*, gently reminding everyone who he was: “Scott Joplin, the composer, has moved from 252 West 47th street to 133 West 138th street. He will devote a part of his time to the instruction of pupils on the violin and piano.” This relocation brought Joplin into a series of nicer apartment buildings, but it did not rekindle his faltering career. From here on, all the evidences of his life begin to take on a decided air of quiet desperation. Joplin continued teaching and tinkering with his publishing company. He also tried to start a mail-order sheet music business, offering a general line of pop tunes and titles from his own small “catalog.” Simultaneously, Lottie Stokes had reestablished her prostitution business, which was run out of the apartments she shared with the composer, and from sublet rooms in nearby buildings. (There is no legal evidence that Joplin and Lottie Stokes were ever married. There is no record of a contractual marriage between the two in New York State, where they met and apparently spent all of their time. Nor were the pair together long enough to have achieved common-law status. In

later years Stokes was evasive with researchers as to her wedding date, giving different dates and even different *years* to interviewers. No certificates or other documents have ever been produced. Lottie Stokes was “Mrs. Scott Joplin” by her word alone.) One of Joplin’s white piano students from this time recalled that Joplin traveled long distances on mass transit to teach in his students’ homes. This indicates his need to maintain this income (at any inconvenience), and also suggests that he did not want students to see his living conditions. By then Joplin was charging \$1.00 per lesson, and was also accepting gifts of used clothing. Still, he longed for the stage, and tried to adapt to its current demands; in the summer of 1915 Joplin starting putting together a new vaudeville turn— “The Syncopated Jamboree,” in collaboration with his C.V.B.A. writer/director friend Bob Slater. Though the piece had a strong cast and rehearsed for some time, it apparently was never booked. More significantly, Joplin had begun composing another full-length work, a “music comedy drama” he called *If*.

Fate had burdened Scott Joplin with more than his fair share of difficulties. But the cruelest blow of all came in October 1915, where he began to manifest the terrifying symptoms of syphilis. This dreadful disease was the scourge of black entertainers and musicians,

and had decimated the leading figures of the African-American theater, including George Walker (1873–1911, of Williams & Walker), Ernest Hogan (1865–1909), and Bob Cole (1869–1911). Syphilis is a three-stage bacterial infection that usually takes many years (or decades) to reach its horrific final “tertiary” stage. In Joplin’s time there were therapies for syphilis but no certain cure. Late-stage cases almost always ended in death. The symptoms include loss of coordination (especially of the fingers, tongue, and lips), depression, and violent outbursts. The composer began to suffer bouts of each of these plagues. We do not know if he sought medical attention to try to save himself, and one must wonder if family and friends really rallied to help him find the best care. But there is no hint of such an effort in surviving narratives, only a rather vague indifference to Joplin’s plight.

[43.]

In the spring of 1916 Joplin was hired to cut a small series of player piano rolls for the Connorized label, and one for a company called Uni-Record. The repertoire consisted mainly of his own compositions. By all accounts Joplin’s piano playing was by this time pathetic. But several piano rolls from these sessions were eventually released—the only record of the composer’s playing. The Connorized rolls were heavily edited, leaving us still wondering about Joplin’s actual performing style. (They were at

[44.]

Scott Joplin lived in this apartment building at 252 W. 47th Street, New York from c. 1913 through late 1914. Photograph by John Keen, 2001. The lower two floors of the structure have since been demolished and rebuilt.



least made to sound competently played.) But his unedited Uni-Record roll of “Maple Leaf Rag” is a disheartening jumble—no doubt an accurate snapshot of Joplin’s frightening physical decline. This experience could only have been a frustrating and humiliating one. Hopefully he was slightly cheered to learn that the orchestra at the Lafayette Theatre (just around the corner from his apartment) was playing his music between the acts along with selections by Dvorák, Gounod, and Béla Kéler.

On September 7, 1916 the *Age* ran the following tantalizing lines: “Scott Joplin, the composer, has just completed his music comedy drama ‘If,’ and is now writing his Symphony No. 1. He has studied symphonic writing.” Six weeks later, the *Freeman* was the first to publicly mention Joplin’s “serious illness.” The paper also added, curiously, that the composer was planning to go to Chicago to be cared for by his sister. However, Joplin remained in Harlem,

and in fits of despair began to destroy his manuscripts. Fall darkened into a bitter and blustery New York City winter. In January 1917 once again the black press announced that the ailing man intended to convalesce with his sister. A fortnight later, although there were closer medical facilities, Scott

Joplin was trundled down one hundred and ten icy city blocks to Bellevue—the free City hospital. On February 5, in the last and saddest move of his itinerant life, he was transferred to the State insane asylum on Ward’s Island. His physician there, a veteran public servant named Dr. Philip Smith (1872–1944) had seen the ravages of syphilitic dementia many times before.

Most of his heavy caseload there consisted of similar patients; the outcome was a foregone conclusion—a nightmarishly slow death by asphyxiation. The “King of Ragtime Writers” lingered on until the first whispers of springtime. Then at last, at 9:10 on the



Piano roll, issued April 1916.
Collection C. Ware.

[45.]

evening of April 1, 1917, his gentle and courageous heart stopped beating forever.

There was little notice of Joplin's death, and no mention of it by the major media of the day. The two leading African-American newspapers both gave short notices, decorously but erroneously attributing the composer's mental illness to the stresses of trying to secure productions of *Treemonisha*. Forgetting (or discounting) the Bayonne performances of four years earlier, Lester A. Walton of the *Age* wrote, "Scott Joplin's burning desire to have produced a ragtime opera he wrote many years ago was responsible for the composer's death, is the opinion of his friends.

... He was advised by musicians of ability to rewrite the opera, which he enthusiastically set out to do; but even after making numerous changes in the book and score he found it a herculean [sic] task to interest people with money in the opera's production. . . ."

On the afternoon of Thursday April 5, Scott Joplin was buried in a pauper's mass grave in a corner of St. Michael's Cemetery in Queens. There is no account of a funeral service, but whatever occurred must have been extremely modest. His grave was not marked and, astoundingly, Lottie spun out the rest of her long life without ever placing a tombstone on the final resting place of her "dear husband." (That obligation was not fulfilled until nearly sixty years later, when ASCAP purchased and installed a simple bronze monument on the site.)

Although Scott Joplin died without a will, the New York authorities gave little scrutiny to the settlement of his worldly affairs.

His meager estate was

claimed to consist only of the printing plates for *Treemonisha*, which were valued at a paltry \$300. The Widow Joplin retained these, as well the composer's personal effects, which included a large quantity of manuscripts



The revised and self-published 1915 edition of "Frolic of the Bears."

(deemed monetarily worthless) and copies of his published music. Included in this collection were the production materials for *Treemonisha*, with its handwritten orchestra parts. Lottie quickly turned over the unsold stock of the printed *Treemonisha* piano/vocal books for liquidation at a reduced price (\$1.00). And she signed over the rights to Joplin's last rag, the poignant "Magnetic," to a Chicago publisher who advertised it as a "Fox Trot" with "Plenty of Pep, Novelty Noise, Raggy Rhythm, Bum Blues, Joyful Jazz." She continued to run a boardinghouse at 163 W. 131st Street, catering to theater folk and musicians. Over the years her tenants included famous jazz figures, including Wilbur Sweatman (1882–1961), Willie "The Lion" Smith (1893–1973), Jelly Roll Morton (1885–1941), and others. Somewhat more discreetly, Lottie also continued to operate her prostitution ring. In due course of time, she claimed the copyrights to "Maple Leaf Rag," and the rest of the composer's published compositions. She enrolled Joplin in ASCAP and collected the payments. As the years rolled on, she supposedly married a man with the surname of "Thomas." (Extensive investigations have revealed nothing more about the mysterious Mr. Thomas or this relationship.) She also meticulously renewed her copyrights on Joplin's music as their expirations came near. In

the 1940s and early '50s Lottie was interviewed by ragtime researchers, to whom she provided a great deal of incorrect information about Scott Joplin and his life.

In March 1953 Lottie Joplin Thomas died. In her will she named her advisor and sometime tenant Wilbur Sweatman (who had also been one of Scott Joplin's associates) as executor. Sweatman was a once-famous clarinetist, vaudevillian, bandleader, songwriter, and publisher. As executor, he took custody of Joplin's manuscripts and control of an entity called the "Lottie Joplin Thomas Trust." There was still a large quantity of Joplin's music stored in the Harlem brownstone; as Willie Smith later recalled, ". . . Before she [Lottie] died she took me down in the cellar and showed me Scott's cellar full of manuscripts—modern things and even some classical pieces he had written." All this Sweatman removed, storing some of it in his office and the rest in his apartment, along with vast quantities of his own old sheet music. In 1959 he dubiously assigned the copyrights to *Treemonisha* to the Wilbur Sweatman Music Publishing Co. Two years later, he died intestate. During his final hospitalization his illegitimate daughter took possession of his apartment and everything in it, including the Joplin material. She removed all of the items from the apartment and put them into storage. However, Sweatman's sister

quickly took issue with these actions and filed a lawsuit to assert her inheritance rights. Eventually a court found that the sister was indeed the legal heir, and the daughter was ordered to return all of the items she had taken. After a long delay, this order was complied with, and at least eleven boxes of musical scores were returned to the sister's attorney. But after several moves and changes of custody, the Joplin material and the Sweatman material had been thoroughly jumbled together. Soon after, all of these boxes "disappeared," and their whereabouts have been the subject of debate for many years. Dismayingly, the items from Sweatman's office (including a Joplin piano concerto) were also unaccounted for.

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I believe I know what happened to at least some of this treasure, and to the *Treemonisha* manuscripts. In 1988 the Paragon Ragtime Orchestra and I were engaged by the *New York Times'* radio station WQXR to play a summer concert at South Street Seaport. This event—featuring the music of Scott Joplin—was heavily advertised on the radio and in the *Times*. More than eight thousand people jammed onto Pier 17 to hear the free performance, and thousands more listened to the live simulcast on WQXR. During the concert I made remarks about Joplin's classical aspirations and mentioned my hope that *Treemonisha's* original orchestrations

would someday turn up. Immediately after the performance, something extraordinary happened: I received word backstage that an audience member urgently needed to speak to me. I was dubious, hot, and tired. Then the messenger dryly added, "He looks like a lawyer." Now I was worried. So I ventured out and there, waiting for me, was an elegantly dressed, elderly African-American gentleman. He handed me his card and identified himself as a former member of the legal firm that "had handled the Sweatman estate case back in the early '60s." This did not ring any bells with me, so my visitor came right to the point: he said that he had, personally, thrown away the manuscripts for *Treemonisha* in 1962! He explained—with considerable dismay—that his practice had received many boxes of music at the conclusion of a legal action. Their client—the aged sister of a deceased musician named Wilbur Sweatman—had poked through these, took a handful of items, and told her lawyers to discard the rest of it. My informant said there were three or four boxes marked "Treemonisha," and that these struck his interest because "'Treemonisha' was such a *strange* word." Thumbing through these he found crumbling music paper written on with ink; parts for instruments—cornet, drums, violin, and other things he could not remember; bits of paper; odds and ends.

Everything was dirty, and some of it had been damaged by water. It all seemed like rubbish, and after a few more minutes of aimless perusal, he carried all of the boxes out to the trash. He told me—again quite abashed—that, "nobody knew about Scott Joplin in 1962." Then he said, "I thought *somebody* should know about this."

RECONSTRUCTING TREEMONISHA

In the early 1970s something wonderful and possibly unprecedented happened: Scott Joplin was discovered by the masses and rose to a posthumous mega-stardom. His music shot to the top of the classical *and* pop charts; it was heard from every TV set, every radio, every record player, and every piano in the land. Joplin had finally arrived, and in a huge way. But he was not merely popular; artistically he was vindicated as a major American composer. The important critics on the very same newspapers that had ignored the man now penned glowing paens to Joplin's genius. The list of honors grew until 1976, when the composer was awarded a Special Pulitzer Prize for *Treemonisha*.

Three sparks had ignited this explosion of interest—Joshua Rifkin's fine LP recording of Joplin piano rags (1970), the New York Public Library's publication of *Scott Joplin: Collected Works* (1971), and the soundtrack of the hit motion picture *The Sting* (1973). Joplin's music was now heard everywhere and loved by everybody—from kids to conservatory professors to Muzak programmers. In reality of course, this interest had been building for years: ragtime buffs (and researchers), traditional jazz musicians, and sheet music collectors had all long known the greatness of Scott Joplin. They felt vindicated too.

Scott Joplin became big business—multi-million dollar business, in fact. And everyone wanted to get in on the act. America's classical music establishment leapt aboard with exceptional vigor; the concept of "classical crossover" was just getting started, and the Joplin fad was made to order—something pop-oriented that had classical underpinnings. Instrumentalists across the globe grabbed hold and rode the wave. String quartets, brass quintets, piano recitalists (of course), and even major symphony orchestras programmed and recorded Joplin's rags betwixt their usual offerings of Mozart, Chopin, and Tchaikovsky.



Wilbur Sweatman, c. 1920.

[49.]

The “King of Ragtime Writers” would have been absolutely delighted.

Eventually all of this excitement caught up to *Treemonisha*, the “Sleeping Beauty of American Music.” Here was a *major stage work* by Scott Joplin assumed to have never been performed. An opera, no less! Artistic cockles were warmed and cash registers seemed ready to ring. But there was an immediate problem: the materials needed to produce this opera—specifically the orchestrations—were missing. The only source for the music, lyrics, and libretto were scattered copies of Joplin’s self-published 1911 piano/vocal score. From this, the first known modern concert of the opera’s music was given on February 28, 1965 by the Utah State University Concert Chorale. This performance, conducted by Ted Puffer, and accompanied by piano, is almost always omitted from the pantheon of *Treemonisha* performances, yet it was commercially recorded. Six years later, excerpts from the opera were presented at Lincoln Center by William Bolcom, Joshua Rifkin, and Mary Lou Williams with a small group of backup singers. As interest in Joplin and his opera continued to surge, there were several efforts to fully stage the opera. The first of these was given on January 28, 1972 at Morehouse College, in a production staged by Katherine Dunham and conducted by Robert Shaw, with orchestrations

by T.J. Anderson. This production received fine notices, and brought *Treemonisha* to international attention. Following this triumph, the opera’s copyright owners—the Lottie Joplin Thomas Trust—commissioned a new orchestration by William Bolcom, which was used for performances at Wolf Trap on August 10–14, 1972. Later, the Trust commissioned a third orchestration, this from yet another contemporary classical composer, Gunther Schuller, for a new Houston Grand Opera production. This one opened on May 23, 1975. The Houston version eventually went to Broadway (briefly), was commercially recorded, and was televised on PBS. It has become the most performed version of the opera and the entity most people today regard “as” *Treemonisha*.

It was marvelous that Joplin’s opera was being staged but, as with most initial efforts, there were shortcomings. First, the provenance of the piece and historical performance practices were not considered at all in these 1970s presentations. These were not “restorations” in any sense, and little or no research was done to attempt to replicate authentic early 1900s performance styles. Worse, in some instances even the composer’s actual music and lyrics were tampered with. The main aim was to build an entertaining show for modern audiences using established templates. All the

people involved were experienced professionals who had spent their lives producing European grand opera. They did not appreciate that *Treemonisha* was an entirely different species of opera—a very rare one that had grown out of the forgotten African-American musical traditions of the late 1800s. Without this knowledge, 1970s directors, orchestrators, and choreographers could only view it as a sort of “student work,” a quaint effort that needed lots of modification to get it up to expectations—that is, to be more like Verdi or Wagner. They reckoned that what it lacked most was *grandness*, and so a large cast, a powerful orchestra, bright costumes, and elaborate (and surrealistic) sets were all summoned to add the gravitas that Joplin had somehow omitted. *Treemonisha* presented in this way was a rather conflicted affair; it was pretentious, heavy, and somewhat aimless. Worse, the large-scale production values swamped the work’s slight storyline, giving the proceedings a vague air of not quite coming off. Nonetheless, aware of Joplin’s tragic struggles and deeply struck by his beautiful melodies, most performers and audiences had warm affection for these performances. (Critics expressed varying opinions.) In any event, there was no other version with which to compare. However, behind closed doors performing arts presenters and executives generally regarded

Joplin’s opera as little more than a curiosity. With a sigh, most realized that it was not the prequel to *Porgy and Bess* that they had long dreamed of. And indeed, in any of its 1970s incarnations, *Treemonisha* has not entered the regular operatic repertoire.

I came to *Treemonisha* from a very different direction. As a kid I had found a battered, coverless copy of the 1911 piano/vocal score. I played at it on the piano, and hummed the voice parts, all to the bemusement of my teacher (she wanted me to fix the many problems in my recital pieces instead). I did not see any live productions of the opera—these had subsided by then—nor could I afford the Houston LP recording. In 1985, while researching as a Juilliard student, I found and acquired a cache of original Scott Joplin orchestrations (also being thrown away, but that is a story for another time); these were fascinating and revealed a uniquely American method of instrumentation. I was also working on projects regarding historic black musicals, operas, and operettas, and was becoming knowledgeable in this area. Occasionally my thoughts would drift around to *Treemonisha*; influenced by my research I always imagined seeing it in a real Edwardian musical hall, its cast singing and dancing in front of canvas backdrops, the audience cheering for Ned, Remus, and the brave

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heroine (and hissing those rotten Conjurers). Meanwhile down in the pit, the “Professor” and his intrepid little band (like the kind I had seen in dozens of sepia-toned old theater photos) sawed away gamely. There was great sweetness, warmth, and intimacy in my *Treemonisha* daydreams. And yet, they were formed on historical actualities.

Sometime in the late 1980s I stumbled upon a late night PBS-TV broadcast of the Houston production of *Treemonisha*. This was my first encounter, and it was disconcerting. Why were those guys crawling around all over the stage in alligator suits? How did old Zodetrick morph into Sportin’ Life? Why all the bombast? And who stuck that Blues chord there in the Overture! A few years later, because of my research and performing activities, I was asked to consult on a *Treemonisha* production being mounted in a large U.S. venue. Again, it was a frustrating experience: the heavy orchestrations blurred Joplin’s intricate rhythms, the large chorus was unintelligible, and Joplin’s carefully crafted *dialect* lyrics were discarded for being “offensive.” (Curiously, these same singers had no qualms about belting out “black dialect” as written by Ira Gershwin.) In short, the opera’s African and American qualities were overwhelmed by the compulsion to transform *Treemonisha* into something it was not. When I explained

these concerns to my superiors, I was told, “. . . but Rick, this is how OPERA is done.”

These experiences convinced me a new, historically authentic performing edition of *Treemonisha* was needed—a scholarly reconstruction of the work completely removed from misguided expectations and commercial pressures, crafted with an understanding of the piece’s unique cultural origins. But no one appeared to be undertaking such a project. In 1986 Joplin’s original piano/vocal score entered the public domain, and in 1993, I finally began work on the new performing version of *Treemonisha* heard on these CDs.

The first question for such a project should be: what was the composer’s purpose in creating the work? In Joplin’s case, I believe that he wanted to blaze the trail for serious black artistry by providing a vehicle for black performers. Until *Treemonisha*, there was virtually no full-length *serious* theatrical repertoire for African-Americans. This was a profound void that needed to be filled. Simultaneously, Joplin was pioneering the creation of a body of cultured musical literature written especially for black singers. Again, until *Treemonisha*, operatic music written for African-Americans was almost nonexistent. Both of these ideas were major evolutionary leaps up and away from the established confines of black talent—the “humorous” stereotypes

of the minstrel, “extravaganza,” and musical comedy stages. Through *Treemonisha*, Scott Joplin would open a new era, and prove the dignity and refinement of the New Negro. Of course, he also wanted to write an opera because it provided the largest possible canvas for his own creative ideas. As the most complex genre in all of Western music, the lyric stage has always been a composer’s ultimate challenge. Most importantly, Joplin needed this magnificent art form to commemorate and celebrate his beloved childhood—home, family, and neighbors. These were precious, and Joplin correctly sensed that he was the only one equipped to make a lasting statement about them. He knew too, that they had all lived through times of almost Biblical importance to their race—those incredibly turbulent and exciting years just after Emancipation. It was *essential* that those days be remembered in a worthy manner. For Scott Joplin, the worthiest of means was opera. And this is why he had to act as his own librettist and lyricist. Joplin was not an egotist; there was simply no one else to help him tell this story.

Who was Scott Joplin’s intended audience? It is clear that *Treemonisha* was not created for the rich white socialites who had established and controlled opera in the United States. Joplin knew that those people would have sneered at the very idea of serious Negro

opera. (As discussed, attending any work in English by a white American composer was quite revolutionary enough for them.) Rather, Joplin’s audience was to be the middle and lower classes: professionals and working folk of all races who as a matter of course went to the theater weekly for their basic entertainment. There, using the established production mechanisms of vaudeville and musical comedy, Joplin hoped to introduce everyday people to the elevating beauty of opera, and not incidentally, to the admirable artistry of a new generation of black performers. And this is also why he made *Treemonisha* so compactly. Joplin knew that there would be no way of booking a three-hour epic into existing circuits (nor would his target audiences sit through such a thing). As much as possible, *Treemonisha* had to fit the established music hall protocols. Very likely the opera was designed to be the second (and larger) part of a full evening of high-class African-American entertainment, beginning “in one” with the offering of traditional and familiar “Jubilee” and Spiritual singing, perhaps a recitation or two, all slowly building to a dramatic opening curtain of the opera itself. Since the 1890s, comparable presentations had been made by black touring companies, albeit with a comedic tone and the “finale” a potpourri of European grand-opera favorites. And by 1910, the idea of

“tabloid-opera” (with a thirty-minute version of *Cavalleria Rusticana*!) was being experimented with by leading white showmen in big-time vaudeville. Thus, a Scott Joplin plan to present *Treemonisha* as cultured “alternative programming” for music-hall audiences certainly had precedent and possibility. (Here, the reader should be made aware of two recent and indispensable books about the pioneering years of African-American theater, music, and entertainment which shed much-needed light on these subjects— Abbott & Seroff’s *Out of Sight* [2002] and *Ragged But Right* [2007].)

It is quite obvious that *Treemonisha*’s story and structure were heavily influenced by nineteenth-century American melodrama. This form of stage play dominated the Victorian theater and was adored by the masses. Melodrama was performed by hundreds of white “repertoire companies” reaching virtually every town and village in the land. In larger cities, major theaters sponsored resident companies to present it as well. Melodrama did not generally use singing, but did involve

The “spiritual” was the probably the first form of African-American music to draw serious attention in the white performing world, and jubilee singing found its popularity with the formation of the Fisk Jubilee Singers in 1872, who toured to great success and spawned many imitators. From *The Illustrated London News*, September 6, 1873. Collection C. Ware.



instrumental overtures and underscoring to heighten the emotional impact. And, because of its generally morally uplifting tone, melodrama was usually considered a wholesome mode of public entertainment. The youthful Scott Joplin was obviously familiar with and fond of the standard “drammers” of the 1870s and ’80s—*East Lynne*, *Ten Nights in a Bar-Room* (“Or, A Vivid Temperance Lesson”), *The Octoroon*, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, *Lady Audley’s Secret*, and their many clones. When studying *Treemonisha*, it becomes obvious that the formula of melodrama strongly shaped its design. The opera’s overarching moralistic theme, its small cast of stock characters (aged parents, an orphan, scheming villains, et al.), the deliberately exaggerated emotional tone, the fulsome use of mystery, shock, and surprise all plunging inevitably toward triumph are the textbook characteristics of Victorian melodrama. Joplin must have thought these attributes well suited to his project, and while melodrama in its classic form had more or less fallen out of fashion, he may have seen it as a comfortable base from which he could introduce more complex artistic and social elements to non-elite audiences. (The all-singing operatic format alone would have been exotic to many prospective viewers, accustomed as they were to the spoken dialog of operetta and musical comedy.)

Joplin’s use of the conservative format of melodrama may have also stemmed from his understanding that much else of what he was offering was truly radical: despite isolated experiments, in America there still was not yet established a tradition of professional black stage drama. There were no nationally famous black playwrights, or black matinee idols (even the characters of “Uncle Tom” and “Topsy” were played by whites in blackface), or black acting companies presenting serious plays. Thankfully, these appalling realities began to slowly improve after the turn of the twentieth century; the first truly successful African-American acting troupe appeared in 1914, when Anita Bush founded her Colored Dramatic Stock Company in Harlem. And so against this deeply discouraging background, Scott Joplin’s attempt to introduce a serious work realistically portraying recent black history was both bold and anomalous. And yet he pushed even further: his protagonist is a magnetic young *woman*. His villains are not destroyed but reformed. The struggle he presents is philosophical: ignorance versus education. In essence, just as Scott Joplin had transformed ragtime, melding disparate folk and classical elements to create a new musical art, *Treemonisha* was his attempt to transform the American theater with a unique style of black lyric drama.

By the last quarter of the nineteenth century there were hundreds of black professional singers working throughout America. These were the people who were to bring *Treemonisha* to life on the stage. When attempting to reconstruct Joplin’s opera, knowledge of their singing styles is of paramount importance. How would they have sung these parts on the stage? There are a few early sound recordings of African-American singers and vocal ensembles for us to consult and, less helpfully, we have the written descriptions of contemporaneous critics. We can also extrapolate from data regarding a performer’s educational background and professional associations. (One thing is sure: they all had powerful voices, which was the one absolute necessity of all professional singers in those pre-microphone days.) But just who were Joplin’s performers? We have lists of a few names. The historical record also shows us that they were a tightly knit group who shared similar backgrounds, skills, and aspirations. They formed Scott Joplin’s milieu, and their capabilities and sensibilities strongly influenced the creation of both of his operas.

Another truth is that very few black professional singers of Joplin’s time had the benefit of systematic training in classical conservatories. Instead, they invented their own educational pathways and created their own opportunities, just as Joplin had done as a

composer. Almost all started as church singers, developing their talents (and expanding their repertoires) through keen observation, experience, and practice. Collectively, their artistic journeys are fascinating, inspiring, and deserve to be better remembered. An excellent representative case is that of the soprano Laura Moss (1875–1935), Scott Joplin’s 1913 choice for the title role of *Treemonisha*. Her life and career parallels that of many of her colleagues, and an examination of it provides us with valuable clues not only to how *Treemonisha* might have sounded on the stage, but also gives us a glimpse at the largely forgotten world of a turn-of-the-century black professional vocalist.

Laura McKintosh Moss was born and raised in Utica, in Western New York State. Laura’s father died while she was an infant; her stepfather (a hotel waiter by trade) was an avid amateur musician. Laura attended local public schools and began singing in her church. Soon word of her beautiful voice spread throughout the town, and she became a favorite soloist (both as a singer and an elocutionist) at school assemblies and church functions. She must have been receiving very good instruction somewhere, because as a teenager she was already performing arias in Italian. The local newspapers began to refer to her as “The Colored Nightingale,” “Utica’s Black Patti,” and the “Bronze Patti” (the latter both

references to the African-American classical soprano Matilda Sissieretta Jones [1869–1933], whose sobriquet “The Black Patti” was itself an allusion to the famous Italian opera star Adelina Patti). There was no “color line” in Utica, and audiences and performers of both races mixed freely there. Sometime in the mid-1890s Laura Moss made the great leap into show business. She rose to the top almost immediately, singing with her celebrated namesake as a member of the Black Patti Troubadours. Through this big-time connection, Miss Moss and her silvery voice were quickly welcomed into the top echelons of African-American talent. (Her colleagues in the Troubadours included soprano Abbie Mitchell, and the multi-gifted Ernest Hogan.) Within a decade Moss’s touring activities with the Troubadours and other black companies had taken her to Australia, New Zealand, Hawaii, all across the United States, and to Europe and Africa.

Laura Moss was a versatile musician and a versatile performer, both hallmarks of black stage professionals of her generation. She could sing grand opera (her diction and high register received compliments from white critics), but “old time plantation melodies” (by Stephen Foster) and spirituals were her forte. She also

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The Black Patti Troubadours, 1897–98 season.
Courtesy Thornton Hagert, Vernacular Music Research.



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Treemonisha in 1913: Miss Laura Moss, "The Colored Nightingale."
The Indianapolis Freeman, December 10, 1910.

loved minstrelsy and actually led a female minstrel troupe that cakewalked on into the 1920s. When occasion demanded, she did non-musical sketch comedy. Yet she also remained an active church singer throughout her life. Eventually, Moss's talents and skills placed her in almost all of the era's top African-American touring companies: the original Ernest Hogan-Billy McClain "Smart Set," Williams & Walker, Cole & Johnson, and the John Rucker, and "Jolly" Jim Larkins shows. In between these extended engagements she worked as a "single" in vaudeville, singing opera arias as the "Hawaiian Jenny Lind." In 1906 she became a lead in Ernest Hogan's hugely popular musical *Rufus Rastus*, which also toured widely (and which was conducted by H. Lawrence Freeman). After several years with Hogan, Laura Moss returned to vaudeville, working in leading Manhattan theaters. By 1911 most of the male movers and shakers of the black theater had died, causing a general decline in black touring activity. That year Laura Moss became co-manager of one of the South's leading African-American theaters (the Globe in Jacksonville, Florida) with another noted black soprano, Cordelia McClain. This was so unusual a situation that the *Indianapolis Freeman* ran an article about it, pointing out a beneficial side effect of the large touring troupes: "Those greater companies, excepting one or two, have

gone but they contributed immeasurably to the uplift of the Negro as an actor. . . . Among these that have gone out from the big shows like alumni of colleges, carrying the work of enlightenment, are Madams Cordelia McClain and Laura Moss. . . . Those coming into contact with them know them by the energy and ability they bring . . . inspiring new life into the old and staid, thus making the stage what it should be."

By the end of 1912 Laura Moss had left her managerial duties in Florida and was back touring in vaudeville. In March 1913, she was in Harlem singing operatic numbers in vaude at the Crescent Theatre. There, she was given the tough show-opening slot (the dreaded "one spot"). The critics were divided: the *Indianapolis Freeman* reported, "I'm sorry to say the Harlem people don't like her style of singing, never did and never will." The *New York Age*, on the other hand, claimed she had ". . . made friends" with her Crescent appearance.

It is impossible to say how Madame Moss and the "King of Ragtime Writers" met. Given the closeness of the African-American show business community, they very well could have been aware of each other for years. Joplin must have found her visually and vocally well suited to the part of Treemonisha; the one photograph of her that has come to light shows a beautiful, light-skinned (her

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character's only stated physical trait), and well proportioned young woman. Joplin must have engaged Moss for his company by the late spring of 1913. In early June she would have begun rehearsals. In mid-July she gave the performances in Bayonne. After that, *Treemonisha* fades into oblivion, but Laura Moss's career continued on. In December 1913 she was back singing in Harlem theaters, and getting good notices. She toured through the 1910s. By the early '20s, after touring much of the world, Laura Moss was content to spend most of her time back at home in Utica. She gave voice lessons, performed at musicales and in local theaters (once with a newcomer named Paul Robeson), and organized (and sang for) countless fundraisers for her church, the Hope Chapel. An esteemed member of her community, Miss Laura Moss passed away on July 7, 1935.

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The most important aspect in reconstructing *Treemonisha* is determining what kind of orchestra would have performed it. This is the key to any attempt to authentically re-create Scott Joplin's theatrical "soundscape." There is no evidence that the composer had scored his work for a typical European-style opera orchestra, or that he desired for it to ever be played by one. Indeed, the very essence of Joplin's music makes it unsuitable for the tonal weight produced by such entities. When he

rather defensively stated in 1913 that "... the score complete is grand opera." He was simply emphasizing that the *format* he was using was that of true opera (i.e., all-sung), and not the typical hodgepodge entertainments that many of his contemporaries were calling (with or without irony) "operas." It is clear that Joplin created this unique new work for presentation in mid-sized music halls and vaudeville theaters. These venues—as well as tens of thousands of similar ones across the United States—employed a very different species of pit-orchestra—the ubiquitous American "Eleven & Pno." ensemble. Developed in the 1870s, this combination was the universal accompanist for variety, vaudeville, musical comedy, and operetta in American theaters up into the early 1920s. Its standardized instrumentation consisted of flute (doubling piccolo), clarinet, first and second cornets, trombone, drums, piano, first and second violins, viola, cello, and double bass. This very efficient little "band" evolved as a result of both economic and artistic considerations: it made a clear, full sound, could play popular and classical music, was compact enough to fit into typical pits, and only added a dozen more names to a theater's payroll list. Happily, from a musical standpoint, the Eleven & Pno. orchestra was admirable for this setting; it supported singers on the stage without

overwhelming them (the microphone was not perfected until the mid-1920s, and was not routinely used in theaters until the 1950s), yet could play powerfully enough to fill the typical theaters of the day (which ranged from eight hundred to fifteen hundred seats). To Scott Joplin, the appealing sound of these nimble and distinctly American orchestras would have been as natural as breathing.

In his original 1911 *Treemonisha* piano/vocal score Joplin presents us with further clues as to his orchestral intentions: there are several instances where he specifies instruments to play certain passages. The only ones indicated are members of the simple Eleven & Pno. orchestra; there are no mentions of oboes, bassoons, French horns, tuba, or harp—instruments that figure prominently in the 1970s orchestrations. Further, Joplin's cuing of the string entrances are always in the singular (as in "violin" or "cello"), indicating that the composer was not expecting to hear string *sections*. That traditional European orchestral sound was based on large

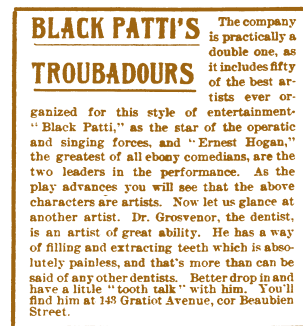
numbers of violins, violas, cellos, and basses playing continuously; string tone predominates, while the winds and brasses are interjected for coloristic effects. But in our young republic, a reversed aesthetic had arisen for theater music: the woodwinds and brasses played almost

continuously, forming the basic sound, while the small group of strings provided the "color." (And the piano tagged along at all times, strengthening where necessary.) Thus, for all of these reasons and after much research, I concluded that *Treemonisha* should be scored for the standard Eleven & Pno. theater orchestra, which PRO re-creates precisely on this recording.

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A word must be interjected here about the banjo, and its non-appearance in this

reconstruction. The banjo is of course an ancient African instrument, transported to our shores during the dark days of slavery. However, I am quite certain that Scott Joplin did not want it for *Treemonisha*, and would have objected to its modern-day interpolation there. As a



Detroit Lyceum Theater advertisement,
September 1899.

matter of history, *all* the African-American theater composers for “book shows” of that period (Will Marion Cook, H. Lawrence Freeman, Joe Jordan, and others) strenuously avoided the banjo because of its overwhelming associations with minstrelsy: for much of the nineteenth century the instrument had been commandeered by white showmen for their phony and demeaning depictions of “plantation life.” For progressive African-Americans at the dawn of the twentieth century, the banjo and banjo playing had become another bitter and cringe-inducing “happy darcy” stereotype that they were desperately trying to move away from. Consequently, all composers of color kept it away from their theater music. (I have examined the orchestrations for many pre-1925 black theater productions, and I have *never* encountered the use of a banjo.) Joplin especially, taking great pains to establish a tone of culture and refinement, knew that a strumming banjo would have all too easily sent his audiences’ thoughts spiraling off to old unwanted associations. Instead, his “banjo figurations” would have been suggested by the viola, or ‘cello (*pizzicato*), or on the piano, with or without a “newspaper mute.” Interestingly,

[64.]

The Calumet Theatre Orchestra, Herman Busse, conductor. A typical American pit-orchestra of the 1900s and 1910s, photographed here out-of-doors in South Chicago in the summer of 1908.



this aversion to the banjo in African-American theater music extended well into the 1920s; even the slaphappy Eubie Blake/Noble Sissle musical comedy *Shuffle Along* (scored by the great black orchestrator Will Vodery) eschewed it.

Once I had determined the type of orchestra appropriate for performing *Treemonisha*, I had to get down to the really large task of re-creating Scott Joplin's missing orchestrations. I began this five-year project in 1993. It was a fascinating effort, because the technique of American theater orchestra scoring from the early 1900s was very much a lost art. It was quite different from the methods of classical orchestration that I had been taught, and yet it was also unlike the brassy "Broadway Sound" that dominated our musical theater from the mid-1920s until the late '50s. Fortunately, I had previously accumulated many resources which proved to be invaluable for this undertaking: I had my own then-nine-thousand-title collection of historic theater orchestra arrangements (c.1870–1925), which included a handful of surviving orchestrations by Joplin himself. This was a gold mine of models for analysis and guidance. Along the way I also acquired and pored over a considerable number of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American books on arranging and orchestration. These provided interesting theory. More helpful were the period magazines published for

theater musicians (*The Dominant*, *The Musical Enterprise*, and *The Leader* were but a few); these not only had articles on arranging, but each had "Departments" devoted to a variety of pertinent topics. Of value too were antique texts for producers and managers; *Julius Cahn's Official Theatrical Guide* (published annually 1896–c. 1922), for example, gives complete technical data on *every* theater in North America, including the sizes of their orchestras and the names of their house conductors.

As you listen to our *Treemonisha* pit orchestra, you will notice that its inherent sound is somewhat novel to modern ears. Yet it was once a very familiar one to millions of people, the result of instrumental arranging techniques that are no longer fashionable. First, all the chords are "voiced" in a very open manner. This provides great fullness using a very small number of players. The strings are written for one-one-a-part performance, with the 1st violin covering the melody (thus usually doubling the vocal soloists) and the 2nd violin and viola playing rhythmic chordal accompaniments with frequent double- and triple-stops. The cello mainly provides flowing counter melodies, and in its high register is used for poignant solos. (In dramatic moments it descends to reinforce the orchestra's lower registers.) The double bass plays Joplin's eminently satisfying bass lines which include

many interesting solos and solis. At the top of the orchestra, the flute (and piccolo, both played by one performer) doubles the melody in the higher octaves and frequently offers flights of decorative "filigree." Its partner, the clarinet, assists in these duties, usually in lower harmony. But often—due to its large range—the clarinet is found strengthening the lower strings and filling in brass chords. For twenty-first-century listeners, the most unusual sounds of the Eleven & Pno. come from the cornets. These once-esteemed soprano brasses are capable of creating a far wider array of sounds than the trumpet. They were the "secret ingredient" of vintage American theater music; arrangers and cornetists of a century ago delighted in their timbral versatility. They play continuously: often the 1st cornet doubles the melody, especially in "big" moments, usually an octave below the 1st violin; the second plays concerted harmony notes or short fanfare figures. The cornets also play soft sustained accompaniments in unobtrusive support of the other instruments or the voices on the stage. And using a variety of mutes, they can simulate the oboe, French horn, or other "exotic" instruments. (All of these characteristics are very skillfully demonstrated on this recording by our players, using a matched set of 1910s Conn "New Wonder" cornets from the PRO collection.) The slide trombone was also a

star member of these small orchestras, and its new, nimble technique was an American innovation that had considerably changed the traditional roles of this ancient instrument. In American theaters, the trombone was both a tenor and a bass instrument, routinely tossing off passages that would have terrified Brahms's stolid players. Like the cornets, it was used with a variety of mutes. The trombone was usually a supporting voice, but occasionally takes the lead, as toward the end of "Treemonisha's Return" (disc 2, track 3), where Scott Joplin's piano/vocal score specifies a novel syncopated solo for it. The upright piano was another standard member of the American pit orchestra—and another diversion from nineteenth-century European practice. Here it functioned almost as a sort of "continuo" (although its part was written-out), playing bass lines and chordal accompaniments, generally reinforcing the strings and woodwinds. A percussion instrument, the piano added a decided "ping" to the ensemble's attack, another charming characteristic of period American theater music. The "stage left" side of every orchestra pit was the drummer's magical domain. This single musician had more than a dozen instruments to play—drums (including timpani), cymbals, "mallets" (glockenspiel, xylophone, and chimes), and various sound effects. As a matter of course he had to move instantly from one to the other.

Timing was everything, and he usually had to watch the stage (for synchronized “hits”), the conductor (hopefully), and his score all at the same time! Theater drummers often attained celebrity status, and prided themselves on their large collections of instruments; photos from the 1910s invariably show them peering out smiling impishly from among a vast clutter of equipment. For *Treemonisha* the drummer plays the usual drum set and timps, and also those old staples of melodrama—the thunder sheet, wind whistle, and ratchet. All the instruments heard on this recording are authentic period antiques.

In 1998 I finished my new orchestration of *Treemonisha* (more than six hundred pages of score and parts) and began to program excerpts from it during Paragon Ragtime Orchestra concerts. Finally, in 2003 we had the opportunity to present the entire opera in semi-staged form at San Francisco’s delightful Stern Grove Festival. This was warmly received by the audience, and attracted significant and positive media coverage. At that time we established the Paragon Singers, a professional stock company to produce *Treemonisha* and other early African-American stage works in authentic period style. In this we were very fortunate to collaborate with Richard Thompson, the brilliant black stage director. The company toured a bit though the ’00s, sometimes billed as “The New Scott Joplin

Opera Company.” Our absolute high point came in 2005, when we brought *Treemonisha* for the first time ever to Scott Joplin’s hometown—Texarkana, Texas-Arkansas. There, in the town’s historic music hall, we performed the opera for a capacity audience which included many members of the Joplin family. The star of the show, however, turned out to be the composer’s closest living relation, his eighty-something-year-old grandniece, LaErma White. A lifelong resident of Texarkana, Mrs. White proudly took center stage and read Scott Joplin’s written Preface before the overture. It was a riveting performance, and we are delighted and honored that she has graciously agreed to record it especially for the appendix of this production.

For much of the biographical information presented here I am indebted to the research work of Dr. Edward A. Berlin, whose 1994 book King of Ragtime is a marvel of scholarship and remains the definitive biography of Scott Joplin. — R.B.

Based in historic Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, **The Paragon Ragtime Orchestra** is the world’s only year-round, professional ensemble specializing in the authentic re-creation of “America’s Original Music”—the sounds of early musical theater, silent cinema, and vintage ballroom dancing. PRO came into being as the result of Rick Benjamin’s 1985 discovery of thousands of early 1900s orchestra scores of the Victor recording star Arthur Pryor. In 1988 the Orchestra made its formal debut at Alice Tully Hall—the first concert ever presented at Lincoln Center by such an ensemble. Since then PRO has appeared at hundreds of leading arts venues, including the Ravinia Festival, the Smithsonian Institution, Chautauqua, Philadelphia’s Kimmel Center, the Brucknerhaus (Austria), and in New York’s 92nd Street Y and City Center. PRO’s music inspired master choreographer Paul Taylor’s dance, *Ob, You Kid!*, which was premiered at The Kennedy Center jointly by the Paul Taylor Dance Company and the Paragon and has since toured the world. In late 2003 the Orchestra premiered Rick Benjamin’s reconstruction of Scott Joplin’s 1911 opera *Treemonisha* to acclaim at San Francisco’s Stern Grove Festival. More recently, PRO had the honor of appearing twice as special guests of the Minnesota Orchestra in Orchestra Hall, Minneapolis.

In addition to its worldwide concert hall, university, and festival appearances, PRO has

acquired a considerable following both here and abroad through its radio programs on the *New York Times’* WQXR, National Public Radio, the British Broadcasting Corp., and the *Voice of America* networks. Since 1989 the Walt Disney Company has relied on the Orchestra for the recorded theme music heard on *Main Street, U.S.A.* at Disneyland, Disney World, and Disneyland Paris, and in 1992 PRO proudly served as “Ambassador of Goodwill” for the United States at the World’s Fair in Seville, Spain. Over the past twenty-five years the Orchestra has been heard on the soundtracks of several feature films and television programs, and its audio and video recordings have been widely praised and considered instrumental in rekindling interest in the rich history and tradition of the American theater orchestra.
www.paragonragtime.com

Conductor **Rick Benjamin** has built a career upon the discovery and performance of American music from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He is the founder and director of the Paragon Ragtime Orchestra, which uses his extraordinary 10,000-title collection of historic American orchestra music (c. 1870–1925) as the basis of its repertoire. In addition to his work with Paragon, Mr. Benjamin maintains active careers as a pianist, arranger, and tubist. As a conductor he leads many notable ensembles, including the

National Orchestra of Ireland (Dublin), the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, the Aalborg and Aarhus Symfoniorkestere in Denmark, the Olympia Symphony (Washington State), the National Orchestra of Iceland, the Erie Philharmonic, and Opera Memphis. Mr. Benjamin is also a leading researcher in the field of silent film music; he has unearthed the original orchestral accompaniments to many great motion pictures of the 1900s, '10s and '20s, and has conducted for more than six hundred screenings across North America and Europe. His articles on historic music appear in several publications, and lecture tours have taken him to more than a hundred colleges and universities throughout North America. He is continuing work on his books *The American Theater Orchestra* and *Encyclopedia of Arrangers & Orchestrators: 1875–1925*. Rick Benjamin was educated at The Juilliard School in New York City. www.rickbenjamin.com

Soprano **Janinah Burnett's** (Lucy) talents have allowed her to grace the stages of Broadway, the Metropolitan Opera, and many other notable venues. An original cast member of Baz Luhrmann's *La Bohème* on Broadway as Mimi, other performances include Bess in Cape Town Opera's production of *Porgy and Bess* at the Deutsche Oper Berlin, Norina in *Don Pasquale* with Connecticut Opera, Violetta in *La Traviata* with Opera Columbus, and Margru

in Anthony Davis's *Amistad* at the Spoleto Festival USA in Charleston. She recently covered Musetta in *La Bohème*, Frasquita in *Carmen*, and Yvette in *La Rondine* at the Metropolitan Opera, and sang Leila in *The Pearl Fishers* with Syracuse Opera. Upcoming performances include Susanna in Baltimore Opera's production of *Le Nozze di Figaro*.

Bass **Frederick Jackson** (Luddud), a Georgia native, made his debut in the title role of Porgy with PAB Theatre Inc.'s touring production of *Porgy and Bess* to wide critical acclaim. Mr. Jackson has been heard in some of the world's leading opera houses including the Zurich Opera, the Hamburgische Staatsoper, and New York City Opera. He has also appeared with the Atlanta Opera, the Virginia Opera, Opera Southwest, Houston Opera Ebony, and Lyric Opera Cleveland. Mr. Jackson completed his studies at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music.

Soprano and music educator **Anita Johnson** (Treemonisha) has had the honor of performing at the White House for President Obama and the joy of performing with Stevie Wonder at the Greek Theater in Los Angeles. She has also performed at the Metropolitan Opera and with other prominent opera companies and symphony orchestras across America, Germany and Italy. She has educated audiences through her one-woman shows *Black Roots of Song* and

ABCs: American Black Composers' Contributions to Our Musical Heritage. She created, directed, produced, and performed the concert event *He's Got the Whole World in His Hand* and has visited universities and colleges as a guest artist giving recitals and master classes in Performance Excellence. Ms. Johnson has a B.M. from the University of Southern California and an M.M. and K-12 Music Certification from the University of Michigan. She is a graduate of the Metropolitan Opera's Lindemann Young Artist Development Program. www.anitadiva.com

Robert Mack (Andy) has received excellent reviews for his powerful but sweet lyric tenor voice throughout the United States and Europe. He has performed principal roles with such noted opera companies as New York City Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Opera Carolina, Opera Bastille (Paris), and Teatro Real in Spain, as well as in the Metropolitan Opera's productions of *La Fanciulla del West* and *The Nose*. He toured with the nationally acclaimed Three Mo' Tenors and recorded the role of Sportin' Life from *Porgy and Bess* with the Nashville Symphony. He co-founded and is the general manager of Opera Noire of New York.

Tenor **Chauncey Packer** (Remus) received his undergraduate degree from the University of Mobile, Alabama, and his M.M. from

the University of New Orleans and did his postgraduate studies at Louisiana State University. Mr. Packer has performed the roles of Steuermann in *Die Fliegende Holländer*, Amon in Phillip Glass's *Akhnaten*, Alfredo in *La Traviata*, and Rodolfo in *La Bohème*. He has performed the role of Sportin' Life in *Porgy and Bess* with the Atlanta Opera, New Orleans Opera, San Francisco Opera, Opera Birmingham, Mobile Opera, Opera Grand Rapids, Pensacola Opera, Tulsa Opera, and in many major European cities. He has also performed *Porgy and Bess* on tours in Japan and with the Opéra Comique in Paris. He is featured on the 2006 Decca recording of *Porgy and Bess* conducted by John Mauceri with the Nashville Symphony. Mr. Packer has also performed concert works with several symphony orchestras across America and in Europe.

Todd Payne (Simon) is an Associate Professor of Music at Missouri State University in Springfield, Missouri, and maintains an active and varied career as a performer. His credits include appearances with the Houston Grand Opera, Opera Memphis, the Indianapolis Opera, Illinois Opera Theater, the Santa Fe Opera, Opera Theatre St. Louis, the Chicago Opera Theatre, the Springfield Regional Opera, Eastern Illinois Symphony, the Rockford

Symphony, and the Memphis Symphony. In 1999, Dr. Payne made his European debut in Austria in Haydn's *Die Jahreszeiten* and Beethoven's *Mass in C*. In 2012 Dr. Payne will take two leading roles in a national touring production of *Porgy and Bess*. He holds music degrees from the University of Memphis and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Baritone **Edward Pleasant** (Zodzetrick), a native of Midland, Texas, has distinguished himself as a versatile performer and as a gifted actor in opera and musical theater. Career highlights include his appearance in the role of Jake in New York City Opera's production of *Porgy and Bess*. He was also seen in that production's historic Emmy-nominated Live from Lincoln Center telecast on PBS. He has frequently performed at Avery Fisher Hall, Alice Tully Hall, and Carnegie Hall, and he has also sung in other prominent venues such as the Texas State Capitol and the White House. Mr. Pleasant's discography includes *The Seven Last Words of Christ* for Gothic Records, Kurt Weill's *The Flight of Lindbergh* for Voices International, and a special 250th-anniversary edition of *The Music of Mozart* for the Madacy label. He can also be heard on *Black Manbattan* with the Paragon Ragtime Orchestra (New World Records).

Mezzo-soprano **AnnMarie Sandy** (Monisha) sang the feature role of Eliza Jane in the Central City Opera world-premiere production of Henry Mollicone's *Gabriel's Daughter*. She has performed in the ensemble casts of Lyric Opera of Chicago's premiere of *Porgy and Bess*, and New York City Opera's premiere of Richard Danielpour's *Margaret Garner*. She has performed the role of Stephano in Opera North's production of *Roméo et Juliette* and Second Lady in Brevard Music Center's production of *The Magic Flute*. Ms. Sandy also performed the role of Monisha with the Paragon Ragtime Orchestra, in the birthplace premiere of Scott Joplin's *Treemonisha*. Other roles include Mère Marie in *Dialogues des Carmélites*, Mercedes in *Carmen*, and Hansel in *Hansel and Gretel*. In 2007, Ms. Sandy made her Lincoln Center debut performing the alto solo of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9* in Avery Fisher Hall with the Metropolitan Youth Orchestra. www.annmariesandy.com

Phumzile Sojola (Cephus) hails from Nelson Mandela Bay, South Africa. A graduate of the University of Kentucky, with further studies at the Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, he sang Popo in William Grant Still's opera *Trouble Island* with New York City Opera, Herrison in Chabrier's *L'Etoile*, and the Leader in Kurt Weill's *Lost in the Stars* with Skylark

Opera. He premiered the role of Arthur in Nathan Davis's *Just Above My Head* with the Opera Theater of Pittsburgh. Mr. Sojola has also had the pleasure of performing at the Edinburgh Festival and Opéra National de Lyon. He is currently performing in American Repertory Theater's new version of *Porgy and Bess*.

Bass-baritone **Darren Stokes** (Parson Alltalk) began his professional music career in 1995 with the Virginia Opera chorus. After graduating with a degree in chemistry from Norfolk State University, he moved to New York and worked as a chemist until pursuing a career in opera. In 2004, Mr. Stokes was granted the opportunity to sing the role of York in Michael Ching's opera *Corps of Discovery* with Opera Memphis in Tennessee, thereby beginning his professional career. Mr. Stokes has added more than 43 roles to his repertoire since embarking on a singing career. In addition to the Lyric Opera of Chicago, San Francisco Opera, and Washington National Opera, he has sung with the Nashville Symphony, the Chicago Symphony, and made his debut with the Cleveland Orchestra at Carnegie Hall. www.darrenstokes.com

Bass-baritone **Frank Ward, Jr.** (Ned) is a singer of opera, oratorio, and recital literature. He made his European debut singing the role

of Don Bartolo in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* in Rome with Opera Estate. Mr. Ward's current project features rarely performed show tunes by African-American composers from the world of Tin Pan Alley and vaudeville (circa 1900). Featured composers include J. Rosamond Johnson, James Weldon Johnson and Bob Cole. He also specializes in art songs and spirituals by such African-American composers as Howard Swanson, Margaret Bonds, and H.T. Burleigh. Mr. Ward holds degrees from Morehouse College (Bachelor of Arts) and the University of Michigan (Master of Music and Doctor of Musical Arts). www.frankwardjr.com

Following page: The Paragon Ragtime Orchestra & Singers recording *Treemonisha* at the American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York, June 1, 2011.

Paragon Ragtime Orchestra

Rick Benjamin, conductor & music director

Caroline Chin, 1st violin & concertmaster

Bryony Stroud-Watson, 2nd violin

Thomas Rosenthal, viola

Alistair MacRae, cello

Troy Rinker, bass

Leslie Cullen, flute & piccolo

Alicia Lee, clarinet

Nathan Botts, cornet

Paul Murphy, cornet

Tim Albright, trombone

Diane Scott, piano

James Musto III, drums, mallets, timpani & sound effects

The "Rest Awhile" Quartet

Phumzile Sojola

Taiwan Norris

Steven Herring

Nathaniel E. Thompson

The Paragon Singers

Diane Scott, Chorus Master

Sopranos

Heather Hill, Pamela Jones,

Andrea Jones-Sojola, Mari-Yan Pringle

Altos

Linda T. Williams, Taleesha J. Scott, Geraldine McMillan

Tenors

Phumzile Sojola, Taiwan Norris

Basses

Nathaniel E. Thompson, Steven Herring, Frederick Jackson



TREEMONISHA.

by Scott Joplin

TREEMONISHA.

Synopsis.

Act I—Morning. Act II—Afternoon. Act III—Evening.

Preface.

The scene of the opera is laid on a plantation somewhere in the State of Arkansas, northeast of the town of Texarkana and three or four miles from the Red River. The plantation being surrounded by a dense forest.

There were several Negro families living on the plantation and other families back in the woods.

In order that the reader may better comprehend the story, I will give a few details regarding the Negroes of this plantation from the year 1866 to the year 1884.

The year 1866 finds them in dense ignorance, with no-one to guide them, as the white folks had moved away shortly after the Negroes were set free and had left the plantation in charge of a trustworthy negro servant named Ned.

All of the Negroes, but Ned and his wife Monisha, were superstitious, and believed in conjuring. Monisha, being a woman, was at times impressed by what the more expert conjurers would say.

Ned and Monisha had no children, and they had often prayed that their cabin home might one day be brightened by a child that would be a companion for Monisha when Ned was away from home. They had dreams, too, of educating the child so that when it grew up it could teach the people around them to aspire to something better and higher than superstition and conjuring.

The prayers of Ned and Monisha were answered in a remarkable manner. One morning in the middle of September 1866, Monisha found a baby under a tree that grew in front of her cabin. It proved to be a light-brown-skinned girl about two days old. Monisha took the baby into the cabin, and Ned and she adopted it as their own.

They wanted the child, while growing up, to love them as it would love its real parents, so they decided to keep it in ignorance of the manner in which it came to them until old enough to understand. They realized, too, that if the neighbors knew the facts, they would someday tell the child, so, to deceive

them, Ned hitched up his mules and, with Monisha and the child, drove to a family of old friends who lived twenty miles away and whom they had not seen for three years. They told their friends that the child was just a week old.

Ned gave these people six bushels of corn and forty pounds of meat to allow Monisha and the child to stay with them for eight weeks, which Ned thought would benefit the health of Monisha. The friends willingly consented to have her stay with them for that length of time.

Ned went back alone to the plantation and told his neighbors that Monisha, while visiting some old friends, had become the mother of a girl baby.

The neighbors were, of course, greatly surprised, but were compelled to believe that Ned's story was true.

At the end of the eight weeks Ned took Monisha and the child home and received the congratulations of his neighbors and friends and was delighted to find that his scheme had worked so well.

Monisha, at first, gave the child her own name; but when the child was three years old, she was so fond of playing under the tree where she was found that Monisha gave her the name of Tree-Monisha.

When Treemonisha was seven years old Monisha arranged with a white family that she would do their washing and ironing and Ned would chop their wood if the lady of the house would give Treemonisha an education, the schoolhouse being too far away for the child to attend. The lady consented and as a result Treemonisha was the only educated person in the neighborhood, the other children being still in ignorance on account of their inability to travel so far to school.

Zodzetrick, Luddud, and Simon, three very old men, earned their living by going about the neighborhood practicing conjuring, selling little luck-bags and rabbits' feet, and confirming the people in their superstition.



This strain of music is the principal strain in the Opera and represents the happiness of the people when they feel free from the conjurors and their spells of superstition.

The opera begins in September 1884. Treemonisha, being eighteen years old, now starts upon her career as a teacher and leader. — Scott Joplin

{Note: Scott Joplin's complete stage directions are included in italics. The spelling, capitalization, and punctuation are reproduced below exactly as they are found in Joplin's original 1911 rehearsal score.}

TREEMONISHA

Act I—Morning

[Track 1]

No. 1 OVERTURE.

[Track 2]

No. 2 THE BAG OF LUCK. Quintet.
(*Curtain rises. Zodzetrick enters.*)

Zodzetrick (*to Monisha*):

I want to sell to you dis bag o' luck, Yo' enemies it will keep away.

[80.] Over yo' front do' you can hang it, An' good luck will come each day.

Monisha: Will it drive away de blues? An' stop Ned from drinkin' booze?

Zodzetrick: It will drive de blues, I'm thinkin', An' will stop Ned from booze-drinkin'.

Monisha (*reaching for bag*): Well!

Ned (*angrily*): No, dat bag you'se not gwine to buy, 'Cause I know de price is high.

Zodzetrick: I mus' tell you plain an' bold, It is worth its weight in gold.

Ned: It may be worth its weight in diamonds rare, Or worth the earth to you.

But to me, it ain't worth a possum's hair, Or persimmons when they're new.

Drinkin' gin I would not stop, If dat bag was on my chin.

I'm goin' to drink an' work my crop, 'Cause I think it is no sin.

Monisha: Dis here bag will heaps o' luck bring, An' we need here jes dis kind o' thing.

Ned: You shall not buy dat bag, 'Cause I don't want it here.

'Nough o' dat thing we've had. 'Twill do us harm, I fear.

(*to Zodzetrick*.)

Say ole man, you won't do, You's a stranger to me. Tell me, who are you?

Zodzetrick: Zodzetrick—I am de Goofer dus' man, An' I'm king of Goofer dus' lan'.

Strange things appear when I say "Hee hoo!"

Strange things appear when I say "Hee hoo!"

(*Zodzetrick starts away. Exit Ned. Monisha goes into the cabin.*)

Treemonisha (*to Zodzetrick*): Wait, sir, for a few moments stay,

You should listen to what I have to say.

Please come closer to me, come along, And I'll tell you of your great wrong.

(*Zodzetrick marks a cross on the ground spits on it and turns back.*)

Zodzetrick: I've come back, my dear child, to hear what you say,

Go on with your story, I can't stay all day.

Treemonisha: You have lived without working

for many years.

All by your tricks of conjury.

You have caused superstition and many sad tears.

You should stop, you are doing great injury.

Zodzetrick: You 'cuse me wrong for injury I'se not done,

An' it won't be long 'fore I'll make you from me run.

I have dis bag o' luck, 'tis true, So take care, I'll send bad luck to you.

Remus: Shut up old man, enough you've said; You can't fool Treemonisha—she has a level head.

She is the only educated person of our race, For many long miles far away from this place.

She'll break the spell of superstition in the neighborhood,

And all you foolish conjurors will have to be good.

To read and write she has taught me, and I am very thankful,

I have more sense now, you can see, and to her I'm very grateful.

You'd better quit your foolish ways—and all this useless strife,

You'd better change your ways today—and live a better life.

Zodzetrick: I don't care what you say, I will never change my way.

(*He starts away.*)

I'm goin' now, but I'll be back soon, Long 'fore another new moon.

Did you all hear me?

Treemonisha & Remus: Yes, and we are glad you are going.

(*They stand looking at Zodzetrick as he walks slowly away.*)

Hope he'll stay away from here always, always.

[Track 3]

No. 3 "THE CORN-HUSKERS."

Corn-Huskers (*Chorus of Corn-Huskers in distance*): Very fine day.

Treemonisha: The folks are coming to husk our corn,

I hear them singing a very sweet song.

See, there they are now, almost here, I'm glad the day is clear.

(*Enter Corn-Huskers.*)

Corn-Huskers: Hello!

Treemonisha & Remus: Hello!

Corn-Huskers: We've come to husk de corn.

Treemonisha: Shall we have a Ring-play before we work today?

Corn-Huskers: Yes, and we'll stay the whole day long.

[81.]

[Track 4]

No. 4 “WE’RE GOIN’ AROUND.”

A RING PLAY.

(All form a ring by joining hands, including Lucy, Andy’s partner; Andy stands in the center of the ring.)

Andy *(All begin circling)*: Dere was a man befo’ de war,

Corn-Huskers: O, we’re goin’ around.

Andy: Said he didn’t like his moth’n-law,

Corn-Huskers: O, we’re goin’ around.

Andy: I know we’ll have a jolly good time,

Corn-Huskers: O, we’re goin’ around.

Andy: Because de weather’s very fine,

[82.] Corn-Huskers: O, we’re goin’ around.

(Stop circling.)

(Andy swings his partner—Lucy—the next lady to her swinging Lucy each time before swinging each succeeding lady. Every time Andy swings his partner the other gentlemen swing their partners.)

Andy: Swing dat lady,

Corn-Huskers: Goin’ around.

Andy: Swing dat lady,

Corn-Huskers: Goin’ around.

Andy: Swing her gently,

Corn-Huskers: Goin’ around, Keep on goin’

around, ’round. Swing,

Andy: Swing dat gent’mun,

Corn-Huskers: Goin’ around.

Andy: Swing dat gent’mun,

Corn-Huskers: Goin’ around. Swing, swing,

goin’ around,

Keep on a-goin’ around, keep a-goin’ ’round.

(Andy is in circle; Lucy, in center, swings Andy, then next gentleman to him, swinging Andy again before swinging another gentleman.)

Andy: Gals all smilin’,

Corn-Huskers: Goin’ around.

Andy: Gals all smilin’,

Corn-Huskers: Goin’ around.

Andy: Smilin’ sweetly,

Corn-Huskers: Goin’ around. Keep on goin’

around, ’round. Boys,

Andy: Boys all smilin’,

Corn-Huskers: Goin’ around.

Andy: Boys all smilin’,

Corn-Huskers: Goin’ around. Swing, swing,

goin’ around, Keep on a-goin’ around, around.

(Lucy in circle; first gentleman to the right of Andy goes center.)

Andy *(Begin Circling)*: All join hands an circle

once mo’,

Corn-Huskers: O, we’re goin’ around.

Andy: Don’t go fast, an’ don’t go slow,

Corn-Huskers: O, we’re goin’ around.

Andy: Let yo’ steps be light an’ neat,

Corn-Huskers: O, we’re goin’ around.

Andy: Be careful how you shake yo’ feet,

Corn-Huskers: O, we’re goin’ around.

(Stop circling.)

(Gentleman in center swings his partner, &c.)

Andy: Swing dat lady,

Corn-Huskers: Goin’ around.

Andy: Swing dat lady,

Corn-Huskers: Goin’ around.

Andy: Swing her gently,

Corn-Huskers: Goin’ around, Keep on goin’

around, ’round. Swing,

Andy: Swing dat gent’mun,

Corn-Huskers: Goin’ around.

Andy: Swing dat gent’mun,

Corn-Huskers: Goin’ around. Swing, swing,

goin’ around,

Keep on a-goin’ around, keep a-goin’ ’round,
(Gentleman, in center, goes back to the circle and his partner goes to center.)

Andy: Gals all smilin’,

Corn-Huskers: Goin’ around.

Andy: Gals all smilin’,

Corn-Huskers: Goin’ around.

Andy: Smilin’ sweetly,

Corn-Huskers: Goin’ around. Keep on goin’

around, ’round. Boys,

Andy: Boys all smilin’,

Corn-Huskers: Goin’ around.

Andy: Boys all smilin’,

Corn-Huskers: Goin’ around.

Swing, swing, goin’ around, Keep on a-goin’

around,

(They sit around the corn and begin busking slowly.)

’Round, ’round, ’round.

[Track 5]

No. 5 THE WREATH.

Treemonisha: You girls are wearing wreaths on your heads,

(Monisha opens the cabin door and stands, listening.)

And I am wearing a bonnet instead.

Lucy: You should wear a wreath made of pretty leaves.

Treemonisha: Now to make my wreath, I see, I must have leaves from that tree.

Monisha: No! Not a leaf from dat tree take,
Leave ’em there, child, for my sake,

Take ’em from another tree, An’ very fine yo’ wreath will be.

Treemonisha: There are pretty leaves on this tree so near,

But, to please you, I’ll to another tree go.

Tell me why this tree is, to you, so dear?

Chorus: Please tell us, we would all like to know.

[Track 6]

No. 6 “THE SACRED TREE.”

Monisha: One Autumn night in bed I was lying, Just eighteen years ago,

[83.]

I heard a dear little baby crying, While loudly
Ned did snore.
And the baby's crying seemed to be somewhere
near that sacred tree,
And the baby's crying seemed to be somewhere
near that sacred tree.
It was twelve o'clock, or just before, When the
rain fell hard and fast,
The baby's cries I heard no more, It had gone to
sleep at last.

And very quiet it seemed to be, Somewhere
near that sacred tree,
And very quiet it seemed to be, Somewhere
near that sacred tree.

[84.]

I came out in the yard to see, And find out
where the child could be;
And there, in rags, the baby laid, Sheltered by
that tree's cool shade.
I found it where I thought 'twould be, There
besides that sacred tree,
I found it where I thought 'twould be, There
besides that sacred tree.
I took the child into our home, And now the
darling girl is grown,
All I've said to you is true, The child I've told
you of is you.
Take not a leaf but leave them be, On that dear
old sacred tree;
Take not a leaf but leave them be, On that dear
old sacred tree.

The rain or the burning sun, you see, Would
have sent you to your grave,
But the sheltering leaves of that old tree, Your
precious life did save.
So now with me you must agree, Not to harm
that sacred tree;
So now with me you must agree, Not to harm
that sacred tree.

[Track 7]

No. 7 **SURPRISED.**

Treemonisha: I am greatly surprised to know
that you are not my mother.
Corn-Huskers: We are all surprised, surprised.

[Track 8]

No. 8 **“TREEMONISHA'S BRINGING
UP.”** (Recitative)

Monisha: We brought you up to believe that
we were your real parents.
We saw nothing wrong in doing so.
If our friends and acquaintances had discovered
that you were not our own child,
It would only have been a question of time
when they would have told you the truth.
On a dark still night, Ned hitched up the old
mules, and taking you,
We were soon driving along the road, And the

next day were twenty miles away.
Calling on some friends, We told them that you
were our first-born and that I intended to stay
at their house for eight weeks for the benefit of
my health.

We presented to our old friends six bushels of
corn and forty pounds of meat.
Ned went back to the old home and told the folks
all about his baby of a few days old.
The neighbors were much surprised at what Ned
told them, But of course believed him,
And so you have never learned the secret of your
birth until now.

When you were seven years old, There being no
school in the neighborhood,
A white lady undertook your education.
(*points to the trunk of the sacred tree.*)

I found you on that spot, And your parents I
know not;
Ned and I love you true; You have been a faithful
daughter.
Treemonisha: I love you and Ned too, And your
bidding I will do.
To me you have been a mother, And Ned has been
a father.

Monisha: When you were a little child of years
only three,
You were the most contented while playing near
that tree.
Monisha first I named you, The honor was for me.

Treemonisha next I named you, Because you
loved that tree.
Treemonisha: I will take leaves from another
tree, And very fine my wreath will be.
Corn-Huskers: Take them from another tree,
And very fine your wreath will be.
(*Treemonisha and Lucy go among the trees.*)

[Track 9]

No. 9 **“GOOD ADVICE.”**
(*Parson Alltalk enters.*)

Parson Alltalk: Lis'en friends, Do not tell lies
an' steal, because it ain't right.
Remember all I say to you, Because it's good
advice.

(*All kneel in prayer.*)
(*All rise.*)

Parson Alltalk: Does yer feel lak you've been
redeemed?
Chorus: O yes, ah feel lak I've been redeemed.
Parson Alltalk: Ain't yer glad yer have been
redeemed?
Chorus: O yes, om glad ah have been
redeemed.
Parson Alltalk: Does yer always aim ter speak
de truth?
Chorus: O yes, ah always aim ter speak de
truth.

[85.]

Parson Alltalk: Does yer love all yo' neighbors too?

Chorus: O yes, ah love all ma neighbors too.

Parson Alltalk: Lis'en friends, Always live lak brothers an' sisters, Because it is right.

Remember all I say to you, Because it's good advice.

Don't harm yo' brother, Don't harm yo' sister;
O, my neighbors, you must be good.

Chorus (*With closed lips.*): Un . . .

Parson Alltalk: Remember, each day, Yo' debts you should pay;

O, my neighbors, you must be good.

Chorus (*With closed lips.*): Un . . .

[86.]

Parson Alltalk: Does yer feel lak you've been redeemed?

Chorus: O yes, ah feel lak I've been redeemed.

Parson Alltalk: Ain't yer glad yer have been redeemed?

Chorus: O yes, om glad ah have been redeemed.

Parson Alltalk: Does yer always aim ter speak de truth?

Chorus: O yes, ah always aim ter speak de truth.

Parson Alltalk: Does yer love all yo' neighbors too?

Chorus: O yes, ah love all ma neighbors too.
(*Exit Parson Alltalk.*)

[Track 10]

No. 10 CONFUSION. Ensemble.

Monisha: Look! Lucy is comin' back, I can't see Treemonisha. I wonder where she is?

Lucy has somethin' over her mouth, An' her hands are tied behind her.

Chorus: [women:] What is de trouble [men:] What's wrong, Lucy?

(*Lucy enters and falls to the ground exhausted.*)

(*All gather around Lucy. Monisha unties Lucy's hands and takes the handkerchief from over her mouth. Lucy then sits up.*)

Chorus: Speak! Lucy, Speak! Lucy, Speak! Lucy, Speak! Where is Treemonisha?

[sopranos & altos] Speak to me, please speak to me!

[tenors] Speak, Speak, Speak, Speak, Speak, Speak, Speak, speak to me!

[basses:] Speak, Speak, Speak, Speak, speak to me!

Lucy: Zodzetrick an' Luddud have tied a han'kerchief over Treemonisha's mouth, An' have tied her han's behind her jes' lak dey tied mine.

Chorus: Tell it quick, quick! Tell it quick!

Lucy: An' Zodzetrick got on his mule's back An' lifted Treemonisha on after him,

Den galloped away into de woods.

(*Women crying.*) (*The crying need not be in strict*

time, but the accompaniment must be.)

(*Lucy rises and begins to cry.*)

Chorus Women: Oh—!

(*Spoken in crying tones*)

Go an' bring her back, boys.

Chorus Men: We will bring her back.

(*The corn-busking boys run down the road after the conjurors. Remus goes to the corn-field gets the scarecrow suit and disguises himself to follow and frighten the conjurors.*)

Chorus Women: Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh!

(*Ned comes running from the field.*)

Ned: Hey!

Monisha, speak! Where is Treemonisha an' de boys?

Monisha: Among the trees to gather leaves Treemonisha and Lucy went,

They thought not of the conjurous thieves, While on their pleasure bent.

But Zodzetrick and Luddud made haste while they could,

They have captured Treemonisha, and their threats they have made good.

The boys went to rescue her and bring her back to me,

She is our only daughter, and with us she ought to be.

Ned: I'll beat dat triffling Zodzetrick, Until he runs lak a big cur dog,

And I'll kill dat scoundrel Luddud,

(*Enter Remus*)

Jus' lak I would kill a hog.

Remus:

(*He puts on the scarecrow suit.*)

I'll wear dis ugly scare-crow, While through the woods I roam,

'Twill scare away the conjurors, And I'll bring Treemonisha home.

(*He goes running down the road.*)

(*Ned, Monisha and the girls look at Remus as he runs down the road.*)

Chorus: Run faster, Remus, Remus, Keep straight ahead.

Run faster, Remus, Remus, Keep straight ahead.

[87.]

(*Curtain down.*)

Act II—Afternoon

[Track 11]

No. 11 SUPERSTITION.

(*SCENE I. Woods. Conjurors meeting. Wasp's nest hanging on bush.*)

Simon: If along de road you're goin', An' all to yo' true knowin',
A black cat cross'd yo' path, Yo' bad luck will long last.

Conjurors: 'Tis true, 'tis true, We all believe 'tis true. 'Tis true, 'tis true, We all believe 'tis true.

Simon: If you are eatin' food wid ease, An' drawin' pleasant breath,
Be careful dat you do not sneeze, Because 'tis sign of death.

Sweep not de dust from yo' cabins at night, For some of yo' neighbors surely will fight.

If yo' nose should itch while you sit in yo' room, An unwelcome neighbor will visit you soon.

If at night while passin' a graveyard, You shake wid fear de most,

Conjurors: Un-hun-n

[88.] **Simon:** Jus' step a little faster forward, Before you see a ghost.

Conjurors: We'll run.

Simon: If a neighbor comes to see you, An' he squeezes yo' han' very tight,
You had better speak loud "Hee Hoo," Dat neighbor is not right.

If you hear a mule a brayin' While you're on yo' knees a prayin', Yo' luck is goin' wrong.

You should stop before it's all gone.

(Simon looks into woods and sees Zodzetrick and Luddud coming with Treemonisha and points his finger at them.)

Conjurors: 'Tis true, 'tis true, We all believe 'tis true. 'Tis true, 'tis true, We all believe 'tis true.

[Track 12]

No. 12 TREEMONISHA IN PERIL.

Ensemble.

(Everyone looks toward the approaching strangers.)

Simon *(giving conjuror's yell):* Hee-Hoo!

Conjurors: Hee-Hoo!

Zodzetrick and Luddud: Hee-Hoo!

Conjurors: Hee-Hoo! Hee-Hoo! Hee-Hoo!

Simon: It is Zodzetrick an' Luddud. Who is dat woman dey am bringin' wid 'em?

Cephus: She's not known to anyone here.

Conjuror Women: She's a stranger.

(Enter Zodzetrick, Luddud, and Treemonisha.)

Zodzetrick and Luddud: Hey!

Conjurors: Hey!

Luddud: Lis'en! Lis'en!

Ev'rybody lis'en!

Conjurors: We are lis'nin'.

Luddud: Dis here gal don't believe in superstition.

Zodzetrick: Dat's de truth.

Luddud: She don't believe in conjury.

Zodzetrick: Dat's de truth.

Luddud: She's been tellin' de people dat dey should throw away their bags o' luck.
Now, how are you goin' to get food to eat, If you can't sell yo' bags o' luck?

Simon: Food will be hard to get, If we can't sell our bags of luck.

Conjurors: Dat's de truth.

Simon: Dat gal mus' be punished.

Cephus: Don't punish her, She is a good girl.
Don't punish her.

Simon: Dat boy laks dat gal, but we're goin' to punish her jus' de same.

Conjuror Women: Punish her!

Simon: Come on ev'rybody to de brush arbor,
Dis gal mus' have de punishment dat's waitin' for her.

(All go to the brush arbor.)

Conjurors: 'Tis true, 'tis true, 'tis true, 'tis true.

[Track 13]

No. 13 FROLIC OF THE BEARS.

(Enter eight bears.)

(Bears begin frolicking.)

Bears: Oo . . . ar! . . . Oo . . . ar! . . . Oo . . . ar!
. . . Oo . . . ar! . . .

Oo . . . ar! . . . Oo . . . ar! . . .

Oo . . . ar! . . . Oo . . . ar! . . .

Oo . . . ar! . . . Oo . . . ar! . . .

Oo . . . ar! . . . Oo . . . ar! . . .

Conjurors *(In distance):* Hey!

(Bears run when they hear voices.)

[Track 14]

No. 14 THE WASP-NEST. Ensemble.

(Enter conjurors.)

Simon: Ev'rybody lis'en! My plan is de best.

Conjurors: What's yo' plan?

Simon: When I count three, You mus' shove dat gal on dat wasp-nest.

Conjurors: Go on an' count.

(Zodzetrick and Luddud lead Treemonisha close to the wasp-nest.)

Simon: One, . . . two.

Cephus *(Sees a strange form appearing):* Look!
What is dat thing comin' yonder?

Simon: It looks like de devil.

Conjurors: De devil?

Simon: Yes, de devil,

(Zodzetrick and Luddud free Treemonisha and look toward the devil.)

An' he is comin' right after us.

Conjuror Women: We mus' leave here.

Simon: Run an' save yourselves.

(All run as the devil enters. Treemonisha, knowing the supposed devil to be Remus, does not move.)

(Remus (the devil) stops and looks at the conjurors as they run.)

[Track 15]

No. 15 THE RESCUE.

(Remus takes off the Scarecrow suit and folds it on one arm, still looking toward conjurors.)

(He approaches Treemonisha.)

[89.]

Treemonisha (*Puts her arms around his neck*):

Remus, you have saved me
from the awful sting of the wasp.

They were going to shove me on that wasp-
nest.

(*Remus looks, horror-stricken, at the wasp-nest.*)

When one of them counted three. But thanks
to the great Creator,
You came in time to save me.

Remus: I am glad I came in time to save you
From the awful sting of the wasp.

And while on my way to your rescue, Many
hills and valleys I crossed.

[90.] I know the conjurors are superstitious, And
afraid of anything that looks strange,
So I wore the scare-crow for that purpose, And
have scared them away out of range.
Come, let us leave these woods at once, Because
I hear some very strange grunts.

(*Remus and Treemonisha leave, going in the opposite
direction from the conjurors.*)

(*The scene is suddenly changed to a cotton field which
occupies greater portion of stage; a wagon road in
front, men and women seen picking cotton.*)

[Track 16]

No. 16 WE WILL REST AWHILE. Male
Quartet in Cotton Field.

Quartet: We will rest awhile, We will rest
awhile,

'Cause it makes us feel very good, very good.

We will rest awhile, We will rest awhile,

Soon we'll be at home chopping wood,
chopping wood.

We will rest awhile, We will rest awhile,

'Cause it's almost eatin' time, eatin' time.

We will rest awhile, We will rest awhile, 'Cause
restin' is very fine.

(*Cotton pickers sit down to rest.*)

[Track 17]

No. 17 GOING HOME. Duet: Remus and
Treemonisha and Chorus of Cotton Pickers.

(*Enter Treemonisha and Remus on road.*)

Treemonisha and Remus: Hello strangers!

Cotton Pickers: Hello!

Remus: Does this road lead to the John Smith
plantation?

Foreman (*in the field*): Yes, and three miles
from here, You'll reach your destination.

Treemonisha and Remus: Thank you.

Foreman: You are welcome.

Cotton Pickers: Quite welcome.

(*Remus and Treemonisha go on their way.*)

(*During pause the cotton pickers bear aunt Dinah
blow a horn three times.*)

[Track 18]

**No. 18 AUNT DINAH HAS BLOWED DE
HORN.**

Cotton Pickers: Aunt Dinah has blowed de
horn, An' we'll go home to stay until dawn.

Get ready, put yo' sack on yo' back, I'm so
happy I don't know how to act, how to act.

Aunt Dinah has blowed de horn, An' she wants
us to come straight home,

We have not much time for delay, 'Cause our
work is finished for today.

O yes, Aunt Dinah has blowed de horn, An'
we'll go home to stay until dawn.

Get ready, put yo' sack on yo' back, I'm so
happy I don't know how to act, how to act.

Aunt Dinah has blowed de horn, An' she wants
us to come straight home,

We have not much time for delay, 'Cause our
work is finished for today.

O yes, Aunt Dinah has blowed de horn, An'
we'll go home to stay until dawn.

Get ready, keep yo' sack on yo' back, I'm so
happy I don't know how to act, how to act.

Aunt Dinah has blowed de horn, An' she wants
us to come straight home,

We have not much time for delay, 'Cause our
work is finished for today.

(*Curtain down.*)

Disc 2

Act III—Evening

[Track 1]

No. 19 PRELUDE TO ACT 3.

[Track 2]

No. 20 I WANT TO SEE MY CHILD.

Duet—Soprano and Bass.

(*SCENE—Interior of Ned and Monisha's cabin.*

*Ned and Monisha are seated on a bench, she leaning
against him.*)

Monisha: I want to see my child tonight,

I want to see her now,
Those men have carried her away for spite,

I would rescue her if I knew how.

Ned: Perhaps you'll see her tomorrow,

[**Monisha**]: I want to see her now.

Ned: And then you'll have no more sorrow;

[**Monisha**]: I want to see her now, O! . . .

Ned: Do not grieve and complain, You will see
her again.

[**Monisha**]: I want to see her now.

Monisha: If I could see my darling now,

I would be happy again,
The tears are falling from my brow, I must see
her soon, or go insane.

Ned: Perhaps you'll see her tomorrow,

[**Monisha**]: I want to see her now,

[91.]

Ned: And then you'll have no more sorrow;
[Monisha:] I want to see her now, O! . . .
Ned: Do not grieve and complain, You will see
her again.
[Monisha:] I want to see her now.

[Track 3]
No. 21 TREEMONISHA'S RETURN.
Ensemble.
(Enter Remus and Treemonisha.)

Monisha: O, there is my child! Remus, you
are a hero!

Ned: You are all right, Remus!

Remus: Thank you! Thank you!

[92.] Ned: I see a crowd of people coming this way,
They are very happy and gay.

Treemonisha and Remus: They are almost
here.

(The Crowd enters)

Visitors: Treemonisha, We are glad to see you
home again.

Treemonisha: Thank you! To scare the
conjurers away from me,
Remus wore that old scarecrow.

Visitors: Scarecrow!

Treemonisha: It scared them and they ran you
see, For I am home, you know.

Visitors: Hurrah for Remus!

(All shake hands with him.)

Unnn! Unnn! Unnn! Unn! Unn!
(Stop shaking hands)
(Everyone looks toward door.)
Corn-Husking Boys (in distance): Hey! . . .

Treemonisha: The boys are coming back
again.

(Boys enter with Zodetrick and Luddud as
prisoners.)

All: Hurrah! Hurrah!

(Prisoners are silent)

(They stand the prisoners in the middle of the room
the others circle around them)

Andy: Dese are de guilty men, Dat carried
Treemonisha away.

We went to de conjurers den, An' captured
dem today. What will we do wid dem?

Chorus: Punish them! Punish them! Punish
them!

(Treemonisha is silent)

Women: Rebuke and beat them hard.

Men (Shaking fists at Zodetrick and Luddud):
Yes, we will punch

and we will kick them very hard, very hard.
(The men advance toward Zodetrick and Luddud,
raising their fists threateningly)

Chorus: You must/will beat them hard.

Treemonisha: Stop!

(The men stop, drop hands quickly to sides and step
backward to where they first stood.)

Treemonisha (Recitative): You will do evil for

evil, If you strike them you know;
Just give them a severe lecture, And let them
freely go.

Zodetrick and Luddud: Thank you!

Thank...

Andy: Shut up! You have no right to speak
here.

Chorus: Don't speak here!

Treemonisha (To Andy and pointing to conjurers):

Andy, make them free!

(Andy does not move. All look with surprise at
Treemonisha.)

Treemonisha (more forcibly): Make them free!

(Andy removes the ropes from Conjurers wrists.)

(The others grunt their disapproval)

Chorus: Unn!

[Track 4]

No. 22 WRONG IS NEVER RIGHT. A
Lecture.

Remus: Never treat your neighbors wrong, By
making them feel blue;
Remember that the whole day long The
Creator is watching you.

Never do wrong for revenge, In the day or
night;

Wrong must not on right infringe, For wrong
is never right.

Wrong is never right, That is very true,

Wrong is never right, And wrong you should
not do.

Wrong is never right, You will agree with me;
Wrong is never right, And it will never be.

Never treat your neighbors wrong, By causing
them to grieve,

Help the weak if you are strong, And never
again deceive.

Your deeds should please heaven's throng, For
you are in their sight,

You should never think of wrong, For wrong is
never right.

Wrong is never right, That is very true,
Wrong is never right, And wrong you should
not do.

Wrong is never right, You will agree with me;
Wrong is never right, And it will never be.

Octet Chorus:
[second tenor] Wrong is never right, That is
very true,

[sopranos] Wrong is never right, That is
very true,

[altos & tenors] Do right,
[basses] Wrong is never right,

[sopranos] Wrong is never right, And wrong
you should not do,

[altos & tenors] Wrong never do.
[basses] Do right, right do.

[second tenor] Wrong is never right, You will
agree with me;

[93.]

[sopranos] Wrong is never right, You will agree with me;
[altos & tenors] Do right, Do right,
[basses] Wrong is never right,
Remus: Wrong is never right, and it will never be.

[sopranos] Wrong is never right, and it will never be.
[altos & tenors] Do right, And happy you will be.
[basses] Do right, And happy you will be.

[Track 5]
No. 23 ABUSE. Ensemble.

[94.] **Andy:** We should beat these men, Look at their guilty grin.
(People shaking fists and stamping their feet as they speak to conjurors. Treemonisha silent.)
Chorus: You two low, mean conjurors! Now be good! Be good!
Treemonisha: Do not abuse them. They will be good, they will be good.

[Track 6]
No. 24 “WHEN VILLAINS RAMBLE FAR AND NEAR.” A Lecture.

Ned: When villains ramble far and near, To break the people's laws,

Their punishment should be severe, Within the devil's claws.
When villains ramble far and near, With their hearts full of sin,
They do much wrong without a fear, But someday right will win.
We stay close at home, When villains rambling we can hear,
We have no chance to roam, When heartless villains are so near.
We dare not sleep at night, When we have an awful fear.
We keep a brilliant light, When villains ramble far and near.
When villains ramble far and near, And cause great alarm,
We wish for them a short career, Before they do great harm.
When villains ramble far and near, To treat other people bad,
They should be dispatched to the other sphere, To make old Satan feel glad.
We stay close at home, When villains rambling we can hear,
We have no chance to roam, When heartless villains are so near.
We dare not sleep at night, When we have an awful fear.
We keep a brilliant light, When villains ramble far and near.

[Track 7]
No. 25 CONJURORS FORGIVEN.
Ensemble.

Treemonisha: Will all of you forgive these men for my sake?
Andy: We hate to forgive them, tho' we may forgive them for your sake.
Chorus: For your sake we will we will forgive them.
Treemonisha (*Shakes hands with Conjurors*): Let us now shake hands with these men.
Chorus (*All shake hands with Conjurors*): We have forgiven you, We have forgiven you.
Always be kind and true, Always be kind and true.
We have forgiven you, We have forgiven you.
Always be kind and true,
Be careful what you do, Be careful what you do.

[Track 8]
No. 26 WE WILL TRUST YOU AS OUR LEADER.

Treemonisha: We ought to have a leader In our neighborhood,
An energetic leader, To follow for our good.
The ignorant too long have ruled, I don't see why they should.

And all the people they have fooled, Because they found they could.
Chorus:
[sopranos] We want you as our leader,
[altos & tenors] You should lead us,
[basses] We will trust you as our leader,
[sopranos] We want you to lead, for none could lead like you,
[altos & tenors] You should lead, for none could lead like you,
[basses] We will trust you as our leader, No one else could lead like you,
[sopranos] You know what is best to do.
[altos & tenors] You know what is best to do.
[basses] For you know what is best to do.
[sopranos] We want you as our leader,
[altos & tenors] You should lead us,
[basses] We will trust you as our leader,
[sopranos] We want you as our leader,
[altos & tenors] You should lead us,
[basses] We will trust you as our leader,
[sopranos] Lead us, lead us, and we will surely rise.
[altos & tenors] If you lead we will surely rise.
[basses] You must lead for you are wise,
And we will surely rise.
[sopranos] We want you to lead, You should lead us,

[95.]

[altos & tenors] We want you to lead, You should lead us,
[basses] We want you to lead, You should lead us,
[sopranos] Lead us, lead us, And we will always follow you.

[altos & tenors] If you lead we'll always follow you.
[basses] Dear, your bidding we will do, and we will always follow you.
[all] We feel blue, dear, we feel blue!
[sopranos] We want you as our leader, We want you to lead us.

[96.]

[altos & tenors] You should lead us, You should lead us.
[basses] We will trust you as our leader, We will trust you as our leader.

Treemonisha: If I lead the good women, Tell me, who will lead the men?

Chorus Men: You, you, you, you, you!

Treemonisha: Women may follow me many days long,

But the men may think that I am wrong.

Chorus Men: No, no, no, no, no!

Chorus (all): We all agree to trust you, And we will be true.

We all agree to trust you, And we will be true.

Treemonisha: There's need of some good leader, And there's not much time to wait.

To lead us in the right way Before it is too late.

For ignorance is criminal In this enlightened day,
So let us all get busy, When once we have found the way.

Chorus:

[sopranos] We want you as our leader,
[altos & tenors] You should lead us,
[basses] We will trust you as our leader,
[sopranos] We want you to lead, for none could lead like you,
[altos & tenors] You should lead, for none could lead like you,

[basses] We will trust you as our leader, No one else could lead like you,

[sopranos] You know what is best to do.

[altos & tenors] You know what is best to do.

[basses] For you know what is best to do.

[sopranos] We want you as our leader,

[altos & tenors] You should lead us,

[basses] We will trust you as our leader,

[sopranos] We want you as our leader,

[altos & tenors] You should lead us,

[basses] We will trust you as our leader,

[sopranos] Lead us, lead us, and we will surely rise.

[altos & tenors] If you lead we will surely rise.

[basses] You must lead for you are wise, and we will surely rise.

[sopranos] We want you to lead, You should lead us,

[altos & tenors] We want you to lead, You should lead us,

[basses] We want you to lead, You should lead us,

[sopranos] Lead us, lead us, And we will always follow you.

[altos & tenors] If you lead we'll always follow you.

[basses] Dear, your bidding we will do, and we will always follow you.

[all] We feel blue, dear, we feel blue!

[sopranos] We want you as our leader, We want you to lead us.

[altos & tenors] You should lead us, You should lead us.

[basses] We will trust you as our leader, We will trust you as our leader.

Treemonisha: I will lead you; O yes, I will lead you.

[chorus] lead now, please lead now,

Treemonisha: O yes, I will lead you.

[chorus] please lead,

Treemonisha: Yes, I will lead you.

[chorus—sopranos, altos, tenors] for we will trust you,

[chorus—basses] We will trust you as our leader.

[97.]

Directions for The Slow Drag.

1. The Slow Drag must begin on the first beat of each measure.
2. When moving forward, drag the left foot; when moving backward, drag the right foot.
3. When moving sideways to right, drag left foot; when moving sideways to left, drag right foot.
 4. When prancing, your steps must come on each beat of the measure.
5. When marching and when sliding, your steps must come on the first and third beat of each measure.
6. Hop and skip on second beat of measure. Double the Schottische step to fit the slow music.

—*Scott Joplin.*

[Track 9]

No. 27 A REAL SLOW DRAG.

(Treemonisha and Lucy stand on bench in rear of room.)

Treemonisha: Salute your partner, do the drag, drag, drag.

(Salute partners.)

(Slow Drag forward.)

Stop and move backward, do the drag.

(All stop.)

(Slow drag backward.)

All of you stop.

(All stop.)

[98.]

Look to your right and do the drag, drag, drag.

(All look to right.)

(All Slow Drag sideways to right.)

To your left, to your left, That's the way.

(All Slow Drag sideways to left.)

(All stop.)

(Salute partners.)

Treemonisha and Lucy *(All march, doing the dude walk):*

Marching onward, marching onward, marching to that lovely tune.

Marching onward, marching onward, happy as a bird in June.

Sliding onward, sliding onward, listen to that rag.

(All stop, put right hand to ear and listen to music.)

Hop, and skip, now do that slow – o, do that slow drag.

(All dance.)

Dance slowly,

(All prance.)

prance slowly, while you hear that pretty rag.

(All dance.)

Dance slowly,

(All prance.)

prance slowly,

(All Slow Drag.)

Now you do the real “Slow Drag.”

(All walk.)

Walk slowly,

(All whisper to partners while walking.)

talk lowly,

Treemonisha, Lucy, and Chorus *(All stop, put right hand to ear and listen to music.):*

Listen to that rag,

Hop *(All hop.)* and skip, *(All skip.)*

now do that slow – o,

(All Slow Drag forward.)

do that slow drag.

Treemonisha *(All Schottische.):* Move along,

Don't stop, don't stop dancing,

Drag along,

(All Slow Drag.)

Stop.

(All stop.)

Move along,

(All Schottische.)

Don't stop, Don't stop dancing,

drag along,

(All Slow Drag.)

Doing the real slow drag.

Move along,

(All Schottische.)

don't stop, don't stop dancing

(All Slow Drag.)

Drag along, Stop!

(All stop.)

(All Schottische.)

Move along, don't stop, don't stop dancing,

(All Slow Drag.)

Drag along, doing the real slow drag.

Treemonisha and Lucy *(All march, doing the dude walk):*

Marching onward, marching onward, marching to that lovely tune.

Marching onward, marching onward, happy as a bird in June.

Sliding onward, sliding onward, listen to that rag.

(All stop, put right hand to ear and listen to music.)

Hop,

(All hop.)

and skip,

(All skip.)

now do that slow – o,

(Slow drag forward.)

do that slow drag.

Full Company *(All dance.):*

Dance slowly, prance slowly, while you hear that pretty rag.

Dance slowly, prance slowly, Now you do the real “Slow Drag.”

Walk slowly, talk lowly,

(All stop, put right hand to ear and listen to music.)

Listen to that rag.

Hop

[99.]

(All hop.)

and skip,

(All skip.)

now do that slow – o

(All Slow Drag)

do that slow drag,

(All stop.)

slow – o – o – o.

(Curtain down.)

(End of Opera.)



[100.]

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Produced and engineered by Judith Sherman
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Preface reading engineered by Jim Weaver, Townsquare Media, Texarkana, AR.
 Digital mastering: Paul Zinman, SoundByte Productions Inc., NYC
 Recorded May 31 and June 1–2, 2011 at the American Academy of Arts & Letters, NY
 Book and CD design, layout: Chris Ware
 Piano by Steinway and Sons.

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 The *Treemonisha* performance materials and scores heard on this recording are available for rental.
 Contact: info@paragonragtime.com or (570) 524–9511.



This recording was made possible by grants from The National Endowment for the Arts, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the Francis Goetz Charitable Lead Trust.

The performers wish to dedicate this recording to all of their teachers.

Preface reading thanks: Mrs. LaErma White and family; Dr. Teretha F. Harper, Chair, African-American Committee–Texarkana Regional Arts & Humanities Council; and Nita Fran Hutcheson, Executive Director, Main Street Texarkana.

Special thanks to Chris Ware.

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[103.]

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Anita Johnson



AnnMarie Sandy, Edward Pleasant
Frank Ward, Jr., Chauncey Packer



Todd Payne, Robert Mack,
Janinah Burnett, Darren Stokes







[m.]

Left: Anita Johnson and company; above: Anita Johnson and AnnMarie Sandy.
All photographs courtesy of, and many thanks to, Edward Pleasant.



NEW YORK NEWS

By Billy E. Jones

New York Notes

The Jubilee Four is at the Emory theatre, Providence, R. I.

The Creole Band is at the Pantages, Great Falls, Mont.

Billy E. Jones is at the Standard, Philadelphia. He is featuring "Good-bye, Good Luck, God Bless You."

Smith & Cooper left for the west on Tuesday. They are hooked over the Pantages time.

Scott Joplin, the composer, has completed a musical comedy.

Chicago Defender, August 12, 1916.



Scott Joplin,
c. 1867 — 1917.

Treemonisha

Opera in Three Acts (1911)

WORDS AND MUSIC BY

Scott Joplin

(Story Fictitious)

Cast

(in order of vocal appearance)

Zodzetrick	Edward Pleasant
Monisha	AnnMarie Sandy
Ned	Frank Ward, Jr.
Treemonisha	Anita Johnson
Remus	Chauncey Packer
Andy	Robert Mack
Lucy	Janinah Burnett
Parson Alltalk	Darren Stokes
Simon	Todd Payne
Cephus	Phumzile Sojola
Luddud	Frederick Jackson
Foreman	Darren Stokes

The Paragon Ragtime Orchestra and Singers

Rick Benjamin, conductor

DISC ONE 53:19

ACT 1

1. Overture 7:30
2. The Bag of Luck (Zodzetrick, Monisha, Ned, Treemonisha, Remus) 8:04
3. The Corn-Huskers (Treemonisha, Chorus) :45
4. We're Goin' Around (Andy, Chorus) 2:23
5. The Wreath (Treemonisha, Lucy, Monisha, Chorus) 1:47
6. The Sacred Tree (Monisha) 5:26
7. Surprised (Treemonisha, Chorus) :18
8. Treemonisha's Bringing Up (Monisha, Treemonisha, Chorus) 4:41
9. Good Advice (Parson Alltalk, Chorus) 5:05
10. Confusion (Monisha, Lucy, Ned, Remus, Chorus) 2:37

ACT 2

11. Superstition (Simon, Chorus) 3:35
12. Treemonisha in Peril (Simon, Zodzetrick, Luddud, Cephus, Chorus) 2:49
13. Frolic of the Bears (Chorus) 2:06

14. The Wasp-Nest (Simon, Cephus, Chorus) 1:17
15. The Rescue (Treemonisha, Remus) 1:26
16. We Will Rest Awhile (Male quartet) 1:30
17. Going Home (Remus, Treemonisha, Foreman, Chorus) :40
18. Aunt Dinah Has Blowed de Horn (Chorus) 1:21

DISC TWO 45:47

ACT THREE

1. Prelude to Act 3 4:16
2. I Want to See My Child (Duet: Ned and Monisha) 2:19
3. Treemonisha's Return (Monisha, Remus, Ned, Treemonisha, Andy, Zodzetrick, Luddud, Chorus) 3:43
4. Wrong Is Never Right (Remus, Octet Chorus) 5:33
5. Abuse (Andy, Treemonisha, Chorus) :28
6. When Villains Ramble Far and Near (Ned) 5:11
7. Conjurers Forgiven (Treemonisha, Chorus) 1:38
8. We Will Trust You as Our Leader (Treemonisha, Chorus) 8:13
9. A Real Slow Drag (Treemonisha, Lucy, Chorus) 5:49

Appendix

10. Bowing Music: Themes from the Opera in One-Step Tempo (2003)—Rick Benjamin 2:02
11. Scott Joplin's *Treemonisha* Preface read by his closest living relative,
Grandniece Mrs. LaErma White of Texarkana, Arkansas 6:32

TREEMONISHA

by Rick Benjamin

"... In the need of poems philosophy politics mechanism science behavior, the craft of art, an appropriate native grand-opera, shipcraft, any craft, he is greatest forever and forever who contributes the greatest original practical example. The cleanest expression is that which finds no sphere worthy of itself and makes one. . . ."

—Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (1855)

Scott Joplin's opera *Treemonisha* is an astounding work of art, and one that resonates on many levels. It is the only opera in existence about the Reconstruction Era African-American experience written by a black man who actually lived through it. This fact alone makes *Treemonisha* a work of tremendous significance. Further, Joplin's music is profoundly expressive and as stylistically unique as anything ever created in America. There is nothing remotely comparable to it. And through his score and libretto, Joplin vividly documented a culture that has left us few other artifacts: The echoes of the "field hollers," spirituals, fiddle tunes, revival hymns, and ancient African dances of his rural childhood are all heard, as are the spoken dialects of his people rising up from slavery. Further, *Treemonisha* is a statement of deep racial pride and an act of true artistic heroism—the creation of beauty in the face of almost unbearable ignorance, racism, poverty, and physical and emotional pain.

Yet for all of its obvious significance, *Treemonisha* has been a deeply misunderstood work, both in Scott Joplin's era and in ours. His opera was complex and virtually unprecedented, two reasons why 1910s America could not embrace it. And 1970s classical musicians, although deserving much credit for taking interest, were for the most part not concerned with the opera's cultural origins or historic authenticity—the essential fabrics of this work. But now, on the centennial of this extraordinary creation, it is time to listen to *Treemonisha* with a deeper understanding, in the hope of allowing Scott Joplin to finally sing the song *he* wanted America to hear.

The Forging of an Original American Artist

Surprisingly, Joplin was not a nationally or internationally famous figure in his own time, a sad fact which presents formidable obstacles for historians. He was best known in two Missouri cities—Sedalia and St. Louis, and especially within their respective African-American districts. But Scott Joplin's local recognition never blossomed into true nationwide celebrity on the order of (for example) a Sousa or a Victor Herbert. As a consequence, there is little contemporaneous data on Joplin, and only four surviving photographs, all of poor quality. Even his exact date and place of birth are not known. (The widely cited November 24, 1868 date is almost certainly erroneous.) It is *only* certain that Scott Joplin was one of six children born of Florence Givens (freeborn in Kentucky c. 1841) and Jiles Joplin (an ex-slave from North Carolina, born c. 1842), and that in mid-July 1870, the Joplin family lived on a farm in Davis County, Texas, not far from the borders of Louisiana and Arkansas. It is likely that Scott Joplin was born in that vicinity sometime in the second half of 1867. Later, between 1875 and 1880, the Joplins moved north to Texarkana, a new town literally straddling the state line of Texas and Arkansas.

By today's standards the Joplin family subsisted in grinding poverty, but they always had music; Jiles played and taught the violin, and Florence was a singer and banjo player. As a small child Scott manifested tremendous musical talent, and apparently possessed the gift of absolute pitch (i.e., “perfect pitch”). Fortunately, his interests were nurtured by two Texarkana musicians: a woman named Mag Washington, and one J.C. Johnson. Young Scott sang (both at home and in church choirs) and began to learn how to play the piano and probably the violin. During these critical formative years, he naturally absorbed the sounds and cadences of his community, as well as its strongly held traditions and beliefs.

Later, Scott encountered a very different set of traditions and cultural values, embodied in the person of a German scholar named Julius Weiss (c. 1840–?). This visitor came to Texarkana in the late 1870s as the private tutor for the children of one of the town's leading white citizens. Weiss taught mathematics, astronomy, and German, but his speciality was music. According to local lore, Mrs. Joplin bartered her services as a laundress in exchange for music lessons from Weiss for her son. The details of Joplin's studies are not known, but it would be reasonable to assume that the professor taught his student along traditional European lines: solfège, basic music theory, and keyboard technique. It is also probably safe to assume that this quiet boy eagerly drank in this precious and exotic knowledge. It must be from these lessons that Joplin acquired one of a musician's most important skills—the ability to read and write musical notation. But greater still, the opera-loving Prof. Weiss gave the boy his very first glimpses of the wonders of European classical music, firing within him an intense admiration for artistry and the ambition for greatness which brilliantly illuminated his life.

Like most African-Americans of his hardscrabble and remarkable generation, as a child Scott Joplin had to work to help support his family. His father had left them around 1880, further weakening their already precarious economic position. Young Scott, obviously talented and with the benefit of some training, modestly embarked on a career in music. First, he organized a male vocal quartet for local performances. He also began teaching the mandolin and guitar and playing the piano for dances in Texarkana's black community. This latter activity undoubtedly kindled the close relationship much of Joplin's future music would have with the courtly traditions of black Midwestern social dance.

While still a teenager, Scott Joplin left Texarkana. The year is unknown, as is the reason for his departure. It has been suggested that Julius Weiss's moving away was the cause. At the very least, the German had stirred within the lad a strong yearning to see world beyond western Arkansas. Whatever the case, Joplin began a long period of wanderings as an itinerant musician. He is thought to have roamed throughout the Mississippi and Missouri river valleys, visiting ports of call in Louisiana, Texas, Missouri, Kentucky, and up into Ohio and Illinois, quietly gathering up the materials for his yet undreamed-of future life as a great American composer. This must have been a grand adventure, but one permeated with hardship and even peril: much of the territory Joplin visited was newly settled frontier. It was isolated, violent, and virulently racist. When imagining Joplin's life during this time, it should be remembered that in nineteenth-century America, all musicians were viewed with varying degrees of suspicion, since the playing (or writing) of music was not generally considered legitimate "work." Being a *black musician* would have nearly assured his ne'er-do-well status in the eyes of most whites he would have encountered. Thus, Joplin's musical opportunities would have been largely restricted to the African-American neighborhoods of the towns where he sojourned. There, he would have been further limited to the sacred—the playing and singing in churches (probably for little or no pay); or the profane: entertaining in bars, brothels, and dance halls and other more or less sordid venues of what was euphemistically called the "sporting life."

There was however one other avenue available to black musicians in Victorian America, and one keenly sought after: "the show business." The idea of professional stage entertainment and entertainers had finally taken root in the United States in the 1830s. The latest and most popular form of entertainment then developing was the "minstrel show"—white performers in blackface presenting comic (and demeaning) portrayals of African-Americans and "plantation life." Minstrelsy quickly became a dominant form of theatrical entertainment, with dozens (if not hundreds) of touring companies crisscrossing the nation. After the Civil War, blacks began to enter the minstrel business, both as members of white-managed companies and as entrepreneurial performer/managers with their own "colored" troupes. To modern readers the very concept of the minstrel show may be offensive, but it should be noted that the genre was, practically speaking, the only theatrical training ground for nineteenth-century blacks. All of the future leaders and innovators of the post-1900 black musical stage had started their careers as minstrels. As mortifying as it may seem to us today, minstrelsy was the essential first step in bringing blacks into the American theater. (It was also a form, as curious as it may seem, popular with many African-American audiences.) Scott Joplin was closely connected with minstrelsy and indeed, the very first known newspaper mention of him came in July 1891, when he was back in his hometown performing as a member of the Texarkana Minstrels at Ghio's Opera House.

Joplin remains elusive again until 1894, when he arrives in (or perhaps returns to) a town that would be extremely important to his development—Sedalia, Missouri. The reasons for his move

were not documented. But Sedalia was a new railroad boomtown, and one gaining a reputation for decent racial relations and for its unusually robust musical life. Its population of about fourteen thousand supported several brass bands, at least two string orchestras, and numerous choruses and vocal ensembles (including a “Liederkrantz Society”). These organizations were racially segregated, but attendance at their performances often was not. Sedalia also boasted frequent formal balls and a theater—Wood’s Opera House—which presented touring productions of minstrelsy, melodrama, and “variety” (an early form of vaudeville), as well as concerts and recitals. The town’s African-American community was large, vibrant, and had an educated professional class. Sedalia also had many private clubs and, on a lower social plain, supported numerous saloons, gambling joints, and brothels. In short, this small prairie city offered outsized opportunities for musicians, black and white. All of this must have been attractive to Scott Joplin, but there may have been one deciding factor in his decision to go there. In January 1894, the George R. Smith College (for Negroes) opened in Sedalia, offering Bachelor of Arts degrees in seven disciplines, including music. Since at that time there were only a handful of colleges in America that would allow black attendance, the opening of Smith in Sedalia was a newsworthy event that had to have been an attraction for Scott Joplin. In any case, Joplin did indeed enroll at Smith College, although no records survive to show the exact dates of his attendance or the specific nature of his studies. While he probably had been composing music for years, he was surely finding his childhood training no longer sufficient for his objectives.

Educational advancement aside, Joplin quickly became a very active participant in Sedalia’s musical life, and in a variety of ways. He took up the cornet and joined the Queen City Cornet Band, where he played from 1894 until the fall of 1896. Joplin’s keen interest in vocal music also continued. Possessing a good baritone singing voice, in 1894 he formed the Texas Medley Quartette, an eight-man group that he conducted and sometimes soloed with. With Sedalia as its base, the Quartette seems to have traveled widely: in September of 1894 they were a thousand miles away in Syracuse, New York, performing a fundraiser for the Bethany Baptist Church. This group’s repertoire must have included Joplin’s original music, since the Syracuse concert sparked his very first music publications—a pair of well-crafted parlor ballads, both with words and music by Scott Joplin.

In Sedalia Joplin continued to refine his skills as a composer. His work with syncopated music—“Rag Time”—began to gain attention. Ragtime was a black Midwestern folk style which had been around for some considerable period. But in the mid-1890s this rhythmic music began to emerge as a nationwide popular music fad. It had transcended its ethnic origins and been embraced (in a love/hate sort of way) by middle-class white America. By the late 1890s there were at least a hundred rags in print, many written by white commercial composers. In those days sheet music was the only method for mass-distribution of new songs and instrumental pieces, and American publishers were industrious in placing new ragtime numbers on the market. The originators of this music—black Midwestern pianists—were largely unschooled improvisers who played “by ear” and who could not preserve their creations in written form. Here, Scott Joplin was exceptional: he had the ability to notate music—to compose for publication (and posterity)—a rare skill among nineteenth-century African-Americans. Better still, Joplin was writing down *exceptional* music; he could conjure beautiful melodies and harmonies, combine them with compelling syncopations, and mold these elements into elegant, delightful, and *artistic* rags. He was becoming (perhaps unconsciously) the Old World model of a

classical composer, gathering up the sounds of his own people to create a fresh mode of expression.

One of Joplin's compositions, the "Maple Leaf Rag," became locally popular, and in September 1899 was published by John Stark, the white owner of a Sedalia music shop. Mr. Stark (1841–1927) was in many ways a remarkable nineteenth-century Missourian; although of humble birth and mainly self-educated, he was philosophical, cultured, and perceptive. His daughter Eleanor (1874–?) was a gifted classical pianist and singer whom he had sent to Berlin and Paris to study with one of the great virtuosos of that era. His son Etilmon (1867–1962) was a violinist and music instructor. The Starks' home and store (John Stark & Son) resounded with the works of Beethoven and other great masters. Yet the family was not at all snobbish and enjoyed popular music, especially the exciting sounds of authentic black ragtime. And Stark was also unusually progressive in his ideas on racial relations. He respected African-American culture, and appreciated black artistry in an age when those words together would have seemed oxymoronic. This alliance of Scott Joplin and John Stark was a rare and extremely fortunate happenstance, both for them and for the future course of American music.

"Maple Leaf Rag" eventually became a nationwide hit—and Joplin's most commercially successful composition. Further, Joplin enjoyed a royalty agreement with Stark on its sales, an exceptional arrangement that provided the composer with an income (albeit a modest one) for the rest of his life. It also may have allowed him to begin a withdrawal from performing to concentrate on composing and teaching. The popularity of "Maple Leaf" caused other vital things to happen: John Stark became Joplin's principal publisher, coining the phrase "Classic Ragtime" to describe his growing sheet music catalog. Stark also invented the sobriquet "The King of Ragtime Writers" for Joplin, and ballyhooed that phrase relentlessly in advertisements and press releases. Under his aegis, Scott Joplin began to flower as an original American artist, and began what must have seemed a powerful trajectory toward widespread public and critical acclaim.

It was also while residing in Sedalia that Joplin began to show interest in advancing from short instrumental pieces (rags, waltzes, and marches) to the creation of larger theatrical works—possibly inspired by (or rejecting) the kinds of shows that African-American touring companies were then offering. Minstrelsy was fading into obsolescence, and a number of young black impresarios and composers were beginning to experiment with more realistic depictions of black life. Scott Joplin's first documented venture into this world was *The Ragtime Dance*, a suite of stylized social dances with narration for which he created the words, music, and choreography. To perform it, he formed his own "Drama Company" which presented *The Ragtime Dance* in Sedalia at Wood's Opera House in the fall of 1899.

John Stark, his English wife, Sarah, and their daughter Eleanor had moved to St. Louis half a year before the publication of "Maple Leaf Rag." In this much larger city (its population then was nearly six hundred thousand), John Stark ran a furniture-moving business while another son, Will, remained in Sedalia managing the family's music store. In St. Louis the talented Eleanor Stark opened a music-teaching studio; soon, she was embraced by that city's large German-centric cultural elite.

In yet another of a lifetime of relocations, in 1901 Scott Joplin also moved to St. Louis. Several modern biographies have suggested that these frequent moves were a symptom of "wanderlust," but I think that after his Sedalia period at least, Joplin's relocations were expressions of his

frustration in finding a viable setting for his life as a serious composer. He needed a community that understood and appreciated his value and the value of his creations. From this understanding would flow income (through publication and teaching) and opportunities to have music for larger forces (ensembles and choruses) performed. For an African-American of that time—even an idealistic one gripped by the promise of the dawning twentieth century—this was a decidedly optimistic notion. Joplin did, however, have encouragement: not long after setting up housekeeping in St. Louis with his new wife, Belle, Joplin was introduced to one of the city's most important cultural leaders, the German pianist and conductor Alfred Ernst (1866–1916). Maestro Ernst was the conductor of one of the Midwest's premier musical organizations, the St. Louis Choral-Symphony Society, and was a musician of outstanding pedigree. The meeting between these two contemporaries was so unusual that it was covered by the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. The paper's report, which appeared on February 28, 1901, is extremely valuable because it is the only known analysis of Scott Joplin and his music by a highly trained European classical musician:

TO PLAY RAGTIME IN EUROPE

Director Alfred Ernst of the St. Louis Choral Symphony Society believes that he has discovered, in Scott Joplin of Sedalia, a negro [sic], an extraordinary genius as a composer of ragtime music.

So deeply is Mr. Ernst impressed with the ability of the Sedalian that he intends to take with him to Germany next summer copies of Joplin's work with a view to educating the dignified disciples of Wagner, Liszt, Mendelssohn and other European masters of music into an appreciation of the real American ragtime melodies. It is possible that the colored man may accompany the distinguished conductor.

When he returns from the storied Rhine Mr. Ernst will take Joplin under his care and instruct him in the theory and harmony of music. . . .

"I am deeply interested in this man," said Mr. Ernst to the *Post-Dispatch*. "He is young and undoubtedly has a fine future. With proper cultivation, I believe his talent will develop into positive genius. Being of African blood himself, Joplin has a keener insight into that peculiar branch of melody than white composers. His ear is particularly acute.

"Recently I played for him portions of 'Tannhäuser.' He was enraptured. I could see that he comprehended and appreciated this class of music. It was the opening of a new world to him, and I believe he felt as Keats felt when he first read Chapman's Homer.

"The work Joplin has done in ragtime is so original, so distinctly individual, and so melodious withal, that I am led to believe he can do something fine in composition of a higher class when he shall have been instructed in theory and harmony.

"Joplin's work, as yet, has a certain crudeness, due to his lack of musical education, but it shows that the soul of a composer is there and needs but to be set

free by knowledge of technique. He is an unusually intelligent young man and fairly well educated.”

Mr. and Mrs. Joplin lived in a second-floor apartment in a converted old house at 2658A Morgan Street in the city’s black district. (The building still stands and is now a museum.) In 1901 this was a rough-and-tumble center of drinking, gambling, and prostitution, and yet some of the composer’s greatest creations were born there: “Elite Syncopations,” “The Entertainer,” “The Easy Winners,” and a few others. St. Louis was rapidly becoming the nation’s mecca for real ragtime; it was home to a who’s-who of virtuoso rag pianists and pianist/composers, including Tom Turpin (1873–1922), Joe Jordan (1882–1971; see New World Records 80649-2 for the Paragon Ragtime Orchestra’s comprehensive survey of Jordan’s music), Sam Patterson (c. 1881–1955), Louis Chauvin (1881–1908), Charlie Thompson (1891–1964), and Artie Matthews (1888–1958). Joplin was friendly with all these younger men, but he avoided publicly pitting his own modest keyboard skills against theirs. Rather, living on rising publishing royalties, he spent his time composing and teaching in his apartment. This was quite an atypical lifestyle for a black musician of that era, and especially for one so strongly associated with ragtime. Among his peers, “greatness” was measured by performing prowess. But here was a small, quiet man who *wrote* music. Joplin was different. And he was well liked, and his reputation was spreading. As his friend Sam Patterson later put it, “Everyone had a lot of respect for him . . . he had something to offer. His music was something to talk about.”

Within a year or so after their arrival in St. Louis, Scott and Belle Joplin were financially secure enough to purchase their own house on Lucas Avenue; soon its thirteen rooms were rented by various Sedalia associates and family members. The Joplins were also blessed by the birth of a baby girl. There were tensions, however: Mrs. Joplin turned out to be indifferent to music and to her husband’s career. This upset the composer considerably. Far worse, their little girl became ill and soon died (her name is unknown today). This was more than the marriage could endure, and the Joplins separated. Somehow, through all of this Scott Joplin continued to create bright and cheerful music. Professionally, at least, things were going well. A condensed version of *The Ragtime Dance* had been published by Stark and was being performed on the road by a veteran black minstrel company, Dan McCabe’s Coontown 400. Then, on December 20, 1902, the African-American weekly newspaper the *Indianapolis Freeman* announced an extremely ambitious undertaking: “Mr. Joplin is writing an opera in ragtime to be staged next season.”

The term “ragtime opera” appeared with some frequency in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century theatrical advertising. It was always used as a comic/ironic label for various types of minstrel entertainment; the very juxtaposition of the term “opera” (representing the loftiest heights of European culture) with the supposedly primitive music of blacks was thought to be hilarious. But Scott Joplin was not joking. It is clear that he valued ragtime as an art form, a view which was not widely shared at that time. His opera—*A Guest of Honor*—is now lost, but Joplin biographer Edward Berlin compellingly theorizes that it paid tribute to the great African-American leader Booker T. Washington. Joplin finished the libretto and music sometime very early in 1903 (he applied for copyright on February 16). The project gained local attention, and St. Louis’s other major newspaper, the *Globe-Democrat*, ran another feature story on Joplin, this one by composer and music journalist Monroe H. Rosenfeld (1862–1918). This article is of great historical interest because it is one of only a handful of stories about Joplin to ever appear in a major white newspaper, and its author was a leading popular musician who had written several

million-selling songs (and who had actually invented the phrase “Tin Pan Alley”). Thus, Rosenfeld’s assessment of Scott Joplin is consequential: “This negro [sic] is a tutored student of harmony and an adept at bass and counterpoint; and although his appearance would not indicate it, he is attractive socially because of the refinement of his speech and demeanor.” After listing and praising Joplin’s many rags, Rosenfeld concludes, “Joplin’s ambition is to shine in other spheres. He affirms that it is only a pastime for him to compose syncopated music and he longs for more arduous work. To this end he is assiduously toiling upon an opera, nearly a score of the numbers of which he has already composed and which he hopes to give an early production in this city.”

Joplin began casting while still working on his new opera: On January 3, 1903 the *New York Dramatic Mirror* announced: “F. W. Meiser will star Scott Joplin next season in a ragtime opera which Mr. Joplin is now writing, and he will be supported by what is promised to be one of the finest negro [sic] companies on the road.” The thirty-two-member company included Chester A. Hawkes (a concert baritone), soprano Latisha Howell, and two young men very familiar to piano ragtime fans—Scott Hayden (1882–1915) and Arthur Marshall (1881–1968). The *Dramatic Mirror* notice seems to suggest that Joplin himself was the star of the show. That leads to many intriguing questions. We know that he could sing and dance. But Joplin’s friends described him as extremely reserved and “not much socially.” Could he have also been a magnetic presence on the stage? (It is certainly possible. Many famous performers have been notoriously shy people offstage.) Another press item reveals that financing for *A Guest of Honor* was coming from a “strong capitalist” who was making his “first adventure in Negro Opera.” In any case, bookings for a tour of about sixteen shows were quickly secured, commencing on August 30th and running through October 12, 1903. These were the toughest kinds of dates for touring companies—“one-nighters” scattered over five states. The venues were all independent vaudeville theaters, averaging around a thousand seats and staffed with five- to ten-piece orchestras. In early August Joplin’s troupe began its rehearsals in St. Louis. The two-act opera itself consisted of around twenty musical numbers, which Joplin had also choreographed himself (the “drills” as they were called in early theater jargon). The production was advertised as featuring “*Pretty Girls — Sweet Singers — Elaborate Wardrobe.*” and as “The only genuine rag-time opera ever produced.”

The fact that Joplin’s company was billed in so many different ways for this tour provides important insight into the difficulties of marketing black artistry in those times. The variations must have been related to management’s concerns with public perceptions about “ragtime opera.” In April 1903 it was referred to as the “Scott Joplin Drama Company”; in March as “Scott Joplin’s Colored Rag Time Opera Co.” By June it had become “Scott Joplin’s Colored Opera Co.” But by the time the troupe actually hit the road in late August, it was being variously billed as the “Joplin Ragtime Minstrels,” “Guest of Honor Co.,” “Scott Joplin’s Rag-Time Opera Co.,” and the “Scott Joplin Opera Co.”

Under whatever banner, *A Guest of Honor* played its first date on August 30, across the river in East St. Louis, Illinois (probably at the McCasland Opera House), apparently to a large audience. Two days later, while playing Springfield, Illinois, evil struck: the company’s manager stole the receipts and absconded (a common peril in old-time show business). Several modern researchers have suggested that this event *may* have ended the tour, resulting in a huge economic setback for Joplin. But recently I have discovered several 1903 trade-paper references to *A Guest of Honor* performances not previously documented, including Sedalia (September 9), Clinton, Missouri (September 10), Carthage, Missouri (September 11), Vincennes, Iowa (September 23), and Fort

Dodge, Iowa (October 10). All of these came after Springfield, which was on September 2. Of the sixteen dates thus far discovered in various period sources, only two were listed as canceled—both in Iowa: Ottumwa (September 29) and Mason City (October 12). So it seems that the tour did continue.

A more important mystery about *A Guest of Honor* is the current whereabouts of its score and libretto. These seemingly vanished after the 1903 tour, and are most likely lost forever, although since the 1940s theories have abounded as to their fate. Since Joplin is not on record referring to the opera again after the fall of 1903, and since he did not finish the copyright process to protect it (which he had begun in February), it can be assumed that he had reasons for not wanting the opera to be performed again. But whatever its challenges and disappointments, *A Guest of Honor* taught the “King of Ragtime Writers” many valuable lessons, which he would soon put to even better use.

1904 was a restless year for Scott Joplin; he visited family in Texarkana and Hot Springs, Arkansas. He also returned to Sedalia for a while. Ostensibly a St. Louis resident, he flirted for the next several years with Chicago, which at that time was developing a positive reputation as a place of opportunity for African-Americans. (Several of Joplin’s St. Louis colleagues had successfully established themselves there.) However, St. Louis was abuzz with anticipation for the upcoming Louisiana Purchase Exposition (the “World’s Fair”) and the 1904 Summer Olympic Games. For months in advance it was assumed that these huge international gatherings would include African-American participation. But appallingly, blacks were not invited to serve in any official capacity by the organizers of either event. However, the World’s Fair and the Olympics did create significant employment opportunities for black musicians *off* the fairgrounds, in restaurants, hotels, and other resorts catering to the visiting multitudes. Much ragtime was played in these places, and Scott Joplin wrote one of his best compositions—“The Cascades”—to commemorate the Fair’s celebrated fountains.

This period also contained an episode of great personal significance in Scott Joplin’s life: on June 14, 1904 he married nineteen-year-old Freddie Alexander in Little Rock, Arkansas. The reserved, thirty-seven-year-old musician met this young lady on a prior visit, had fallen in love and, while courting by mail, had even written a charming piece for her—“The Chrysanthemum: An Afro-American Intermezzo.” However, the couple’s happiness was achingly short-lived: shortly after their wedding, Freddie caught a cold, became bedridden, and died just a few weeks later.

The mourning composer spent 1905 and ’06 wandering between St. Louis and Chicago. He kept writing during these unhappy months, but very few of his published pieces were rags. His state of mind was perhaps best expressed by one of his most reflective compositions, the concert waltz “Bethena,” which appeared early in 1905. Joplin kept a very low profile through the remainder of that year and much of the next. However, in the fall of 1906 he was on the vaudeville circuits, touring an act called “Joplin’s Alabama Jubilee Singers.” (This group is thought to have included Louis Chauvin and Sam Patterson as members.) He had also quietly begun a decidedly grander project.

A fine opportunity came to Scott Joplin sometime in the spring of 1907. A fledgling music-business trade magazine called *American Musician and Art Journal* (published 1906–1916) had decided to do a feature story on him. The instigator of this attention was undoubtedly John Stark who, expanding his business, had opened a branch of John Stark & Son in New York not far from the *American Musician*’s new office. Shrewdly, the ragtime publisher arranged to have the

magazine personally interview Joplin at the Stark store on East 23rd Street, scores and piano at the ready. The resulting article was a publicist's dream: Joplin was respectfully portrayed in a manner not usually used to describe pop music composers. His constant habit of carrying music paper on his person for preserving melodic inspirations was revealed. But then came a *really* spectacular revelation: "Scott Joplin has been working a considerable time on a grand opera which will contain music similar to that sung by the negroes [sic] during slavery days, the music of today, the negro ragtime, and the music the negro will use in the future. . . . The writer . . . heard Mr. Joplin play the overture of his new opera, and to say that it was exceptionally good would be putting it mildly." Here is the first glimmer of what would become *Treemonisha*.

Once again Scott Joplin moved. His home now would be New York City, that vast and mighty capital of American art, music, and theater. His arrival time is of course unknown. But since he had come to New York for his *American Musician* interview sometime in May or early June of 1907, one wonders if he simply decided to remain there. In any case, by July of 1907 Joplin was living in a small and dismal boardinghouse at 128 W. 29th Street in an African-American neighborhood on the southern fringe of Manhattan's "Tenderloin" district. The composer's new home was very near New York's major theaters and music publishing companies. And twenty blocks North was "Black Bohemia," a bustling community that was home to many of the nation's leading black theater performers, musicians, and intellectuals. (Refer to the Paragon Ragtime Orchestra's recording *Black Manhattan* [New World Records 80611-2] to hear the music of this era by Joplin's contemporaries.)

America's leading popular music publishers were all located in Manhattan, and Joplin lost no time introducing himself to them (undoubtedly to John Stark's discomfiture). He soon sold two excellent rags, "The Searchlight" and "Gladiolus" to Joseph W. Stern & Co. This was a major coup for Joplin, since Stern's roster of composers was distinguished, and included almost all of the era's top African-American writers. (Joplin made quite an impression on Edward B. Marks, the firm's manager. Twenty-five years later Marks wrote, "Joplin's was a curious story. His compositions became more and more intricate, until they were almost jazz Bach." The veteran publisher also recalled that Joplin often lamented his lack of recognition when in the company of other "colored songwriters.") Continuing to hustle, Joplin also purchased an advertisement in *American Musician and Art Journal* offering his services as a "ragtime arranger." His relationship with the magazine was growing; a few weeks later, it ran a second piece on him:

SCOTT JOPLIN

Apostle of High Class Ragtime Is a Serious Worker.

. . . Of the higher class of ragtime Scott Joplin is an apostle and authority. Joplin doesn't like the light music of the day; he is delighted by Beethoven and Bach, and his compositions, though syncopated, smack of the higher cult. . . . those who play Joplin's music carefully will find a suggestion of profound thought in it. His melodies are intensely sentimental and distinguished from most other modern creations by being new. Their harmonic treatment is masterly and as he turns out the finished products they appeal to the cultured as well as the amateur, and will bear repetition without number, growing more popular with age. . . .

New York's African-American weekly, the *New York Age*, also began to cover Joplin, and was especially intrigued by his opera project. The first sentence underscores the fact that several other black composers were then at work on operas or operettas:

There are many colored writers busily engaged even now in writing operas. Music circles have been stirred recently by the announcement by Scott Joplin, known as the apostle of ragtime, is composing scores for grand opera. . . . he came to New York from St. Louis and it was the opinion of all that his mission was one of placing several of his ragtime instrumental compositions on the market. The surprise of the musicians and publishers can be imagined when Joplin announced that he was writing grand opera and expected to have his scores finished by summer. From ragtime to grand opera is certainly a big jump—about as great a jump as from the American Theatre [a New York vaudeville hall] to the Manhattan and Metropolitan Opera Houses. Yet we believe that the time is not far off when America will produce several S. Coleridge Taylors who will prove to the public that the black man can compose other than ragtime music. The composer is just in his thirties and is very retiring in manner. Critics who have heard part of his new opera are very optimistic as to his future success.

This very good press must have been heartening and helpful to Joplin. However, although circulated nationally (and a godsend to historians), the *New York Age* did not even come close to approaching the multi-million mass readership of that era's leading white newspapers. Thus, researchers must carefully weigh the potential public impact of *New York Age* coverage bearing this fact in mind. In 1910 New York was a city of nearly five million people. Serving this population were no less than *eighteen* major daily newspapers, and eighteen major weeklies. Only about one hundred thousand of these multi-millions of New Yorkers were African-American. So even if every black person in the five boroughs read the *Age*, it would still have meant that only a very small percentage of the city's population would have been aware of its content at any given time. A comparable demographic situation existed with the country's other leading black weekly, the *Indianapolis Freeman*. Even together, and considering their thousands of out-of-town subscribers, the circulations of both the *Age* and the *Freeman* combined were dwarfed by that of contemporary white newspapers. Nevertheless, both provided sporadic coverage of Scott Joplin's activities, which was far more than any other news organizations of that time could claim. It is to the everlasting shame of New York's mighty dailies—the *Times*, the *Herald*, the *Tribune*, the *World*, the *Sun*, the *American*, the *Telegraph*, the *Globe*, the *Evening Mail*, the *Post*, and the *Evening Journal*—that they printed not one word about Scott Joplin during his decade in New York. None even carried his obituary.

By the spring of 1908, Scott Joplin had discontinued his business relationship with John Stark. The old publisher was struggling for survival in New York's cutthroat business environment, and was unwilling (and probably unable) to pay composers the fees that had formerly been his custom. Joplin balked and took up with a new, small Tin Pan Alley firm called Seminary Music. Naturally, Stark was unhappy at his star's departure. In his private ledger he wrote, "Joplin's case is pitiful—When he hawks a manuscript around and finally sells it for a few dollars the next publisher he meets tells him, 'Why I would have given you \$500 for it.' This torments him and keeps him scheming to beat his last publisher." Losing ground, within two years Stark closed his

New York operation and retreated back to St. Louis, holding Tin Pan Alley and “Gotham” in bitter contempt until his death in 1927.

Scott Joplin quietly continued laboring on his opera. He was not becoming famous in New York, but he was earning a living and creating beautiful compositions. By 1909 he had sixteen new works in print, including an instruction manual (*The School of Ragtime*, self-published), a waltz, a habanera, and thirteen rags. On August 12, 1909 the *New York Age* hinted, “Scott Joplin is busy finishing his opera, which will likely be given a public hearing before long.” The composer had also joined the Colored Vaudeville Benevolent Association, a new professional organization founded to fight for better working conditions and wages for black stage performers. Joplin’s work for the C.V.B.A. would bring him into contact with some of the foremost African-American theatrical performers and musicians of that time.

At last, sometime in the second half of 1910, Scott Joplin finished his opera, which he named *Treemonisha*. It was a remarkable achievement by any standard, encompassing twenty-seven musical numbers presented over three Acts. Included were arias, recitatives, duets, a quartet, a quintet, and extensive (and expert) choral writing in up to eight parts. More impressively, unlike most theater composers, who work as part of a team of specialists, Joplin had created it all—libretto (story and lyrics), music, and choreography. His specifications in each of these areas were notated in hundreds of painstakingly handwritten pages of a single manuscript document—the “score.” This consisted of a two-stave piano accompaniment part, and above, the vocal lines—the solos and choral parts, with their lyrics. This type of document is referred to as a “piano/vocal score.” Now to be of practical use, this had to be published; since operatic performance is an intensely collaborative art, dozens of people (from potential backers to the performers rehearsing on stage) need to have copies of a score. Having it in print was also a mark of prestige and was a composer’s “demo” in that era before tapes, CDs, and mp3 files. But in 1910, the only way to duplicate such a thing was through the expensive and lengthy process of engraving, printing, and binding it into book form. To avoid this expenditure and to assure some measure of distribution and sales all composers sought to “place” their manuscripts with established music companies. In this effort Joplin was frustrated: John Stark & Son had turned *Treemonisha* down while he was still working on it (as they had in 1903 with *A Guest of Honor*); his new publishers, Seminary Music and Joseph W. Stern & Co. also rejected the opera. Joplin apparently “shopped” it around to other New York music firms, all without success.

Rejected but not thwarted, Joplin made a momentous decision: he would publish the opera’s piano/vocal score himself. This—for a man still living in an antiquated boardinghouse probably without indoor plumbing or electricity—was audacious. In 1910 the cost of engraving and printing a simple four-page pop song was around \$35 (\$815 in today’s dollars). Since Joplin needed well over *two hundred* such pages for *Treemonisha*, publishing it himself would be a tremendous financial strain. But once again he overcame, partially by spreading out the cost of the opera’s hundreds of printing plates by having them engraved in small batches over many months. When at last he had acquired all of these, they were hauled over to the pressroom to begin the printing process. Weeks passed. Finally, on May 19, 1911 Scott Joplin took possession of the first edition of *Treemonisha*. (One can imagine his feelings of pride as he hefted his book for the first time.) Taking great care to correctly register his copyright, Joplin personally made the trip to the Copyright Office in Washington, D.C. to fill out the paperwork and present two file copies of the volume. (One is still on deposit today.) Returning to New York, he began handing out review copies to whomever he thought could help promote it. Altogether, the writing and self-

publication of *Treemonisha* was a tremendous achievement. Happily, Joplin's circle of friends understood this and shared in the composer's delight. On June 14 two of his friends, the Misses Christie Hawkins and Stella Lewis, celebrated the opera's publication with a reception for Joplin and twenty-five invited guests. There was a fine meal and dancing, and one hopes that the composer enjoyed himself to the fullest.

By the turn of the new twentieth century, America's classical music community (a small, yet rich and influential one) was much excited about the topic of "American opera." There were only a handful of true opera companies in the entire country, and their unswerving mission was the presentation of the grand masterworks by the Italian, German, and French romanticists. As the U.S. emerged as a major world power after 1900, progressive music lovers (and nationalists) began to press for an American "school" of operatic expression. New England Conservatory professor Frederick S. Converse (1871–1940) was first to answer the call, in 1906, with his one-act fantasy *The Pipe of Desire*. In 1910 this became the first American work ever presented by the Metropolitan Opera and, simultaneously, the first it had ever presented in English! As a follow-up to this novelty, the Met then announced a nationwide \$10,000 contest for ". . . the best grand opera written in English and composed by an American." The following year in Chicago, the beloved operetta composer Victor Herbert (1859–1924) premiered his first serious opera—*Natoma*. Soon afterward (also in 1911) the Met announced the winner of its American Opera Contest—*Mona* by Yale University's Horatio Parker (1863–1919). This epic was set in Roman-occupied Britain in the year 100.

Through 1910 and 1911 the nation's newspapers and magazines followed this activity with dozens of articles on "American opera" and its new class of academician-composer. As the leading critics and musical journalists engaged in their frenzied appraisals, little did they realize that unheralded, a much more worthy work had also just appeared. But Joplin still did have a supporter at the *American Musician and Art Journal*, most likely the magazine's editor, William A. Corey (1856–1916). Not just a trade journalist and music critic, Corey was also a skilled organist, bandmaster, composer, and impresario. He was a classical musician who had remained close enough to the pulse of real American life to comprehend the extraordinary value of Joplin's achievement. The composer had provided a review copy of *Treemonisha* to Corey's magazine, and on June 24, 1911, the following amazing, un-attributed article appeared in its pages—the first and apparently only article on the opera to appear in a contemporaneous white magazine:

A MUSICAL NOVELTY

Scott Joplin, well known as a writer of music, and especially of what a certain musician classified as 'classic rag-time,' has just published an opera in three acts, entitled "Treemonisha," upon which he has been working for the past fifteen years. This achievement is noteworthy for two reasons: First, it is composed by a negro [sic], and second, the subject deals with an important phase of negro life. The characters, eleven in number, and the chorus are also negroes. . . .

A remarkable point about this work is its evident desire to serve the negro race by exposing two of the great evils which have held his people in its grasp, as well as to point them to higher and nobler ideals. Scott Joplin has proved himself a teacher as well as a scholar and an optimist with a mission which has been splendidly performed. Moreover, he has created an entirely new phase of musical art and has produced a thoroughly American opera, dealing with a typical American subject,

yet free from all extraneous influence. He has discovered something new because he had confidence in himself and in his mission and, being an optimist, was destined to succeed. . . .

The principal theme of the opera is one of entrancing beauty, symbolic of the happiness of the people when they feel free from the spells of superstition animated by the wiles of the conjurors:



Scott Joplin has not been influenced by his musical studies or by foreign schools. He has created an original type of music in which he employs syncopation in a most artistic and original manner. It is in no sense rag-time, but of that peculiar quality of rhythm which Dvořák used so successfully in the 'New World' symphony. The composer has constantly kept in mind his characters and their purpose, and has written music keeping with his libretto. 'Treemonisha' is not grand opera, nor is it not light opera; it is what we might call character opera or racial opera. . . .

There has been much written and printed of late concerning American opera, and the American composers have seized the opportunity of acquainting the world with the fact that they have been able to produce works in this line. Several operas by American composers have been produced recently, and there is promise of several others being heard next year, among which will be Professor Parker's 'Mona,' which won the \$10,000 Metropolitan Opera prize. Now the question is, Is this an American opera? And the correlative question is, Are the American composers endeavoring to write American operas? In other words, are they striving to create a school of American opera, or are they simply employing their talents to fashion something for the operatic stage and satisfactory to the operatic management? If so, American opera will always remain a thing in embryo. To date there is no record of even the slightest tendency toward the fashioning of the real American opera, and although this work just completed by one of the Ethiopian race will hardly be accepted as a typical American opera for obvious reasons, nevertheless none can deny that it serves as an opening wedge, since it is in every respect indigenous. It has sprung from our own soil practically of its own accord. Its composer has focused his mind on a single object, and with a nature wholly in sympathy with it has hewn an entirely new form of operatic art. Its production would prove an interesting and potent achievement, and it is to be hoped that sooner or later it will be thus honored.

While soliciting for press for *Treemonisha*, Joplin was surely scouting for performance opportunities as well. Due to its casting requirements, subject matter, and provenance, it was simply out of the question for him to even approach any white opera company for a premiere. But with decades of experience with and contacts in black show business, Joplin would have approached the leaders of the various active African-American musical/theatrical troupes to suggest a collaboration. While

none had been staging full-length serious works, a few had presented programs highlighting extended excerpts from famous European operas. It would not have seemed a tremendous stretch to advance from that to a complete and refined Negro opera. But there were no takers. In time, Joplin wearily realized that if he ever wanted to see *Treemonisha* on the stage, he would have to undertake the huge task of putting it there himself. For this he needed financial help.

On October 5, 1911 came a flash of welcome news: the *New York Age* announced that Thomas Johnson, a leading African-American businessman and former director of Harlem's top theater—the Crescent—had agreed to finance *Treemonisha*. This was a huge step forward, not only because Johnson (1843–1918) was a prominent community leader, but because he also worked for the nation's most powerful theater magnates—Abe Erlanger and Marc Klaw. As the receptionist for the partner's private office above their flagship New Amsterdam Theater (one of Broadway's most prestigious and home of the Ziegfeld *Follies*), Thomas Johnson was an insider in the “control room” of American show business. And he was more than just an office staffer: for decades he had also been Klaw & Erlangers's confidential go-between for matters involving their nationwide Theater Syndicate. Having someone with Thomas Johnson's connections and experience backing *Treemonisha* would at least assure its launch, and with luck, perhaps performances in the Trust's vast circuit of theaters. Accordingly, it was announced that the opera was to go into rehearsals “at once,” with “Some of the leading colored singers in this country. . .” which was to include eleven principals and forty choristers. Then, following the usual pattern of the day, the fledgling company would go to Atlantic City for previews. Eventually, the fully polished opera would return to New York for its formal opening.

Scott Joplin was now committed to the arduous but exciting task of building a production: He would need to oversee casting and auditions, “design” (sets, flats, drops, props, lights, and costumes), scheduling, rehearsals, and attendant and innumerable business details. (One hopes he had very capable assistants helping with these efforts.) Since there is no evidence to the contrary, it seems as though he also planned to direct the staging of the work himself. The opera's music also needed to be orchestrated, a major job Joplin is documented to have also undertaken himself with the assistance of Sam Patterson. In summary, Scott Joplin had given himself a workload that theater professionals of *any* era would have deemed impossible for a single individual to manage.

Treemonisha's shadowy production history is the composite of fragments of information from a small handful of period sources and two or three modern-day interviews with elderly Joplin associates. Over the years these bits have been interpreted in a variety of ways. However, viewing the information with a knowledge of early twentieth-century theatrical production methods brings certain pieces into clearer focus. At some point in the fall of 1911, the composer presided over a “performance” of the opera in a Harlem hall—probably the Crescent Theatre. The cast sang in street clothes, there were no sets or drops, and Joplin provided the accompaniment on the piano. A reported seventeen people attended, and the event—usually described as a “backer's audition”—was deemed a failure. Previous writers have pointed to this story to illustrate their assumptions that Joplin was such an amateur that he was unable to prepare a more impressive performance, thus dooming his project. (Several of these writers also place this event in 1915, which is almost certainly inaccurate.) But the description passed down to us is not of an audition, but a “reading” of a production already under way. This was a typical part of the rehearsal process in the commercial theater, used to demonstrate to one's backers the progress being made on a new show. I speculate that Thomas Johnson had advanced some start-up money to Joplin, and possibly assisted in assembling a cast or in securing rehearsal space. But after attending

Joplin's reading a few weeks later, for unknown reasons he withdrew his support. In any case, Johnson departs early in the *Treemonisha* saga. With him went perhaps the greatest chance the opera had of ever gaining a solid foothold on the stages of that era.

There are almost no glimpses of the opera during 1912. Scott Joplin offered only one rag for publication during the year, indicating that his energies were being applied elsewhere. He must have been preoccupied finding a producer for *Treemonisha*. But it is also worth considering the idea that this dearth of Joplin rags could also be a symptom of artistic ennui: after having completed a beautiful, intricate, large-scale creation, could the composer have felt constrained by the formulaic conventions of the two-minute piano rag?

1912 also brought the news that Joplin had decided to revise the opera in consultation with the African-American classical composer H. Lawrence Freeman (1869–1954). The two men had much in common, including a shared admiration of *Tannhäuser*. Indeed, Freeman was referred to as the “Colored Wagner,” and is said to have been the first black to compose an opera. Although largely self-trained, Freeman had been experimenting since the early 1890s in Denver with his own operas as performed by his own semi-professional company. Unlike Joplin, who based *Treemonisha* on African-American folk material, Freeman usually relied on ancient mythology for his themes. Revealingly, Freeman subsidized his artistic ambitions by working as a musical director and conductor for several leading black vaudeville and musical comedy companies. In 1908 Freeman and his opera-singing family moved to New York City, where he founded several cultural enterprises, including the Negro Choral Society (1912). There is no record of the advice Joplin might have received from Harry Freeman. But given their similar backgrounds, rarefied interests, and close proximity, the two men must have had much to talk about.

In his superb 1994 biography of the composer, Edward Berlin revealed his tantalizing discovery of newspaper mentions of a possible 1913 *Treemonisha* performance, but presented few further details. Nonetheless, Joplin enthusiasts and *Treemonisha* lovers have always believed that the opera was never professionally staged for paying audiences during the composer's lifetime: this is the cherished central heart of the tragic “Joplin legend.” But it is a mistaken assumption, and the historical record needs to be corrected. In combing through thousands of pages of historic newspapers and theatrical trade journals over the past eighteen years, I have been lucky enough to encounter several forgotten pieces of information which do demonstrate that Joplin *did* in fact perform *Treemonisha* in some form and with some degree of success. By putting a dozen or more of these fragments together, the following narrative emerges:

Sometime in the late spring of 1913 Scott Joplin began once again to move forward with a production of his opera. This meant that he had a performance or performances lined up, and principal soloists under contract. He must have had a new backer too. On June 14, 1913 the *Indianapolis Freeman* announced that, “Mr. Joplin, known as the Ragtime King, has started his rehearsals, which will last four weeks. This company will consist of twenty-eight or thirty people. A comic opera of his own, called *Treemonisha*.” Five days later, in the *New York Age*, the composer placed his chorus call: “Wanted—Chorus people, especially sopranos and tenors. Rehearsals held by Scott Joplin at Moses Hall. 127 W 30th street, New York, every evening at 8 o'clock.” So, rehearsals were still under way. On June 21 the *Freeman* continues, “Scott Joplin is very busy rehearsing his comic opera company.” Two weeks later: “Prof. Scott Joplin, known as the ragtime King, is working hard on his comic opera, and has some of the best talent with him. The rehearsals are interesting now. It looks like business. He opens in a few weeks.” On July 12

came a piece of vital information: “Prof. Scott Joplin, the Ragtime King, is still rehearsing. He has his show in very good working order. Madam Moss is leading lady, McKisic of McKisic & Shasty, has the staging of the production.” So we now know who was singing the title role—black soprano Laura Moss. And stage director McKisic is Stanford McKissick (1873–c. 1940), the black song-and-dance man who had been a headliner in big-time white vaudeville.

Two days later the troupe, billed as “Scott Joplin’s Merry Makers” opened at the Washington Park Theatre in Bayonne, New Jersey. This thousand-seat playhouse, built in 1902, was part of a waterfront resort complex that included a picnic-park, banquet hall, restaurant, a game arcade, and several large dance pavilions. The Park was truly a summer venue—open only May to September, when almost all other theaters were closed due to hot weather (air-conditioning was not yet in widespread use). It was linked to New York by a short ferryboat ride, and to other points via trolley car. The Park Theatre’s only offerings were summery fare: vaudeville, minstrel shows, and the occasional light drama, all at low prices. After 1909, motion pictures were added to these attractions. The Park was a popular “break-in” house for new acts and shows, and although white-owned and patronized, regularly booked all styles of African-American talent. Joplin’s company would have arrived a day or two before the show to load in, review their blocking, and rehearse with the Park’s six-piece pit orchestra. Finally, at 8:00 P.M. on July 14, 1913, the company took to the stage. Their show had been given the minstrel-esque title “A Real Slow Drag.” (In those days theater managers had the right to advertise and “bill” their acts in any way they pleased. *Treemonisha* was no doubt thought too nondescript a title to sell tickets.) No printed program has surfaced, but since *Treemonisha* is a small opera—about an hour and a half in duration—“A Real Slow Drag” could have been a complete presentation of it. (The reported month’s worth of rehearsals would seem to support this theory.) It is also possible that this performance was a Tab version (i.e., “tabloid” or abridged) of the opera, hitting the high points and ending with “A Real Slow Drag.” In either case, given the setting—warm evening breezes, trees, ice cream, beer, Joplin’s lovely music, and “10 Pretty Girls — Singers — Dancers” on the stage—it would be hard to imagine this performance not being well-received. According to local newspaper advertisements, “A Real Slow Drag” was to be repeated on the evenings of July 15 and 16 as well.

We have evidence that at least the first of these three performances actually occurred: on July 19, the *Freeman* reported that, “Professor Scott Joplin, the Rag Time King, now has his show together. Their first stand, Monday, July 14, Washington Park, Bayou [sic, Bayonne] N.J. Scott Joplin’s Rag Time Opera of Twenty People.” In period theater parlance, a “stand” was the term for a *completed* performance or set of performances. (Upcoming events were “dates,” “engagements,” or “bookings.”) A theatrical columnist reporting an act’s stand from five days previously was saying that their show had been played without incident. Thus, *some* version of *Treemonisha* was indeed performed at the Washington Park Theatre in the summer of 1913. Unfortunately, its offerings were never reviewed, and as interviewer Monroe Rosenfeld had earlier noted, Scott Joplin “. . . rarely refers to his productions and does not boast of his ability.” So it does not seem odd that his new opera company’s trial run did not generate further reportage or comment.

In the weeks following the Bayonne performances further casting notices appeared, signaling that these July stagings were indeed encouraging “previews.” Joplin was now moving on to the next phase. The composer began to enlarge his troupe, not rebuild it. On July 26: “Scott Joplin, the ragtime King, wishes to add to his company three more people” (the *Freeman*). On August 9: “Scott Joplin, the ragtime king, has signed several contracts, iron-clad, for the appearance of his

big comic, ragtime opera in some of the larger theaters in and around New York” (the *Freeman*). And again he advertised, this time in the *Age*: “Singers Wanted at Once CALL OR WRITE SCOTT JOPLIN 252 West 47th St, New York City State Voice You Sing.” On the same day this ran (August 14, 1913), in the adjacent column the *Age*’s respected theatrical writer Lester A. Walton revealed what was going on: Benjamin Nibur, director/manager of Harlem’s newest and best theater—the Lafayette—had agreed to present *Treemonisha* there with a cast of forty and a twenty-five-piece orchestra! It would open in just a few months, in the fall. This was splendid news—the “big break,” finally. But Joplin’s only comments indicated his concern with public perception of the piece: “I am a composer of ragtime music, but I want it thoroughly understood that my opera ‘Treemonisha’ is not ragtime. In most of the strains I have used syncopations (rhythm) peculiar to my race, but the music is not ragtime and the score complete is grand opera.” Did the *Freeman*’s repeated mislabeling of *Treemonisha* as a “comic opera” exasperate him? Joplin was marching onward in any event, and taking pains to make sure his intentions were clear.

At this time we learn something fascinating about Scott Joplin himself: he was once again taking music lessons. This glimpse comes to us through a short social interest item in the *New York Age*. On September 25, 1913, Mme. Alma Jupiter Greene hosted an intimate dinner party in her apartment for Prof. B.V. Giannini, his student Scott Joplin, and Henry Pleasant. It is possible that this gathering was connected to ongoing *Treemonisha* activities. Greene was a noted soprano soloist in New York’s black churches (later including Harlem’s Abyssinian Baptist Church); Pleasant was a classical African-American tenor and future member of the famed Lafayette Players. Bruto Valerico Giannini was a vocal coach, pianist, composer, and piano pedagogue. Since the mid-1890s Giannini had maintained a teaching studio at Carnegie Hall, and later on Broadway between West 65th and 66th Streets. The Professor specialized in “vocal culture,” but he also taught piano; *The Etude* and other music magazines published his teaching pieces. Giannini also had a strong connection with New York’s African-American community, and taught many of the serious singers and pianists of “Black Bohemia” and Harlem. The legendary stride pianist James P. Johnson (1894–1955) was another Giannini student, beginning in 1913. As Johnson recalled, “old professor Giannini” gave him his “. . . harmony and counterpoint for just a dollar a lesson. He taught me for four years. I had to throw away my fingering and learn to put the right finger on the right note. I was on Bach, and double thirds need good fingering.” But when did Scott Joplin begin studying with B.V. Giannini? An April 1909 St. Louis newspaper article mentions that Joplin was studying in New York; he was still doing so in the fall of 1913. Was he honing his vocal talents? Or trying to improve (or regain) his modest keyboard skills? Perhaps he wanted to learn about the operas that the Professor had seen staged in Milan. Sadly, these questions will probably never be answered. But this episode adds two more “brush strokes” to the emerging portrait of the elusive Scott Joplin: it shows us a middle-aged professional musician who continued to be interested in artistic advancement. Further, we see that while hobnobbing with an Italian *maestro* and black church singers, he was certainly not hanging out over at the Clef Club.

In early October 1913, we have one more line about *Treemonisha*, and it is positive: “Scott Joplin has again started rehearsals of his comic opera. He now has twenty-two people” (the *Freeman*). And then, silence. Nothing more is heard about the production during Joplin’s lifetime. What happened? This failure could have been caused by any number of circumstances. There was nothing unusual about *Treemonisha* getting this far and then folding. When studying the musical

stage of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century New York, one sees that many new “shows” foundered before their formal openings. The reasons for *Treemonisha*’s failure could have been quite mundane—the withdrawal of a star performer, “creative differences” between Joplin and management, or even shakeups within the producing organization or venues he was dealing with. (As a matter of fact, the theater business in Harlem was just then entering a period of turmoil; the control and ownership of the Layington changed hands several times. And the Johnson Amusement Company, the firm of Joplin’s 1912 backer Thomas Johnson, was soon to go into bankruptcy.) It had been a long journey for Scott Joplin but, whether he realized it or not, he had gone as far as he would be able to with his beloved opera.

The composer’s life in general must have begun its sharp decline at about this time, mainly due to other forces well outside of his control. Joplin’s primary source of income—the instrumental rag structured in traditional march form—was fading into obsolescence. This style had never enjoyed a huge mass market; it was a niche favored by pianists who possessed good technique and enjoyed practicing. It required effort (and a “good left hand”) to learn a classic rag. On the other hand, the vast majority of pop music buyers preferred *songs*—that is, simple verse/chorus tunes with lyrics that related a story, accompanied by a simple piano part. Much of what was considered “ragtime” during the ragtime era was in fact syncopated pop songs, not the florid Joplin, James Scott (1885–1938), and Joseph F. Lamb (1887–1960) piano solos that the 1970s ragtime revivalists championed. Although Joplin wrote a few songs during his career, it was not a genre he excelled in. Also, by the early 1910s America was gripped in the “Dance Craze”—an absolute mania for ballroom dancing. The music for this fad valued powerful rhythm, “novelty,” and repetition above melody, harmony, and nuance. And the new dances themselves were aesthetically far different from the genteel Victorian mainstays like the two-step, schottische, and waltz. These had given way to the faster and more athletic one-step, Hesitation, and the Animal Dances (the Turkey Trot, Bunny Hug, Grizzly Bear, Fox Trot, and others). The tempo of Scott Joplin’s music was too slow, and melodically it had too many notes per beat to be effective for these boisterous new dances. “The King of Ragtime Writers” was unwilling or unable to modify his style to conform to these emerging trends. Thus, by 1913, Joplin found it increasingly difficult to sell his new rags to established music publishers at what he thought to be a fair price. He tried to sidestep this problem in October 1913 by forming the “Scott Joplin Music Publishing Company.” He was not giving up on his art; if Tin Pan Alley could no longer recognize the value of his compositions, he would retail them directly. But to make ends meet, Joplin relied more and more on his private teaching income; he charged fifty to seventy-five cents for a piano lesson. His new residence on West 47th Street was ostensibly a boardinghouse run by his companion, Lottie Stokes (1873–1953). It was in fact a bordello. Still, Joplin soldiered on, searching for a producer for his opera, self-publishing sheet music excerpts from it in addition to his final piano work, the haunting “Magnetic Rag.”

In December 1914 Scott Joplin at last joined the ongoing African-American exodus from the West Side to the burgeoning community of Harlem. He announced this in the *New York Age*, gently reminding everyone who he was: “Scott Joplin, the composer, has moved from 252 West 47th street to 133 West 138th street. He will devote a part of his time to the instruction of pupils on the violin and piano.” This relocation brought Joplin into a series of nicer apartment buildings, but it did not rekindle his faltering career. From here on, all the evidences of his life began to take on a decided air of quiet desperation. Joplin continued teaching and tinkering with his publishing company. He also tried to start a mail-order sheet music business, offering a

general line of pop tunes and titles from his own small “catalog.” Simultaneously, Lottie Stokes had reestablished her prostitution business, which was run out of the apartments she shared with the composer, and from sublet rooms in nearby buildings. (There is no legal evidence that Joplin and Lottie Stokes were ever married. There is no record of a contractual marriage between the two in New York State, where they met and apparently spent all of their time. Nor were the pair together long enough to have achieved common-law status. In later years Stokes was evasive with researchers as to her wedding date, giving different dates and even different *years* to interviewers. No certificates or other documents have ever been produced. Lottie Stokes was “Mrs. Scott Joplin” by her word alone.) One of Joplin’s white piano students from this time recalled that Joplin traveled long distances on mass transit to teach in his students’ homes. This indicates his need to maintain this income (at any inconvenience), and also suggests that he did not want students to see his living conditions. By then Joplin was charging \$1.00 per lesson, and was also accepting gifts of used clothing. Still, he longed for the stage, and tried to adapt to its current demands; in the summer of 1915 Joplin starting putting together a new vaudeville turn— “The Syncopated Jamboree,” in collaboration with his C.V.B.A. writer/director friend Bob Slater. Though the piece had a strong cast and rehearsed for some time, it apparently was never booked. More significantly, Joplin had begun composing another full-length work, a “music comedy drama” he called *If*.

Fate had burdened Scott Joplin with more than his fair share of difficulties. But the cruelest blow of all came in October 1915, when he began to manifest the terrifying symptoms of syphilis. This dreadful disease was the scourge of black entertainers and musicians, and had decimated the leading figures of the African-American theater, including George Walker (1873–1911, of Williams & Walker), Ernest Hogan (1865–1909), and Bob Cole (1869–1911). Syphilis is a three-stage bacterial infection that usually takes many years (or decades) to reach its horrific final “tertiary” stage. In Joplin’s time there were therapies for syphilis but no certain cure. Late-stage cases almost always ended in death. The symptoms include loss of coordination (especially of the fingers, tongue, and lips), depression, and violent outbursts. The composer began to suffer bouts of each of these plagues. We do not know if he sought medical attention to try to save himself, and one must wonder if family and friends really rallied to help him find the best care. But there is no hint of such an effort in surviving narratives, only a rather vague indifference to Joplin’s plight.

In the spring of 1916 Joplin was hired to cut a small series of player piano rolls for the Connerized label, and one for a company called Uni-Record. The repertoire consisted mainly of his own compositions. By all accounts Joplin’s piano playing was by this time pathetic. But several piano rolls from these sessions were eventually released—the only record of the composer’s playing. The Connerized rolls were heavily edited, leaving us still wondering about Joplin’s actual performing style. (They were at least made to sound competently played.) But his unedited Uni-Record roll of “Maple Leaf Rag” is a disheartening jumble—no doubt an accurate snapshot of Joplin’s frightening physical decline. This experience could only have been a frustrating and humiliating one. Hopefully he was slightly cheered to learn that the orchestra at the Lafayette Theatre (just around the corner from his apartment) was playing his music between the acts along with selections by Dvořák, Gounod, and Béla Kéler.

On September 7, 1916 the *Age* ran the following tantalizing lines: “Scott Joplin, the composer, has just completed his music comedy drama ‘If,’ and is now writing his Symphony No. 1. He has studied symphonic writing.” Six weeks later, the *Freeman* was the first to publicly mention Joplin’s

“serious illness.” The paper also added, curiously, that the composer was planning to go to Chicago to be cared for by his sister. However, Joplin remained in Harlem, and in fits of despair began to destroy his manuscripts. Fall darkened into a bitter and blustery New York City winter. In January 1917 once again the black press announced that the ailing man intended to convalesce with his sister. A fortnight later, although there were closer medical facilities, Scott Joplin was trundled down one hundred and ten icy city blocks to Bellevue—the free City hospital. On February 5, in the last and saddest move of his itinerant life, he was transferred to the State insane asylum on Ward’s Island. His physician there, a veteran public servant named Dr. Philip Smith (1872–1944) had seen the ravages of syphilitic dementia many times before. Most of his heavy caseload there consisted of similar patients; the outcome was a foregone conclusion—a nightmarishly slow death by asphyxiation. The “King of Ragtime Writers” lingered on until the first whispers of springtime. Then at last, at 9:10 on the evening of April 1, 1917, his gentle and courageous heart stopped beating forever.

There was little notice of Joplin’s death, and no mention of it by the major media of the day. The two leading African-American newspapers both gave short notices, decorously but erroneously attributing the composer’s mental illness to the stresses of trying to secure productions of *Treemonisha*. Forgetting (or discounting) the Bayonne performances of four years earlier, Lester A. Walton of the *Age* wrote, “Scott Joplin’s burning desire to have produced a ragtime opera he wrote many years ago was responsible for the composer’s death, is the opinion of his friends. . . . He was advised by musicians of ability to rewrite the opera, which he enthusiastically set out to do; but even after making numerous changes in the book and score he found it a herculean [sic] task to interest people with money in the opera’s production. . . .”

On the afternoon of Thursday April 5, Scott Joplin was buried in a pauper’s mass grave in a corner of St. Michael’s Cemetery in Queens. There is no account of a funeral service, but whatever occurred must have been extremely modest. His grave was not marked and, astoundingly, Lottie spun out the rest of her long life without ever placing a tombstone on the final resting place of her “dear husband.” (That obligation was not fulfilled until nearly sixty years later, when ASCAP purchased and installed a simple bronze monument on the site.)

Although Scott Joplin died without a will, the New York authorities gave little scrutiny to the settlement of his worldly affairs. His meager estate was claimed to consist only of the printing plates for *Treemonisha*, which were valued at a paltry \$300. The Widow Joplin retained these, as well the composer’s personal effects, which included a large quantity of manuscripts (deemed monetarily worthless) and copies of his published music. Included in this collection were the production materials for *Treemonisha*, with its handwritten orchestra parts. Lottie quickly turned over the unsold stock of the printed *Treemonisha* piano/vocal books for liquidation at a reduced price (\$1.00). And she signed over the rights to Joplin’s last rag, the poignant “Magnetic,” to a Chicago publisher who advertised it as a “Fox Trot” with “Plenty of Pep, Novelty Noise, Raggy Rhythm, Bum Blues, Joyful Jazz.” She continued to run a boardinghouse at 163 W. 131st Street, catering to theater folk and musicians. Over the years her tenants included famous jazz figures, including Wilbur Sweatman (1882–1961), Willie “The Lion” Smith (1893–1973), Jelly Roll Morton (1885–1941), and others. Somewhat more discreetly, Lottie also continued to operate her prostitution ring. In due course of time, she claimed the copyrights to “Maple Leaf Rag,” and the rest of the composer’s published compositions. She enrolled Joplin in ASCAP and collected the payments. As the years rolled on, she supposedly married a man with the surname of “Thomas.” (Extensive investigations have revealed nothing more about the mysterious Mr.

Thomas or this relationship.) She also meticulously renewed her copyrights on Joplin's music as their expirations came near. In the 1940s and early '50s Lottie was interviewed by ragtime researchers, to whom she provided a great deal of incorrect information about Scott Joplin and his life.

In March 1953 Lottie Joplin Thomas died. In her will she named her advisor and sometime tenant Wilbur Sweatman (who had also been one of Scott Joplin's associates) as executor. Sweatman was a once-famous clarinetist, vaudevillian, bandleader, songwriter, and publisher. As executor, he took custody of Joplin's manuscripts and control of an entity called the "Lottie Joplin Thomas Trust." There was still a large quantity of Joplin's music stored in the Harlem brownstone; as Willie Smith later recalled, ". . . Before she [Lottie] died she took me down in the cellar and showed me Scott's cellar full of manuscripts—modern things and even some classical pieces he had written." All this Sweatman removed, storing some of it in his office and the rest in his apartment, along with vast quantities of his own old sheet music. In 1959 he dubiously assigned the copyrights to *Treemonisha* to the Wilbur Sweatman Music Publishing Co. Two years later, he died intestate. During his final hospitalization his illegitimate daughter took possession of his apartment and everything in it, including the Joplin material. She removed all of the items from the apartment and put them into storage. However, Sweatman's sister quickly took issue with these actions and filed a lawsuit to assert her inheritance rights. Eventually a court found that the sister was indeed the legal heir, and the daughter was ordered to return all of the items she had taken. After a long delay, this order was complied with, and at least eleven boxes of musical scores were returned to the sister's attorney. But after several moves and changes of custody, the Joplin material and the Sweatman material had been thoroughly jumbled together. Soon after, all of these boxes "disappeared," and their whereabouts have been the subject of debate for many years. Dismayingly, the items from Sweatman's office (including a Joplin piano concerto) were also unaccounted for.

I believe I know what happened to at least some of this treasure, and to the *Treemonisha* manuscripts. In 1989 the Paragon Ragtime Orchestra and I were engaged by the *New York Times*' radio station WQXR to play a summer concert at South Street Seaport. This event—featuring the music of Scott Joplin—was heavily advertised on the radio and in the *Times*. More than eight thousand people jammed onto Pier 17 to hear the free performance, and thousands more listened to the live simulcast on WQXR. During the concert I made remarks about Joplin's classical aspirations and mentioned my hope that *Treemonisha*'s original orchestrations would someday turn up. Immediately after the performance, something extraordinary happened: I received word backstage that an audience member urgently needed to speak to me. I was dubious, hot, and tired. Then the messenger dryly added, "He looks like a lawyer." Now I was worried. So I ventured out and there, waiting for me, was an elegantly dressed, elderly African-American gentleman. He handed me his card and identified himself as a former member of the legal firm that "had handled the Sweatman estate case back in the early '60s." This did not ring any bells with me, so my visitor came right to the point: he said that he had, personally, thrown away the manuscripts for *Treemonisha* in 1962! He explained—with considerable dismay—that his practice had received many boxes of music at the conclusion of a legal action. Their client—the aged sister of a deceased musician named Wilbur Sweatman—had poked through these, took a handful of items, and told her lawyers to discard the rest of it. My informant said there were three or four boxes marked "Treemonisha," and that these struck his interest because "'Treemonisha' was such a *strange* word." Thumbing through these he found crumbling music

paper written on with ink; parts for instruments—cornet, drums, violin, and other things he could not remember; bits of paper; odds and ends. Everything was dirty, and some of it had been damaged by water. It all seemed like rubbish, and after a few more minutes of aimless perusal, he carried all of the boxes out to the trash. He told me—again quite abashed—that, “nobody knew about Scott Joplin in 1962.” Then he said, “I thought *somebody* should know about this.”

Reconstructing *Treemonisha*

In the early 1970s something wonderful and possibly unprecedented happened: Scott Joplin was discovered by the masses and rose to a posthumous mega-stardom. His music shot to the top of the classical *and* pop charts; it was heard from every TV set, every radio, every record player, and every piano in the land. Joplin had finally arrived, and in a huge way. But he was not merely popular; artistically he was vindicated as a major American composer. The important critics on the very same newspapers that had ignored the man now penned glowing paeans to Joplin’s genius. The list of honors grew until 1976, when the composer was awarded a Special Pulitzer Prize for *Treemonisha*. Three sparks had ignited this explosion of interest—Joshua Rifkin’s fine LP recording of Joplin piano rags (1970), the New York Public Library’s publication of *Scott Joplin: Collected Works* (1971), and the soundtrack of the hit motion picture *The Sting* (1973). Joplin’s music was now heard everywhere and loved by everybody—from kids to conservatory professors to Muzak programmers. In reality of course, this interest had been building for years: ragtime buffs (and researchers), traditional jazz musicians, and sheet music collectors had all long known the greatness of Scott Joplin. They felt vindicated too.

Scott Joplin became big business—multi-million dollar business, in fact. And everyone wanted to get in on the act. America’s classical music establishment leapt aboard with exceptional vigor; the concept of “classical crossover” was just getting started, and the Joplin fad was made to order—something pop-oriented that had classical underpinnings. Instrumentalists across the globe grabbed hold and rode the wave. String quartets, brass quintets, piano recitalists (of course), and even major symphony orchestras programmed and recorded Joplin’s rags betwixt their usual offerings of Mozart, Chopin, and Tchaikovsky. The “King of Ragtime Writers” would have been absolutely delighted.

Eventually all of this excitement caught up to *Treemonisha*, the “Sleeping Beauty of American Music.” Here was a *major stage work by Scott Joplin* assumed to have never been performed. An opera, no less! Artistic cockles were warmed and cash registers seemed ready to ring. But there was an immediate problem: the materials needed to produce this opera—specifically the orchestrations—were missing. The only source for the music, lyrics, and libretto were scattered copies of Joplin’s self-published 1911 piano/vocal score. From this, the first known modern concert of the opera’s music was given on February 28, 1965 by the Utah State University Concert Chorale. This performance, conducted by Ted Puffer, and accompanied by piano, is almost always omitted from the pantheon of *Treemonisha* performances, yet it was commercially recorded. Six years later, excerpts from the opera were presented at Lincoln Center by William Bolcom, Joshua Rifkin, and Mary Lou Williams with a small group of backup singers. As interest in Joplin and his opera continued to surge, there were several efforts to fully stage the opera. The first of these was given on January 28, 1972 at Morehouse College, in a production staged by Katherine Dunham and conducted by Robert Shaw, with orchestrations by T.J. Anderson. This production received fine notices, and brought *Treemonisha* to international attention. Following this triumph, the opera’s copyright owners—the Lottie Joplin Thomas Trust—commissioned a new

orchestration by William Bolcom, which was used for performances at Wolf Trap on August 10–14, 1972. Later, the Trust commissioned a third orchestration, this from yet another contemporary classical composer, Gunther Schuller, for a new Houston Grand Opera production. This one opened on May 23, 1975. The Houston version eventually went to Broadway (briefly), was commercially recorded, and was televised on PBS. It has become the most performed version of the opera and the entity most people today regard “as” *Treemonisha*.

It was marvelous that Joplin’s opera was being staged but, as with most initial efforts, there were shortcomings. First, the provenance of the piece and historical performance practices were not considered at all in these 1970s presentations. These were not “restorations” in any sense, and little or no research was done to attempt to replicate authentic early 1900s performance styles. Worse, in some instances even the composer’s actual music and lyrics were tampered with. The main aim was to build an entertaining show for modern audiences using established templates. All the people involved were experienced professionals who had spent their lives producing European grand opera. They did not appreciate that *Treemonisha* was an entirely different species of opera—a very rare one that had grown out of the forgotten African-American musical traditions of the late 1800s. Without this knowledge, 1970s directors, orchestrators, and choreographers could only view it as a sort of “student work,” a quaint effort that needed lots of modification to get it up to expectations—that is, to be more like Verdi or Wagner. They reckoned that what it lacked most was *grandness*, and so a large cast, a powerful orchestra, bright costumes, and elaborate (and surrealistic) sets were all summoned to add the gravitas that Joplin had somehow omitted. *Treemonisha* presented in this way was a rather conflicted affair; it was pretentious, heavy, and somewhat aimless. Worse, the large-scale production values swamped the work’s slight storyline, giving the proceedings a vague air of not quite coming off. Nonetheless, aware of Joplin’s tragic struggles and deeply struck by his beautiful melodies, most performers and audiences had warm affection for these performances. (Critics expressed varying opinions.) In any event, there was no other version with which to compare. However, behind closed doors performing arts presenters and executives generally regarded Joplin’s opera as little more than a curiosity. With a sigh, most realized that it was not the prequel to *Porgy and Bess* that they had long dreamed of. And indeed, in any of its 1970s incarnations, *Treemonisha* has not entered the regular operatic repertoire.

I came to *Treemonisha* from a very different direction. As a kid I had found a battered, coverless copy of the 1911 piano/vocal score. I played at it on the piano, and hummed the voice parts, all to the bemusement of my teacher (she wanted me to fix the many problems in my recital pieces instead). I did not see any live productions of the opera—these had subsided by then—nor could I afford the Houston LP recording. In 1985, while researching as a Juilliard student, I found and acquired a cache of original Scott Joplin orchestrations (also being thrown away, but that is a story for another time); these were fascinating and revealed a uniquely American method of instrumentation. I was also working on projects regarding historic black musicals, operas, and operettas, and was becoming knowledgeable in this area. Occasionally my thoughts would drift around to *Treemonisha*; influenced by my research I always imagined seeing it in a real Edwardian musical hall, its cast singing and dancing in front of canvas backdrops, the audience cheering for Ned, Remus, and the brave heroine (and hissing those rotten Conjurers). Meanwhile down in the pit, the “Professor” and his intrepid little band (like the kind I had seen in dozens of sepia-toned old theater photos) sawed away gamely. There was great sweetness, warmth, and intimacy in my *Treemonisha* daydreams. And yet, they were formed on historical actualities.

Sometime in the late 1980s I stumbled upon a late night PBS-TV broadcast of the Houston production of *Treemonisha*. This was my first encounter, and it was disconcerting. Why were those guys crawling around all over the stage in alligator suits? How did old Zedtrick morph into Sportin' Life? Why all the bombast? And who stuck that Blues chord there in the Overture! A few years later, because of my research and performing activities, I was asked to consult on a *Treemonisha* production being mounted in a large U.S. venue. Again, it was a frustrating experience: the heavy orchestrations blurred Joplin's intricate rhythms, the large chorus was unintelligible, and Joplin's carefully crafted *dialect* lyrics were discarded for being "offensive." (Curiously, these same singers had no qualms about belting out "black dialect" as written by Ira Gershwin.) In short, the opera's African and American qualities were overwhelmed by the compulsion to transform *Treemonisha* into something it was not. When I explained these concerns to my superiors, I was told, "... but Rick, this is how OPERA is done."

These experiences convinced me a new, historically authentic performing edition of *Treemonisha* was needed—a scholarly reconstruction of the work completely removed from misguided expectations and commercial pressures, crafted with an understanding of the piece's unique cultural origins. But no one appeared to be undertaking such a project. Finally, in 1986 Joplin's original piano/vocal score entered the public domain, and in 1993, I finally began work on the new performing version of *Treemonisha* heard on these CDs.

The first question for such a project should be: what was the composer's purpose in creating the work? In Joplin's case, I believe that he wanted to blaze the trail for serious black artistry by providing a vehicle for black performers. Until *Treemonisha*, there was virtually no full-length *serious* theatrical repertoire for African-Americans. This was a profound void that needed to be filled. Simultaneously, Joplin was pioneering the creation of a body of cultured musical literature written especially for black singers. Again, until *Treemonisha*, operatic music written for African-Americans was almost nonexistent. Both of these ideas were major evolutionary leaps up and away from the established confines of black talent—the "humorous" stereotypes of the minstrel, "extravaganza," and musical comedy stages. Through *Treemonisha*, Scott Joplin would open a new era, and prove the dignity and refinement of the New Negro. Of course, he also wanted to write an opera because it provided the largest possible canvas for his own creative ideas. As the most complex genre in all of Western music, the lyric stage has always been a composer's ultimate challenge. Most importantly, Joplin needed this magnificent art form to commemorate and celebrate his beloved childhood—home, family, and neighbors. These were precious, and Joplin correctly sensed that he was the only one equipped to make a lasting statement about them. He knew too, that they had all lived through times of almost Biblical importance to their race—those incredibly turbulent and exciting years just after Emancipation. It was *essential* that those days be remembered in a worthy manner. For Scott Joplin, the worthiest of means was opera. And this is why he had to act as his own librettist and lyricist. Joplin was not an egotist; there was simply no one else to help him tell this story.

Who was Scott Joplin's intended audience? It is clear that *Treemonisha* was not created for the rich white socialites who had established and controlled opera in the United States. Joplin knew that those people would have sneered at the very idea of serious Negro opera. (As discussed, attending any work in English by a white American composer was quite revolutionary enough for them.) Rather, Joplin's audience was to be the middle and lower classes: professionals and working folk of all races who as a matter of course went to the theater weekly for their basic entertainment. There, using the established production mechanisms of vaudeville and musical comedy, Joplin

hoped to introduce everyday people to the elevating beauty of opera, and not incidentally, to the admirable artistry of a new generation of black performers. And this is also why he made *Treemonisha* so compactly. Joplin knew that there would be no way of booking a three-hour epic into existing circuits (nor would his target audiences sit through such a thing). As much as possible, *Treemonisha* had to fit the established music-hall protocols. Very likely the opera was designed to be the second (and larger) part of a full evening of high-class African-American entertainment, beginning “in one” with the offering of traditional and familiar “Jubilee” and Spiritual singing, perhaps a recitation or two, all slowly building to a dramatic opening curtain of the opera itself. Since the 1890s, comparable presentations had been made by black touring companies, albeit with a comedic tone and the “finale” a potpourri of European grand-opera favorites. And by 1910, the idea of “tabloid-opera” (with a thirty-minute version of *Cavalleria Rusticana*!) was being experimented with by leading white showmen in big-time vaudeville. Thus, a Scott Joplin plan to present *Treemonisha* as cultured “alternative programming” for music-hall audiences certainly had precedent and possibility. (Here, the reader should be made aware of two recent and indispensable books about the pioneering years of African-American theater, music, and entertainment which shed much-needed light on these subjects— Abbott & Scroff’s *Out of Sight* [2002] and *Ragged But Right* [2007].)

It is quite obvious that *Treemonisha*’s story and structure were heavily influenced by nineteenth-century American melodrama. This form of stage play dominated the Victorian theater and was adored by the masses. Melodrama was performed by hundreds of white “repertoire companies” reaching virtually every town and village in the land. In larger cities, major theaters sponsored resident companies to present it as well. Melodrama did not generally use singing, but did involve instrumental overtures and underscoring to heighten the emotional impact. And, because of its generally morally uplifting tone, melodrama was usually considered a wholesome mode of public entertainment. The youthful Scott Joplin was obviously familiar with and fond of the standard “drammers” of the 1870s and ’80s—*East Lynne*, *Ten Nights in a Bar-Room* (“Or, A Vivid Temperance Lesson”), *The Octoroon*, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, *Lady Audley’s Secret*, and their many clones. When studying *Treemonisha*, it becomes obvious that the formula of melodrama strongly shaped its design. The opera’s overarching moralistic theme, its small cast of stock characters (aged parents, an orphan, scheming villains, et al.), the deliberately exaggerated emotional tone, the fulsome use of mystery, shock, and surprise all plunging inevitably toward triumph are the textbook characteristics of Victorian melodrama. Joplin must have thought these attributes well suited to his project, and while melodrama in its classic form had more or less fallen out of fashion, he may have seen it as a comfortable base from which he could introduce more complex artistic and social elements to non-elite audiences. (The all-singing operatic format alone would have been exotic to many prospective viewers, accustomed as they were to the spoken dialog of operetta and musical comedy.)

Joplin’s use of the conservative format of melodrama may have also stemmed from his understanding that much else of what he was offering was truly radical: despite isolated experiments, in America there still was not yet established a tradition of professional black stage drama. There were no nationally famous black playwrights, or black matinee idols (even the characters of “Uncle Tom” and “Topsey” were played by whites in blackface), or black acting companies presenting serious plays. Thankfully, these appalling realities began to slowly improve after the turn of the twentieth century; the first truly successful African-American acting troupe appeared in 1914, when Anita Bush founded her Colored Dramatic Stock Company in Harlem.

And so against this deeply discouraging background, Scott Joplin's attempt to introduce a serious work realistically portraying recent black history was both bold and anomalous. And yet he pushed even further: his protagonist is a magnetic young *woman*. His villains are not destroyed but reformed. The struggle he presents is philosophical: ignorance versus education. In essence, just as Scott Joplin had transformed ragtime, melding disparate folk and classical elements to create a new musical art, *Treemonisha* was his attempt to transform the American theater with a unique style of black lyric drama.

By the last quarter of the nineteenth century there were hundreds of black professional singers working throughout America. These were the people who were to bring *Treemonisha* to life on the stage. When attempting to reconstruct Joplin's opera, knowledge of their singing styles is of paramount importance. How would they have sung these parts on the stage? There are a few early sound recordings of African-American singers and vocal ensembles for us to consult and, less helpfully, we have the written descriptions of contemporaneous critics. We can also extrapolate from data regarding a performer's educational background and professional associations. (One thing is sure: they all had powerful voices, which was the one absolute necessity of all professional singers in those pre-microphone days.) But just who were Joplin's performers? We have lists of a few names. The historical record also shows us that they were a tightly knit group who shared similar backgrounds, skills, and aspirations. They formed Scott Joplin's milieu, and their capabilities and sensibilities strongly influenced the creation of both of his operas.

Another truth is that very few black professional singers of Joplin's time had the benefit of systematic training in classical conservatories. Instead, they invented their own educational pathways and created their own opportunities, just as Joplin had done as a composer. Almost all started as church singers, developing their talents (and expanding their repertoires) through keen observation, experience, and practice. Collectively, their artistic journeys are fascinating, inspiring, and deserve to be better remembered. An excellent representative case is that of the soprano Laura Moss (1875–1935), Scott Joplin's 1913 choice for the title role of *Treemonisha*. Her life and career parallels that of many of her colleagues, and an examination of it provides us with valuable clues not only to how *Treemonisha* might have sounded on the stage, but also gives us a glimpse at the largely forgotten world of a turn-of-the-century black professional vocalist.

Laura McKintosh Moss was born and raised in Utica, in Western New York State. Laura's father died while she was an infant; her stepfather (a hotel waiter by trade) was an avid amateur musician. Laura attended local public schools and began singing in her church. Soon word of her beautiful voice spread throughout the town, and she became a favorite soloist (both as a singer and an elocutionist) at school assemblies and church functions. She must have been receiving very good instruction somewhere, because as a teenager she was already performing arias in Italian. The local newspapers began to refer to her as "The Colored Nightingale," "Utica's Black Patti," and the "Bronze Patti" (the latter both references to the African-American classical soprano Matilda Sissieretta Jones [1869–1933], whose sobriquet "The Black Patti" was itself an allusion to the famous Italian opera star Adelina Patti). There was no "color line" in Utica, and audiences and performers of both races mixed freely there. Sometime in the mid-1890s Laura Moss made the great leap into show business. She rose to the top almost immediately, singing with her celebrated namesake as a member of the Black Patti Troubadours. Through this big-time connection, Miss Moss and her silvery voice were quickly welcomed into the top echelons of African-American talent. (Her colleagues in the Troubadours included soprano Abbie Mitchell, and the multi-gifted Ernest Hogan.) Within a decade Moss's touring activities with the

Troubadours and other black companies had taken her to Australia, New Zealand, Hawaii, all across the United States, and to Europe and Africa.

Laura Moss was a versatile musician and a versatile performer, both hallmarks of black stage professionals of her generation. She could sing grand opera (her diction and high register received compliments from white critics), but “old time plantation melodies” (by Stephen Foster) and spirituals were her forte. She also loved minstrelsy and actually led a female minstrel troupe that cakewalked on into the 1920s. When occasion demanded, she did non-musical sketch comedy. Yet she also remained an active church singer throughout her life. Eventually, Moss’s talents and skills placed her in almost all of the era’s top African-American touring companies: the original Ernest Hogan–Billy McClain “Smart Set,” Williams & Walker, Cole & Johnson, and the John Rucker, and “Jolly” Jim Larkins shows. In between these extended engagements she worked as a “single” in vaudeville, singing opera arias as the “Hawaiian Jenny Lind.” In 1906 she became a lead in Ernest Hogan’s hugely popular musical *Rufus Rastus*, which also toured widely (and which was conducted by H. Lawrence Freeman). After several years with Hogan, Laura Moss returned to vaudeville, working in leading Manhattan theaters. By 1911 most of the male movers and shakers of the black theater had died, causing a general decline in black touring activity. That year Laura Moss became co-manager of one of the South’s leading African-American theaters (the Globe in Jacksonville, Florida) with another noted black soprano, Cordelia McClain. This was so unusual a situation that the *Indianapolis Freeman* ran an article about it, pointing out a beneficial side effect of the large touring troupes: “Those greater companies, excepting one or two, have gone but they contributed immeasurably to the uplift of the Negro as an actor. . . . Among these that have gone out from the big shows like alumni of colleges, carrying the work of enlightenment, are Madams Cordelia McClain and Laura Moss. . . . Those coming into contact with them know them by the energy and ability they bring . . . inspiring new life into the old and staid, thus making the stage what it should be.”

By the end of 1912 Laura Moss had left her managerial duties in Florida and was back touring in vaudeville. In March 1913, she was in Harlem singing operatic numbers in vaude at the Crescent Theatre. There, she was given the tough show-opening slot (the dreaded “one spot”). The critics were divided: the *Indianapolis Freeman* reported, “I’m sorry to say the Harlem people don’t like her style of singing, never did and never will.” The *New York Age*, on the other hand, claimed she had “. . . made friends” with her Crescent appearance.

It is impossible to say how Madame Moss and the “King of Ragtime Writers” met. Given the closeness of the African-American show business community, they very well could have been aware of each other for years. Joplin must have found her visually and vocally well suited to the part of Treemonisha; the one photograph of her that has come to light shows a beautiful, light-skinned (her character’s only stated physical trait), and well proportioned young woman. Joplin must have engaged Moss for his company by the late spring of 1913. In early June she would have begun rehearsals. In mid-July she gave the performances in Bayonne. After that, *Treemonisha* fades into oblivion, but Laura Moss’s career continued on. In December 1913 she was back singing in Harlem theaters, and getting good notices. She trouped on through the 1910s. By the early ’20s, after touring much of the world, Laura Moss was content to spend most of her time back at home in Utica. She gave voice lessons, performed at musicales and in local theaters (once with a newcomer named Paul Robeson), and organized (and sang for) countless fundraisers for her church, the Hope Chapel. An esteemed member of her community, Miss Laura Moss passed away on July 7, 1935.

The most important aspect in reconstructing *Treemonisha* is determining what kind of orchestra would have performed it. This is the key to any attempt to authentically re-create Scott Joplin's theatrical "soundscape." There is no evidence that the composer had scored his work for a typical European-style opera orchestra, or that he desired for it to ever be played by one. Indeed, the very essence of Joplin's music makes it unsuitable for the tonal weight produced by such entities. When he rather defensively stated in 1913 that ". . . the score complete is grand opera," he was simply emphasizing that the *format* he was using was that of true opera (i.e., all-sung), and not the typical hodgepodge entertainments that many of his contemporaries were calling (with or without irony) "operas." It is clear that Joplin created this unique new work for presentation in mid-sized music halls and vaudeville theaters. These venues—as well as tens of thousands of similar ones across the United States—employed a very different species of pit-orchestra—the ubiquitous American "Eleven & Pno." ensemble. Developed in the 1870s, this combination was the universal accompanist for variety, vaudeville, musical comedy, and operetta in American theaters up into the early 1920s. Its standardized instrumentation consisted of flute (doubling piccolo), clarinet, first and second cornets, trombone, drums, piano, first and second violins, viola, cello, and double bass. This very efficient little "band" evolved as a result of both economic and artistic considerations: it made a clear, full sound, could play popular and classical music, was compact enough to fit into typical pits, and only added a dozen more names to a theater's payroll list. Happily, from a musical standpoint, the Eleven & Pno. orchestra was admirable for this setting; it supported singers on the stage without overwhelming them (the microphone was not perfected until the mid-1920s, and was not routinely used in theaters until the 1950s), yet could play powerfully enough to fill the typical theaters of the day (which ranged from eight hundred to fifteen hundred seats). To Scott Joplin, the appealing sound of these nimble and distinctly American orchestras would have been as natural as breathing.

In his original 1911 *Treemonisha* piano/vocal score Joplin presents us with further clues as to his orchestral intentions: there are several instances where he specifies instruments to play certain passages. The only ones indicated are members of the simple Eleven & Pno. orchestra; there are no mentions of oboes, bassoons, French horns, tuba, or harp—instruments that figure prominently in the 1970s orchestrations. Further, Joplin's cuing of the string entrances are always in the singular (as in "violin" or "cello"), indicating that the composer was not expecting to hear string *sections*. That traditional European orchestral sound was based on large numbers of violins, violas, cellos, and basses playing continuously; string tone predominates, while the winds and brasses are interjected for coloristic effects. But in our young republic, a reversed aesthetic had arisen for theater music: the woodwinds and brasses played almost continuously, forming the basic sound, while the small group of strings provided the "color." (And the piano tagged along at all times, strengthening where necessary.) Thus, for all of these reasons and after much research, I concluded that *Treemonisha* should be scored for the standard Eleven & Pno. theater orchestra, which PRO re-creates precisely on this recording.

A word must be interjected here about the banjo, and its non-appearance in this reconstruction. The banjo is of course an ancient African instrument, transported to our shores during the dark days of slavery. However, I am quite certain that Scott Joplin did not want it for *Treemonisha*, and would have objected to its modern-day interpolation there. As a matter of history, *all* the African-American theater composers for "book shows" of that period (Will Marion Cook, H. Lawrence Freeman, Joe Jordan, and others) strenuously avoided the banjo because of its overwhelming associations with minstrelsy: for much of the nineteenth century the instrument had been

commandeered by white showmen for their phony and demeaning depictions of “plantation life.” For progressive African-Americans at the dawn of the twentieth century, the banjo and banjo playing had become another bitter and cringe-inducing “happy ducky” stereotype that they were desperately trying to move away from. Consequently, all composers of color kept it away from their theater music. (I have examined the orchestrations for many pre-1925 black theater productions, and I have *never* encountered the use of a banjo.) Joplin especially, taking great pains to establish a tone of culture and refinement, knew that a strumming banjo would have all too easily sent his audiences’ thoughts spiraling off to old unwanted associations. Instead, his “banjo figurations” would have been suggested by the viola, or ’cello (*pizzicato*), or on the piano, with or without a “newspaper mute.” Interestingly, this aversion to the banjo in African-American theater music extended well into the 1920s; even the slaphappy Eubie Blake/Noble Sissle musical comedy *Shuffle Along* (scored by the great black orchestrator Will Vodery) eschewed it.

Once I had determined the type of orchestra appropriate for performing *Treemonisha*, I had to get down to the really large task of re-creating Scott Joplin’s missing orchestrations. I began this five-year project in 1993. It was a fascinating effort, because the technique of American theater orchestra scoring from the early 1900s was very much a lost art. It was quite different from the methods of classical orchestration that I had been taught, and yet it was also unlike the brassy “Broadway Sound” that dominated our musical theater from the mid-1920s until the late ’50s. Fortunately, I had previously accumulated many resources which proved to be invaluable for this undertaking: I had my own then-nine-thousand-title collection of historic theater orchestra arrangements (c. 1870–1925), which included a handful of surviving orchestrations by Joplin himself. This was a gold mine of models for analysis and guidance. Along the way I also acquired and pored over a considerable number of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American books on arranging and orchestration. These provided interesting theory. More helpful were the period magazines published for theater musicians (*The Dominant*, *The Musical Enterprise*, and *The Leader* were but a few); these not only had articles on arranging, but each had “Departments” devoted to a variety of pertinent topics. Of value too were antique texts for producers and managers; *Julius Cahn’s Official Theatrical Guide* (published annually 1896–c. 1922), for example, gives complete technical data on *every* theater in North America, including the sizes of their orchestras and the names of their house conductors.

As you listen to our *Treemonisha* pit orchestra, you will notice that its inherent sound is somewhat novel to modern ears. Yet it was once a very familiar one to millions of people, the result of instrumental arranging techniques that are no longer fashionable. First, all the chords are “voiced” in a very open manner. This provides great fullness using a very small number of players. The strings are written for one-one-a-part performance, with the 1st violin covering the melody (thus usually doubling the vocal soloists) and the 2nd violin and viola playing rhythmic chordal accompaniments with frequent double- and triple-stops. The cello mainly provides flowing countermelodies, and in its high register is used for poignant solos. (In dramatic moments it descends to reinforce the orchestra’s lower registers.) The double bass plays Joplin’s eminently satisfying bass lines which include many interesting solos and solis. At the top of the orchestra, the flute (and piccolo, both played by one performer) doubles the melody in the higher octaves and frequently offers flights of decorative “filigree.” Its partner, the clarinet, assists in these duties, usually in lower harmony. But often—due to its large range—the clarinet is found strengthening the lower strings and filling in brass chords. For twenty-first-century listeners, the most unusual sounds of the Eleven & Pno. come from the cornets. These once-esteemed soprano brasses are

capable of creating a far wider array of sounds than the trumpet. They were the “secret ingredient” of vintage American theater music; arrangers and cornetists of a century ago delighted in their timbral versatility. They play continuously: often the 1st cornet doubles the melody, especially in “big” moments, usually an octave below the 1st violin; the second plays concerted harmony notes or short fanfare figures. The cornets also play soft sustained accompaniments in unobtrusive support of the other instruments or the voices on the stage. And using a variety of mutes, they can simulate the oboe, French horn, or other “exotic” instruments. (All of these characteristics are very skillfully demonstrated on this recording by our players, using a matched set of 1910s Conn “New Wonder” cornets from the PRO collection.) The slide trombone was also a star member of these small orchestras, and its new, nimble technique was an American innovation that had considerably changed the traditional roles of this ancient instrument. In American theaters, the trombone was both a tenor and a bass instrument, routinely tossing off passages that would have terrified Brahms’s stolid players. Like the cornets, it was used with a variety of mutes. The trombone was usually a supporting voice, but occasionally takes the lead, as toward the end of “Treemonisha’s Return” (disc 2, track 3), where Scott Joplin’s piano/vocal score specifies a novel syncopated solo for it. The upright piano was another standard member of the American pit orchestra—and another diversion from nineteenth-century European practice. Here it functioned almost as a sort of “continuo” (although its part was written-out), playing bass lines and chordal accompaniments, generally reinforcing the strings and woodwinds. A percussion instrument, the piano added a decided “ping” to the ensemble’s attack, another charming characteristic of period American theater music. The “stage left” side of every orchestra pit was the drummer’s magical domain. This single musician had more than a dozen instruments to play—drums (including timpani), cymbals, “mallets” (glockenspiel, xylophone, and chimes), and various sound effects. As a matter of course he had to move instantly from one to the other. Timing was everything, and he usually had to watch the stage (for synchronized “hits”), the conductor (hopefully), and his score all at the same time! Theater drummers often attained celebrity status, and prided themselves on their large collections of instruments; photos from the 1910s invariably show them peering out smiling impishly from among a vast clutter of equipment. For *Treemonisha* the drummer plays the usual drum set and tamps, and also those old staples of melodrama—the thunder sheet, wind whistle, and ratchet. All the instruments heard on this recording are authentic period antiques.

In 1998 I finished my new orchestration of *Treemonisha* (more than six hundred pages of score and parts) and began to program excerpts from it during Paragon Ragtime Orchestra concerts. Finally, in 2003 we had the opportunity to present the entire opera in semi-staged form at San Francisco’s delightful Stern Grove Festival. This was warmly received by the audience, and attracted significant and positive media coverage. At that time we established the Paragon Singers, a professional stock company to produce *Treemonisha* and other early African-American stage works in authentic period style. In this we were very fortunate to collaborate with Richard Thompson, the brilliant black stage director. The company toured a bit through the ’00s, sometimes billed as “The New Scott Joplin Opera Company.” Our absolute high point came in 2005, when we brought *Treemonisha* for the first time ever to Scott Joplin’s hometown—Texarkana, Texas-Arkansas. There, in the town’s historic music hall, we performed the opera for a capacity audience which included many members of the Joplin family. The star of the show, however, turned out to be the composer’s closest living relation, his eighty-something-year-old grandniece, LaErma White. A lifelong resident of Texarkana, Mrs. White proudly took center stage and read Scott Joplin’s written Preface before the overture. It was a riveting performance,

and we are delighted and honored that she has graciously agreed to record it especially for the appendix of this production.

For much of the biographical information presented here I am indebted to the research work of Dr. Edward A. Berlin, whose 1994 book King of Ragtime is a marvel of scholarship and remains the definitive biography of Scott Joplin.

Based in historic Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, **The Paragon Ragtime Orchestra** is the world's only year-round, professional ensemble specializing in the authentic re-creation of "America's Original Music"—the sounds of early musical theater, silent cinema, and vintage ballroom dancing. PRO came into being as the result of Rick Benjamin's 1985 discovery of thousands of early 1900s orchestra scores of the Victor recording star Arthur Pryor. In 1988 the Orchestra made its formal debut at Alice Tully Hall—the first concert ever presented at Lincoln Center by such an ensemble. Since then PRO has appeared at hundreds of leading arts venues, including the Ravinia Festival, the Smithsonian Institution, Chautauqua, Philadelphia's Kimmel Center, the Brucknerhaus (Austria), and in New York's 92nd Street Y and City Center. PRO's music inspired master choreographer Paul Taylor's dance, *Oh, You Kid!*, which was premiered at The Kennedy Center jointly by the Paul Taylor Dance Company and the Paragon and has since toured the world. In late 2003 the Orchestra premiered Rick Benjamin's reconstruction of Scott Joplin's 1911 opera *Treemonisha* to acclaim at San Francisco's Stern Grove Festival. More recently, PRO had the honor of appearing twice as special guests of the Minnesota Orchestra in Orchestra Hall, Minneapolis.

In addition to its worldwide concert hall, university, and festival appearances, PRO has acquired a considerable following both here and abroad through its radio programs on the *New York Times'* WQXR, National Public Radio, the British Broadcasting Corp., and the *Voice of America* networks. Since 1989 the Walt Disney Company has relied on the Orchestra for the recorded theme music heard on *Main Street, U.S.A.* at Disneyland, Disney World, and Disneyland Paris, and in 1992 PRO proudly served as "Ambassador of Goodwill" for the United States at the World's Fair in Seville, Spain. Over the past twenty-five years the Orchestra has been heard on the soundtracks of several feature films and television programs, and its audio and video recordings have been widely praised and considered instrumental in rekindling interest in the rich history and tradition of the American theater orchestra. www.paragonragtime.com

Conductor **Rick Benjamin** has built a career upon the discovery and performance of American music from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He is the founder and director of the Paragon Ragtime Orchestra, which uses his extraordinary 10,000-title collection of historic American orchestra music (c. 1870–1925) as the basis of its repertoire. In addition to his work with Paragon, Mr. Benjamin maintains active careers as a pianist, arranger, and tubist. As a conductor he leads many notable ensembles, including the National Orchestra of Ireland (Dublin), the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, the Aalborg and Aarhus Symfoniorkestere in Denmark, the Olympia Symphony (Washington State), the National Orchestra of Iceland, the

Erie Philharmonic, and Opera Memphis. Mr. Benjamin is also a leading researcher in the field of silent film music; he has unearthed the original orchestral accompaniments to many great motion pictures of the 1900s, '10s and '20s, and has conducted for more than six hundred screenings across North America and Europe. His articles on historic music appear in several publications, and lecture tours have taken him to more than a hundred colleges and universities throughout North America. He is continuing work on his books *The American Theater Orchestra* and *Encyclopedia of Arrangers & Orchestrators: 1875–1925*. Rick Benjamin was educated at The Juilliard School in New York City. www.rickbenjamin.com

Soprano **Janinah Burnett**'s (Lucy) talents have allowed her to grace the stages of Broadway, the Metropolitan Opera, and many other notable venues. An original cast member of Baz Luhrmann's *La Bohème* on Broadway as Mimi, other performances include Bess in Cape Town Opera's production of *Porgy and Bess* at the Deutsche Oper Berlin, Norina in *Don Pasquale* with Connecticut Opera, Violetta in *La Traviata* with Opera Columbus, and Margru in Anthony Davis's *Amistad* at the Spoleto Festival USA in Charleston. She recently covered Musetta in *La Bohème*, Frasquita in *Carmen*, and Yvette in *La Rondine* at the Metropolitan Opera, and sang Leila in *The Pearl Fishers* with Syracuse Opera. Upcoming performances include Susanna in Baltimore Opera's production of *Le Nozze de Figaro*.

Bass **Frederick Jackson** (Luddud), a Georgia native, made his debut in the title role of *Porgy* with PAB Theatre Inc.'s touring production of *Porgy and Bess* to wide critical acclaim. Mr. Jackson has been heard in some of the world's leading opera houses including the Zurich Opera, the Hamburgische Staatsoper, and New York City Opera. He has also appeared with the Atlanta Opera, the Virginia Opera, Opera Southwest, Houston Opera Ebony, and Lyric Opera Cleveland. Mr. Jackson completed his studies at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music.

Soprano and music educator **Anita Johnson** (Treemonisha) has had the honor of performing at the White House for President Obama and the joy of performing with Stevie Wonder at the Greek Theater in Los Angeles. She has also performed at the Metropolitan Opera and with other prominent opera companies and symphony orchestras across America, Germany and Italy. She has educated audiences through her one-woman shows *Black Roots of Song* and *ABCs: American Black Composers' Contributions to Our Musical Heritage*. She created, directed, produced, and performed the concert event *He's Got the Whole World in His Hand* and has visited universities and colleges as a guest artist giving recitals and master classes in Performance Excellence. Ms. Johnson has a B.M. from the University of Southern California and an M.M. and K-12 Music Certification from the University of Michigan. She is a graduate of the Metropolitan Opera's Lindemann Young Artist Development Program. www.anitadiva.com

Robert Mack (Andy) has received excellent reviews for his powerful but sweet lyric tenor voice throughout the United States and Europe. He has performed principal roles with such noted opera companies as New York City Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Opera Carolina, Opera Bastille (Paris), and Teatro Real in Spain, as well as in the Metropolitan Opera's productions of *La Fanciulla del West* and *The Nose*. He toured with the nationally acclaimed Three Mo' Tenors and recorded the role of Sportin' Life from *Porgy and Bess* with the Nashville Symphony. He co-founded and is the general manager of Opera Noire of New York.

Tenor **Chauncey Packer** (Remus) received his undergraduate degree from the University of Mobile, Alabama, and his M.M. from the University of New Orleans and did his postgraduate studies at Louisiana State University. Mr. Packer has performed the roles of Steuermann in *Die Fliegende Holländer*, Amon in Phillip Glass's *Akhnaten*, Alfredo in *La Traviata*, and Rodolfo in *La Bohème*. He has performed the role of Sportin' Life in *Porgy and Bess* with the Atlanta Opera, New Orleans Opera, San Francisco Opera, Opera Birmingham, Mobile Opera, Opera Grand Rapids, Pensacola Opera, Tulsa Opera, and in many major European cities. He has also performed *Porgy and Bess* on tours in Japan and with the Opéra Comique in Paris. He is featured on the 2006 Decca recording of *Porgy and Bess* conducted by John Mauceri with the Nashville Symphony. Mr. Packer has also performed concert works with several symphony orchestras across America and in Europe.

Todd Payne (Simon) is an Associate Professor of Music at Missouri State University in Springfield, Missouri, and maintains an active and varied career as a performer. His credits include appearances with the Houston Grand Opera, Opera Memphis, the Indianapolis Opera, Illinois Opera Theater, the Santa Fe Opera, Opera Theatre St. Louis, the Chicago Opera Theatre, the Springfield Regional Opera, Eastern Illinois Symphony, the Rockford Symphony, and the Memphis Symphony. In 1999, Dr. Payne made his European debut in Austria in Haydn's *Die Jahreszeiten* and Beethoven's *Mass in C*. In 2012 Dr. Payne will take two leading roles in a national touring production of *Porgy and Bess*. He holds music degrees from the University of Memphis and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Baritone **Edward Pleasant** (Zodzetrick), a native of Midland, Texas, has distinguished himself as a versatile performer and as a gifted actor in opera and musical theater. Career highlights include his appearance in the role of Jake in New York City Opera's production of *Porgy and Bess*. He was also seen in that production's historic Emmy-nominated Live from Lincoln Center telecast on PBS. He has frequently performed at Avery Fisher Hall, Alice Tully Hall, and Carnegie Hall, and he has also sung in other prominent venues such as the Texas State Capitol and the White House. Mr. Pleasant's discography includes *The Seven Last Words of Christ* for Gothic Records, Kurt Weill's *The Flight of Lindbergh* for Voices International, and a special 250th-anniversary edition of *The Music of Mozart* for the Madacy label. He can also be heard on *Black Manhattan* with the Paragon Ragtime Orchestra (New World Records).

Mezzo-soprano **AnnMarie Sandy** (Monisha) sang the feature role of Eliza Jane in the Central City Opera world-premiere production of Henry Mollicone's *Gabriel's Daughter*. She has performed in the ensemble casts of Lyric Opera of Chicago's premiere of *Porgy and Bess*, and New York City Opera's premiere of Richard Danielpour's *Margaret Garner*. She has performed the role of Stephano in Opera North's production of *Roméo et Juliette* and Second Lady in Brevard Music Center's production of *The Magic Flute*. Ms. Sandy also performed the role of Monisha with the Paragon Ragtime Orchestra, in the birthplace premiere of Scott Joplin's *Treemonisha*. Other roles include Mère Marie in *Dialogues des Carmélites*, Mercedes in *Carmen*, and Hansel in *Hansel and Gretel*. In 2007, Ms. Sandy made her Lincoln Center debut performing the alto solo of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9* in Avery Fisher Hall with the Metropolitan Youth Orchestra.

www.annmariesandy.com

Phumzile Sojola (Cephus) hails from Nelson Mandela Bay, South Africa. A graduate of the University of Kentucky, with further studies at the Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, he sang Popo in William Grant Still's opera *Trouble Island* with New York City Opera, Harrison in Chabrier's *L'Etoile*, and the Leader in Kurt Weill's *Lost in the Stars* with Skylark Opera. He premiered the role of Arthur in Nathan Davis's *Just Above My Head* with the Opera Theater of Pittsburgh. Mr. Sojola has also had the pleasure of performing at the Edinburgh Festival and Opéra National de Lyon. He is currently performing in American Repertory Theater's new version of *Porgy and Bess*.

Bass-baritone **Darren Stokes** (Parson Alltalk) began his professional music career in 1995 with the Virginia Opera chorus. After graduating with a degree in chemistry from Norfolk State University, he moved to New York and worked as a chemist until pursuing a career in opera. In 2004, Mr. Stokes was granted the opportunity to sing the role of York in Michael Ching's opera *Corps of Discovery* with Opera Memphis in Tennessee, thereby beginning his professional career. Mr. Stokes has added more than 43 roles to his repertoire since embarking on a singing career. In addition to the Lyric Opera of Chicago, San Francisco Opera, and Washington National Opera, he has sung with the Nashville Symphony, the Chicago Symphony, and made his debut with the Cleveland Orchestra at Carnegie Hall. www.darrenstokes.com

Bass-baritone **Frank Ward, Jr.** (Ned) is a singer of opera, oratorio, and recital literature. He made his European debut singing the role of Don Bartolo in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* in Rome with Opera Estate. Mr. Ward's current project features rarely performed show tunes by African-American composers from the world of Tin Pan Alley and vaudeville (circa 1900). Featured composers include J. Rosamond Johnson, James Weldon Johnson and Bob Cole. He also specializes in art songs and spirituals by such African-American composers as Howard Swanson, Margaret Bonds, and H.T. Burleigh. Mr. Ward holds degrees from Morehouse College (Bachelor of Arts) and the University of Michigan (Master of Music and Doctor of Musical Arts).

www.frankwardjr.com

Paragon Ragtime Orchestra

Rick Benjamin, conductor & music director

Caroline Chin, 1st violin & concertmaster

Bryony Stroud-Watson, 2nd violin

Thomas Rosenthal, viola

Alistair MacRae, cello

Troy Rinker, bass

Leslie Cullen, flute & piccolo

Alicia Lee, clarinet

Nathan Botts, cornet

Paul Murphy, cornet

Tim Albright, trombone

Diane Scott, piano

James Musto III, drums, mallets, timpani & sound effects

The “Rest Awhile” Quartet

Phumzile Sojola

Taiwan Norris

Steven Herring

Nathaniel E. Thompson

The Paragon Singers

Diane Scott, Chorus Master

Sopranos

Heather Hill, Pamela Jones, Andrea Jones-Sojola, Mari-Yan Pringle

Altos

Linda T. Williams, Taleesha J. Scott, Geraldine McMillian

Tenors

Phumzile Sojola, Taiwan Norris

Basses

Nathaniel E. Thompson, Steven Herring, Frederick Jackson

Treemonisha

Synopsis

Act I—Morning. Act II—Afternoon. Act III—Evening.

Preface.

The scene of the opera is laid on a plantation somewhere in the State of Arkansas, northeast of the town of Texarkana and three or four miles from the Red River. The plantation being surrounded by a dense forest.

There were several Negro families living on the plantation and other families back in the woods.

In order that the reader may better comprehend the story, I will give a few details regarding the Negroes of this plantation from the year 1866 to the year 1884.

The year 1866 finds them in dense ignorance, with no-one to guide them, as the white folks had moved away shortly after the Negroes were set free and had left the plantation in charge of a trustworthy negro servant named Ned.

All of the Negroes, but Ned and his wife Monisha, were superstitious, and believed in conjuring. Monisha, being a woman, was at times impressed by what the more expert conjurers would say.

Ned and Monisha had no children, and they had often prayed that their cabin home might one day be brightened by a child that would be a companion for Monisha when Ned was away from home. They had dreams, too, of educating the child so that when it grew up it could teach the people around them to aspire to something better and higher than superstition and conjuring.

The prayers of Ned and Monisha were answered in a remarkable manner. One morning in the middle of September 1866, Monisha found a baby under a tree that grew in front of her cabin. It proved to be a light-brown-skinned girl about two days old. Monisha took the baby into the cabin, and Ned and she adopted it as their own.

They wanted the child, while growing up, to love them as it would love its real parents, so they decided to keep it in ignorance of the manner in which it came to them until old enough to understand. They realized, too, that if the neighbors knew the facts, they would someday tell the child, so, to deceive them, Ned hitched up his mules and, with Monisha and the child, drove to a family of old friends who lived twenty miles away and whom they had not seen for three years. They told their friends that the child was just a week old.

Ned gave these people six bushels of corn and forty pounds of meat to allow Monisha and the child to stay with them for eight weeks, which Ned thought would benefit the health of Monisha. The friends willingly consented to have her stay with them for that length of time.

Ned went back alone to the plantation and told his neighbors that Monisha, while visiting some old friends, had become the mother of a girl baby.

The neighbors were, of course, greatly surprised, but were compelled to believe that Ned's story was true.

At the end of the eight weeks Ned took Monisha and the child home and received the congratulations of his neighbors and friends and was delighted to find that his scheme had worked so well.

Monisha, at first, gave the child her own name; but when the child was three years old, she was so fond of playing under the tree where she was found that Monisha gave her the name of Tree-Monisha.

When Treemonisha was seven years old Monisha arranged with a white family that she would do their washing and ironing and Ned would chop their wood if the lady of the house would give Treemonisha an education, the schoolhouse being too far away for the child to attend. The lady consented and as a result Treemonisha was the only educated person in the neighborhood, the other children being still in ignorance on account of their inability to travel so far to school.

Zodzetrick, Luddud, and Simon, three very old men, earned their living by going about the neighborhood practicing conjuring, selling little luck-bags and rabbits' feet, and confirming the people in their superstition.



This strain of music is the principal strain in the Opera and represents the happiness of the people when they feel free from the conjurors and their spells of superstition.

The opera begins in September 1884. Treemonisha, being eighteen years old, now starts upon her career as a teacher and leader.

— **Scott Joplin**

[Note: Scott Joplin's complete stage directions are included in italics. The spelling, capitalization, and punctuation are reproduced below exactly as they are found in Joplin's original 1911 rehearsal score.]

TREEMONISHA

Act I—Morning

[Track 1]

No. 1 OVERTURE.

[Track 2]

No. 2 THE BAG OF LUCK. Quintet.

(Curtain rises. Zodzetrick enters.)

Zodzetrick *(to Monisha):*

I want to sell to you dis bag o' luck, Yo' enemies it will keep away.
Over yo' front do' you can hang it, An' good luck will come each day.

Monisha: Will it drive away de blues? An' stop Ned from drinkin' booze?

Zodzetrick: It will drive de blues, I'm thinkin', An' will stop Ned from booze-drinkin'.

Monisha (*reaching for bag*): Well!

Ned (*angrily*): No, dat bag you'se not gwine to buy, 'Cause I know de price is high.

Zodzetrick: I mus' tell you plain an' bold, It is worth its weight in gold.

Ned: It may be worth its weight in diamonds rare, Or worth the earth to you.

But to me, it ain't worth a possum's hair, Or persimmons when they're new.

Drinkin' gin I would not stop, If dat bag was on my chin.

I'm goin' to drink an' work my crop, 'Cause I think it is no sin.

Monisha: Dis here bag will heaps o' luck bring, An' we need here jes dis kind o' thing.

Ned: You shall not buy dat bag, 'Cause I don't want it here.

'Nough o' dat thing we've had. 'Twill do us harm, I fear.

(*to Zodzetrick*.)

Say ole man, you won't do, You's a stranger to me. Tell me, who are you?

Zodzetrick: Zodzetrick—I am de Goofer dus' man, An' I'm king of Goofer dus' lan'.

Strange things appear when I say "Hee hoo!"

Strange things appear when I say "Hee hoo!"

(*Zodzetrick starts away. Exit Ned. Monisha goes into the cabin.*)

Treemonisha (*to Zodzetrick*): Wait, sir, for a few moments stay,

You should listen to what I have to say.

Please come closer to me, come along, And I'll tell you of your great wrong.

(*Zodzetrick marks a cross on the ground spits on it and turns back.*)

Zodzetrick: I've come back, my dear child, to hear what you say,

Go on with your story, I can't stay all day.

Treemonisha: You have lived without working for many years.

All by your tricks of conjury.

You have caused superstition and many sad tears.

You should stop, you are doing great injury.

Zodzetrick: You 'cuse me wrong for injury I'se not done,

An' it won't be long 'fore I'll make you from me run.

I have dis bag o' luck, 'tis true, So take care, I'll send bad luck to you.

Remus: Shut up old man, enough you've said;

You can't fool Treemonisha—she has a level head.

She is the only educated person of our race, For many long miles far away from this place.

She'll break the spell of superstition in the neighborhood,

And all you foolish conjurors will have to be good.

To read and write she has taught me, and I am very thankful,

I have more sense now, you can see, and to her I'm very grateful.

You'd better quit your foolish ways—and all this useless strife,

You'd better change your ways today—and live a better life.

Zodzetrick: I don't care what you say, I will never change my way.

(*He starts away.*)

I'm goin' now, but I'll be back soon, Long 'fore another new moon.

Did you all hear me?

Treemonisha & Remus: Yes, and we are glad you are going.
(*They stand looking at Zodzetrick as he walks slowly away.*)
Hope he'll stay away from here always, always.

[Track 3]

No. 3 "THE CORN-HUSKERS."

Corn-Huskers (*Chorus of Corn-Huskers in distance*): Very fine day.

Treemonisha: The folks are coming to husk our corn,
I hear them singing a very sweet song.
See, there they are now, almost here, I'm glad the day is clear.

(*Enter Corn-Huskers.*)

Corn-Huskers: Hello!

Treemonisha & Remus: Hello!

Corn-Huskers: We've come to husk de corn.

Treemonisha: Shall we have a Ring-play before we work today?

Corn-Huskers: Yes, and we'll stay the whole day long.

[Track 4]

No. 4 "WE'RE GOIN' AROUND." A RING PLAY.

(*All form a ring by joining hands, including Lucy, Andy's partner; Andy stands in the center of the ring*)

Andy (*All begin circling*): Dere was a man befo' de war,

Corn-Huskers: O, we're goin' around.

Andy: Said he didn't like his moth'n-law,

Corn-Huskers: O, we're goin' around.

Andy: I know we'll have a jolly good time,

Corn-Huskers: O, we're goin' around.

Andy: Because de weather's very fine,

Corn-Huskers: O, we're goin' around.

(*Stop circling*)

(*Andy swings his partner—Lucy—the next lady to her swinging Lucy each time before swinging each succeeding lady. Every time Andy swings his partner the other gentlemen swing their partners.*)

Andy: Swing dat lady,

Corn-Huskers: Goin' around.

Andy: Swing dat lady,

Corn-Huskers: Goin' around.

Andy: Swing her gently,

Corn-Huskers: Goin' around, Keep on goin' around, 'round. Swing,

Andy: Swing dat gent'mun,

Corn-Huskers: Goin' around.

Andy: Swing dat gent'mun,

Corn-Huskers: Goin' around. Swing, swing, goin' around,

Keep on a-goin' around, keep a-goin' 'round.

(*Andy is in circle; Lucy, in center, swings Andy, then next gentleman to him, swinging Andy again before swinging another gentleman.*)

Andy: Gals all smilin',
Corn-Huskers: Goin' around.
Andy: Gals all smilin',
Corn-Huskers: Goin' around.
Andy: Smilin' sweetly,
Corn-Huskers: Goin' around. Keep on goin' around, 'round. Boys,
Andy: Boys all smilin',
Corn-Huskers: Goin' around.
Andy: Boys all smilin',
Corn-Huskers: Goin' around. Swing, swing, goin' around, Keep on a-goin' around, around.
(Lucy in circle; first gentleman to the right of Andy goes center.)
Andy *(Begin Circling)*: All join hands an circle once mo',
Corn-Huskers: O, we're goin' around.
Andy: Don't go fast, an' don't go slow,
Corn-Huskers: O, we're goin' around.
Andy: Let yo' steps be light an' neat,
Corn-Huskers: O, we're goin' around.
Andy: Be careful how you shake yo' feet,
Corn-Huskers: O, we're goin' around.
(Stop circling)
(Gentleman in center swings his partner, &c.)
Andy: Swing dat lady,
Corn-Huskers: Goin' around.
Andy: Swing dat lady,
Corn-Huskers: Goin' around.
Andy: Swing her gently,
Corn-Huskers: Goin' around, Keep on goin' around, 'round. Swing,
Andy: Swing dat gent'mun,
Corn-Huskers: Goin' around.
Andy: Swing dat gent'mun,
Corn-Huskers: Goin' around. Swing, swing, goin' around,
Keep on a-goin' around, keep a-goin' 'round,
(Gentleman, in center, goes back to the circle and his partner goes to center.)
Andy: Gals all smilin',
Corn-Huskers: Goin' around.
Andy: Gals all smilin',
Corn-Huskers: Goin' around.
Andy: Smilin' sweetly,
Corn-Huskers: Goin' around. Keep on goin' around, 'round. Boys,
Andy: Boys all smilin',
Corn-Huskers: Goin' around.
Andy: Boys all smilin',
Corn-Huskers: Goin' around.
Swing, swing, goin' around, Keep on a-goin' around,
(They sit around the corn and begin husking slowly.)
'Round, 'round, 'round.

[Track 5]

No. 5 THE WREATH.

Treemonisha: You girls are wearing wreaths on your heads,

(Monisha opens the cabin door and stands, listening)

And I am wearing a bonnet instead.

Lucy: You should wear a wreath made of pretty leaves.

Treemonisha: Now to make my wreath, I see, I must have leaves from that tree.

Monisha: No! Not a leaf from dat tree take,

Leave 'em there, child, for my sake,

Take 'em from another tree, An' very fine yo' wreath will be.

Treemonisha: There are pretty leaves on this tree so near,

But, to please you, I'll to another tree go.

Tell me why this tree is, to you, so dear?

Chorus: Please tell us, we would all like to know.

[Track 6]

No. 6 "THE SACRED TREE."

Monisha: One Autumn night in bed I was lying, Just eighteen years ago,

I heard a dear little baby crying, While loudly Ned did snore.

And the baby's crying seemed to be somewhere near that sacred tree,

And the baby's crying seemed to be somewhere near that sacred tree.

It was twelve o'clock, or just before, When the rain fell hard and fast,

The baby's cries I heard no more, It had gone to sleep at last.

And very quiet it seemed to be, Somewhere near that sacred tree,

And very quiet it seemed to be, Somewhere near that sacred tree.

I came out in the yard to see, And find out where the child could be;

And there, in rags, the baby laid, Sheltered by that tree's cool shade.

I found it where I thought 'twould be, There besides that sacred tree,

I found it where I thought 'twould be, There besides that sacred tree.

I took the child into our home, And now the darling girl is grown,

All I've said to you is true, The child I've told you of is you.

Take not a leaf but leave them be, On that dear old sacred tree;

Take not a leaf but leave them be, On that dear old sacred tree.

The rain or the burning sun, you see, Would have sent you to your grave,

But the sheltering leaves of that old tree, Your precious life did save.

So now with me you must agree, Not to harm that sacred tree;

So now with me you must agree, Not to harm that sacred tree.

[Track 7]

No. 7 SURPRISED.

Treemonisha: I am greatly surprised to know that you are not my mother.

Corn-Huskers: We are all surprised, surprised.

[Track 8]

No. 8 “TREEMONISHA’S BRINGING UP.” (Recitative)

Monisha: We brought you up to believe that we were your real parents.

We saw nothing wrong in doing so.

If our friends and acquaintances had discovered that you were not our own child,

It would only have been a question of time when they would have told you the truth.

On a dark still night, Ned hitched up the old mules, and taking you,

We were soon driving along the road, And the next day were twenty miles away.

Calling on some friends, We told them that you were our first-born and that I intended to stay at their house for eight weeks for the benefit of my health.

We presented to our old friends six bushels of corn and forty pounds of meat.

Ned went back to the old home and told the folks all about his baby of a few days old.

The neighbors were much surprised at what Ned told them, But of course believed him,

And so you have never learned the secret of your birth until now.

When you were seven years old, There being no school in the neighborhood,

A white lady undertook your education.

(points to the trunk of the sacred tree.)

I found you on that spot, And your parents I know not;

Ned and I love you true; You have been a faithful daughter.

Treemonisha: I love you and Ned too, And your bidding I will do.

To me you have been a mother, And Ned has been a father.

Monisha: When you were a little child of years only three,

You were the most contented while playing near that tree.

Monisha first I named you, The honor was for me.

Treemonisha next I named you, Because you loved that tree.

Treemonisha: I will take leaves from another tree, And very fine my wreath will be.

Corn-Huskers: Take them from another tree, And very fine your wreath will be.

(Treemonisha and Lucy go among the trees.)

[Track 9]

No. 9 “GOOD ADVICE.”

(Parson Alltalk enters.)

Parson Alltalk: Lis’en friends, Do not tell lies an’ steal, because it ain’t right.

Remember all I say to you, Because it’s good advice.

(All kneel in prayer.)

(All rise.)

Parson Alltalk: Does yer feel lak you’ve been redeemed?

Chorus: O yes, ah feel lak I’ve been redeemed.

Parson Alltalk: Ain’t yer glad yer have been redeemed?

Chorus: O yes, om glad ah have been redeemed.

Parson Alltalk: Does yer always aim ter speak de truth?

Chorus: O yes, ah always aim ter speak de truth.

Parson Alltalk: Does yer love all yo’ neighbors too?

Chorus: O yes, ah love all ma neighbors too.

Parson Alltalk: Lis'en friends, Always live lak brothers an' sisters, Because it is right. Remember all I say to you, Because it's good advice.

Don't harm yo' brother, Don't harm yo' sister; O, my neighbors, you must be good.

Chorus (*With closed lips.*): Un . . .

Parson Alltalk: Remember, each day, Yo' debts you should pay;
O, my neighbors, you must be good.

Chorus (*With closed lips.*): Un . . .

Parson Alltalk: Does yer feel lak you've been redeemed?

Chorus: O yes, ah feel lak I've been redeemed.

Parson Alltalk: Ain't yer glad yer have been redeemed?

Chorus: O yes, om glad ah have been redeemed.

Parson Alltalk: Does yer always aim ter speak de truth?

Chorus: O yes, ah always aim ter speak de truth.

Parson Alltalk: Does yer love all yo' neighbors too?

Chorus: O yes, ah love all ma neighbors too.

(*Exit Parson Alltalk.*)

[Track 10]

No. 10 CONFUSION. Ensemble.

Monisha: Look! Lucy is comin' back, I can't see Treemonisha. I wonder where she is?

Lucy has somethin' over her mouth, An' her hands are tied behind her.

Chorus: [women:] What is de trouble [men:] What's wrong, Lucy?

(*Lucy enters and falls to the ground exhausted.*)

(*All gather around Lucy. Monisha unties Lucy's hands and takes the handkerchief from over her mouth. Lucy then sits up.*)

Chorus: Speak! Lucy, Speak! Lucy, Speak! Lucy, Speak! Where is Treemonisha?

[sopranos & altos] Speak to me, please speak to me!

[tenors] Speak, Speak, Speak, Speak, Speak, Speak, Speak, speak to me!

[basses:] Speak, Speak, Speak, Speak, speak to me!

Lucy: Zodzetrick an' Luddud have tied a han'kerchief over Treemonisha's mouth,
An' have tied her han's behind her jes' lak dey tied mine.

Chorus: Tell it quick, quick! Tell it quick!

Lucy: An' Zodzetrick got on his mule's back An' lifted Treemonisha on after him,
Den galloped away into de woods.

(*Women crying*) (*The crying need not be in strict time, but the accompaniment must be.*)

(*Lucy rises and begins to cry.*)

Chorus Women: Oh—!

(*Spoken in crying tones*)

Go an' bring her back, boys.

Chorus Men: We will bring her back.

(*The corn-husking boys run down the road after the conjurors. Remus goes to the corn-field gets the scarecrow suit and disguises himself to follow and frighten the conjurors.*)

Chorus Women: Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh!

(*Ned comes running from the field.*)

Ned: Hey!

Monisha, speak! Where is Treemonisha an' de boys?

Monisha: Among the trees to gather leaves Treemonisha and Lucy went,
They thought not of the conjurous thieves, While on their pleasure bent.
But Zodzetrick and Luddud made haste while they could,
They have captured Treemonisha, and their threats they have made good.
The boys went to rescue her and bring her back to me,
She is our only daughter, and with us she ought to be.

Ned: I'll beat dat trifling Zodzetrick, Until he runs lak a big cur dog,
And I'll kill dat scoundrel Luddud,

(Enter Remus)

Jus' lak I would kill a hog.

Remus:

(He puts on the scarecrow suit.)

I'll wear dis ugly scare-crow, While through the woods I roam,
'Twill scare away the conjurors, And I'll bring Treemonisha home.

(He goes running down the road.)

(Ned, Monisha and the girls look at Remus as he runs down the road.)

Chorus: Run faster, Remus, Remus, Keep straight ahead.

Run faster, Remus, Remus, Keep straight ahead.

(Curtain down.)

Act II—Afternoon

[Track 11]

No. 11 SUPERSTITION.

(SCENE I. Woods. Conjurors meeting. Wasp's nest hanging on bush.)

Simon: If along de road you're goin', An' all to yo' true knowin',
A black cat cross'd yo' path, Yo' bad luck will long last.

Conjurors: 'Tis true, 'tis true, We all believe 'tis true. 'Tis true, 'tis true, We all believe 'tis true.

Simon: If you are eatin' food wid ease, An' drawin' pleasant breath,
Be careful dat you do not sneeze, Because 'tis sign of death.

Sweep not de dust from yo' cabins at night, For some of yo' neighbors surely will fight.

If yo' nose should itch while you sit in yo' room, An unwelcome neighbor will visit you soon.

If at night while passin' a graveyard, You shake wid fear de most,

Conjurors: Un-hun-n

Simon: Jus' step a little faster forward, Before you see a ghost.

Conjurors: We'll run.

Simon: If a neighbor comes to see you, An' he squeezes yo' han' very tight,
You had better speak loud "Hee Hoo," Dat neighbor is not right.

If you hear a mule a brayin' While you're on yo' knees a prayin', Yo' luck is goin' wrong.

You should stop before it's all gone.

(Simon looks into woods and sees Zodzetrick and Luddud coming with Treemonisha and points his finger at them.)

Conjurors: 'Tis true, 'tis true, We all believe 'tis true. 'Tis true, 'tis true, We all believe 'tis true.

[Track 12]

No. 12 TREEMONISHA IN PERIL. Ensemble.

(Everyone looks toward the approaching strangers.)

Simon *(giving conjuror's yell)*: Hee-Hoo!

Conjurors: Hee-Hoo!

Zodzetrick and Luddud: Hee-Hoo!

Conjurors: Hee-Hoo! Hee-Hoo! Hee-Hoo!

Simon: It is Zodzetrick an' Luddud. Who is dat woman dey am bringin' wid 'em?

Cephus: She's not known to anyone here.

Conjuror Women: She's a stranger.

(Enter Zodzetrick, Luddud, and Treemonisha.)

Zodzetrick and Luddud: Hey!

Conjurors: Hey!

Luddud: Lis'en! Lis'en! Ev'rybody lis'en!

Conjurors: We are lis'nin'.

Luddud: Dis here gal don't believe in superstition.

Zodzetrick: Dat's de truth.

Luddud: She don't believe in conjury.

Zodzetrick: Dat's de truth.

Luddud: She's been tellin' de people
dat dey should throw away their bags o' luck.

Now, how are you goin' to get food to eat, If you can't sell yo' bags o' luck?

Simon: Food will be hard to get, If we can't sell our bags of luck.

Conjurors: Dat's de truth.

Simon: Dat gal mus' be punished.

Cephus: Don't punish her, She is a good girl. Don't punish her.

Simon: Dat boy laks dat gal, but we're goin' to punish her jus' de same.

Conjuror Women: Punish her!

Simon: Come on ev'rybody to de brush arbor,
Dis gal mus' have de punishment dat's waitin' for her.

(All go to the brush arbor.)

Conjurors: 'Tis true, 'tis true, 'tis true, 'tis true.

[Track 13]

No. 13 FROLIC OF THE BEARS.

(Enter eight bears.)

(Bears begin frolicking)

Bears: Oo . . . ar! . . . Oo . . . ar! . . . Oo . . . ar! . . . Oo . . . ar! . . .

Oo . . . ar! . . . Oo . . . ar! . . .

Oo . . . ar! . . . Oo . . . ar! . . .

Oo . . . ar! . . . Oo . . . ar! . . .

Oo . . . ar! . . . Oo . . . ar! . . .

Conjurors *(In distance)*: Hey!

(Bears run when they hear voices.)

[Track 14]

No. 14 THE WASP-NEST. Ensemble.

(Enter conjurors.)

Simon: Ev'rybody lis'en! My plan is de best.

Conjurors: What's yo' plan?

Simon: When I count three, You mus' shove dat gal on dat wasp-nest.

Conjurors: Go on an' count.

(Zodzetrick and Luddud lead Treemonisha close to the wasp-nest.)

Simon: One, . . . two.

Cephus *(Sees a strange form appearing):* Look! What is dat thing comin' yonder?

Simon: It looks like de devil.

Conjurors: De devil?

Simon: Yes, de devil,

(Zodzetrick and Luddud free Treemonisha and look toward the devil.)

An' he is comin' right after us.

Conjuror Women: We mus' leave here.

Simon: Run an' save yourselves.

(All run as the devil enters. Treemonisha, knowing the supposed devil to be Remus, does not move.)

(Remus (the devil) stops and looks at the conjurors as they run.)

[Track 15]

No. 15 THE RESCUE.

(Remus takes off the Scarecrow suit and folds it on one arm, still looking toward conjurors.)

(He approaches Treemonisha.)

Treemonisha *(Puts her arms around his neck):* Remus, you have saved me
from the awful sting of the wasp.

They were going to shove me on that wasp-nest.

(Remus looks, horror-stricken, at the wasp-nest.)

When one of them counted three. But thanks to the great Creator,

You came in time to save me.

Remus: I am glad I came in time to save you From the awful sting of the wasp.

And while on my way to your rescue, Many hills and valleys I crossed.

I know the conjurors are superstitious, And afraid of anything that looks strange,

So I wore the scare-crow for that purpose, And have scared them away out of range.

Come, let us leave these woods at once, Because I hear some very strange grunts.

(Remus and Treemonisha leave, going in the opposite direction from the conjurors.)

(The scene is suddenly changed to a cotton field which occupies greater portion of stage; a wagon road in front, men and women seen picking cotton.)

[Track 16]

No. 16 WE WILL REST AWHILE. Male Quartet in Cotton Field.

Quartet: We will rest awhile, We will rest awhile,

'Cause it makes us feel very good, very good.

We will rest awhile, We will rest awhile,

Soon we'll be at home chopping wood, chopping wood.

We will rest awhile, We will rest awhile,

'Cause it's almost eatin' time, eatin' time.

We will rest awhile, We will rest awhile, 'Cause restin' is very fine.

(Cotton pickers sit down to rest.)

[Track 17]

No. 17 GOING HOME. Duet: Remus and Treemonisha and Chorus of Cotton Pickers.

(Enter Treemonisha and Remus on road.)

Treemonisha and Remus: Hello strangers!

Cotton Pickers: Hello!

Remus: Does this road lead to the John Smith plantation?

Foreman *(in the field)*: Yes, and three miles from here, You'll reach your destination.

Treemonisha and Remus: Thank you.

Foreman: You are welcome.

Cotton Pickers: Quite welcome.

(Remus and Treemonisha go on their way.)

(During pause the cotton pickers hear aunt Dinah blow a horn three times.)

[Track 18]

No. 18 AUNT DINAH HAS BLOWED DE HORN.

Cotton Pickers: Aunt Dinah has blowed de horn, An' we'll go home to stay until dawn.

Get ready, put yo' sack on yo' back, I'm so happy I don't know how to act, how to act.

Aunt Dinah has blowed de horn, An' she wants us to come straight home,

We have not much time for delay, 'Cause our work is finished for today.

O yes, Aunt Dinah has blowed de horn, An' we'll go home to stay until dawn.

Get ready, put yo' sack on yo' back, I'm so happy I don't know how to act, how to act.

Aunt Dinah has blowed de horn, An' she wants us to come straight home,

We have not much time for delay, 'Cause our work is finished for today.

O yes, Aunt Dinah has blowed de horn, An' we'll go home to stay until dawn.

Get ready, keep yo' sack on yo' back, I'm so happy I don't know how to act, how to act.

Aunt Dinah has blowed de horn, An' she wants us to come straight home,

We have not much time for delay, 'Cause our work is finished for today.

(Curtain down.)

DISC 2

Act III—Evening

[Track 1]

No. 19 PRELUDE TO ACT 3.

[Track 2]

No. 20 I WANT TO SEE MY CHILD. Duet—Soprano and Bass.

(SCENE—Interior of Ned and Monisha's cabin. Ned and Monisha are seated on a bench, she leaning against him.)

Monisha: I want to see my child tonight, I want to see her now,
Those men have carried her away for spite, I would rescue her if I knew how.

Ned: Perhaps you'll see her tomorrow,

[Monisha:] I want to see her now.

Ned: And then you'll have no more sorrow;

[Monisha:] I want to see her now, O! . . .

Ned: Do not grieve and complain, You will see her again.

[Monisha:] I want to see her now.

Monisha: If I could see my darling now, I would be happy again,
The tears are falling from my brow, I must see her soon, or go insane.

Ned: Perhaps you'll see her tomorrow,

[Monisha:] I want to see her now,

Ned: And then you'll have no more sorrow;

[Monisha:] I want to see her now, O! . . .

Ned: Do not grieve and complain, You will see her again.

[Monisha:] I want to see her now.

[Track 3]

No. 21 TREEMONISHA'S RETURN. Ensemble.

(Enter Remus and Treemonisha.)

Monisha: O, there is my child! Remus, you are a hero!

Ned: You are all right, Remus!

Remus: Thank you! Thank you!

Ned: I see a crowd of people coming this way, They are very happy and gay.

Treemonisha and Remus: They are almost here.

(The Crowd enters)

Visitors: Treemonisha, We are glad to see you home again.

Treemonisha: Thank you! To scare the conjurors away from me,
Remus wore that old scarecrow.

Visitors: Scarecrow!

Treemonisha: It scared them and they ran you see, For I am home, you know.

Visitors: Hurrah for Remus!

(All shake hands with him.)

Unnn! Unnn! Unnn! Unn! Unn!

(Stop shaking hands)

(Everyone looks toward door.)

Corn-Husking Boys *(in distance)*: Hey! . . .

Treemonisha: The boys are coming back again.

(Boys enter with Zodzetrick and Luddud as prisoners.)

All: Hurrah! Hurrah!

(Prisoners are silent)

(They stand the prisoners in the middle of the room the others circle around them)

Andy: Dese are de guilty men, Dat carried Treemonisha away.

We went to de conjurors den, An' captured dem today. What will we do wid dem?

Chorus: Punish them! Punish them! Punish them!

(Treemonisha is silent)

Women: Rebuke and beat them hard.

Men *(Shaking fists at Zodzetrick and Luddud)*: Yes, we will punch

and we will kick them very hard, very hard.

(The men advance toward Zodzetrick and Luddud, raising their fists threateningly)

Chorus: You must/will beat them hard.

Treemonisha: Stop!

(The men stop, drop hands quickly to sides and step backward to where they first stood.)

Treemonisha (Recitative): You will do evil for evil, If you strike them you know;

Just give them a severe lecture, And let them freely go.

Zodzetrick and Luddud: Thank you! Thank...

Andy: Shut up! You have no right to speak here.

Chorus: Don't speak here!

Treemonisha *(To Andy and pointing to conjurors)*: Andy, make them free!

(Andy does not move. All look with surprise at Treemonisha.)

Treemonisha *(more forcibly)*: Make them free!

(Andy removes the ropes from Conjurors wrists.)

(The others grunt their disapproval)

Chorus: Unn!

[Track 4]

No. 22 WRONG IS NEVER RIGHT. A Lecture.

Remus: Never treat your neighbors wrong, By making them feel blue;

Remember that the whole day long The Creator is watching you.

Never do wrong for revenge, In the day or night;

Wrong must not on right infringe, For wrong is never right.

Wrong is never right, That is very true,

Wrong is never right, And wrong you should not do.

Wrong is never right, You will agree with me;

Wrong is never right, And it will never be.

Never treat your neighbors wrong, By causing them to grieve,

Help the weak if you are strong, And never again deceive.

Your deeds should please heaven's throng, For you are in their sight,

You should never think of wrong, For wrong is never right.
Wrong is never right, That is very true,
Wrong is never right, And wrong you should not do.
Wrong is never right, You will agree with me;
Wrong is never right, And it will never be.

Octet Chorus:

[second tenor] Wrong is never right, That is very true,
[sopranos] Wrong is never right, That is very true,
[altos & tenors] Do right,
[basses] Wrong is never right,
[sopranos] Wrong is never right, And wrong you should not do.
[altos & tenors] Wrong never do.
[basses] Do right, right do.
[second tenor] Wrong is never right, You will agree with me;
[sopranos] Wrong is never right, You will agree with me;
[altos & tenors] Do right, Do right,
[basses] Wrong is never right,

Remus: Wrong is never right, and it will never be.

[sopranos] Wrong is never right, and it will never be.
[altos & tenors] Do right, And happy you will be.
[basses] Do right, And happy you will be.

[Track 5]

No. 23 ABUSE. Ensemble.

Andy: We should beat these men, Look at their guilty grin.

(People shaking fists and stamping their feet as they speak to conjurors. Treemonisha silent.)

Chorus: You two low, mean conjurors! Now be good! Be good!

Treemonisha: Do not abuse them. They will be good, they will be good.

[Track 6]

No. 24 “WHEN VILLAINS RAMBLE FAR AND NEAR.” A Lecture.

Ned: When villains ramble far and near, To break the people’s laws,
Their punishment should be severe, Within the devil’s claws.
When villains ramble far and near, With their hearts full of sin,
They do much wrong without a fear, But someday right will win.
We stay close at home, When villains rambling we can hear,
We have no chance to roam, When heartless villains are so near.
We dare not sleep at night, When we have an awful fear.
We keep a brilliant light, When villains ramble far and near.
When villains ramble far and near, And cause great alarm,
We wish for them a short career, Before they do great harm.
When villains ramble far and near, To treat other people bad,
They should be dispatched to the other sphere, To make old Satan feel glad.
We stay close at home, When villains rambling we can hear,

We have no chance to roam, When heartless villains are so near.
We dare not sleep at night, When we have an awful fear.
We keep a brilliant light, When villains ramble far and near.

[Track 7]

No. 25 CONJURORS FORGIVEN. Ensemble.

Treemonisha: Will all of you forgive these men for my sake?

Andy: We hate to forgive them, tho' we may forgive them for your sake.

Chorus: For your sake we will we will forgive them.

Treemonisha (*Shakes hands with Conjurors*): Let us now shake hands with these men.

Chorus (*All shake hands with Conjurors*): We have forgiven you, We have forgiven you.
Always be kind and true, Always be kind and true.

We have forgiven you, We have forgiven you. Always be kind and true,
Be careful what you do, Be careful what you do.

[Track 8]

No. 26 WE WILL TRUST YOU AS OUR LEADER.

Treemonisha: We ought to have a leader In our neighborhood,
An energetic leader, To follow for our good.
The ignorant too long have ruled, I don't see why they should.
And all the people they have fooled, Because they found they could.

Chorus:

[sopranos] We want you as our leader,
[altos & tenors] You should lead us,
[basses] We will trust you as our leader,
[sopranos] We want you to lead, for none could lead like you,
[altos & tenors] You should lead, for none could lead like you,
[basses] We will trust you as our leader, No one else could lead like you,
[sopranos] You know what is best to do.
[altos & tenors] You know what is best to do.
[basses] For you know what is best to do.
[sopranos] We want you as our leader,
[altos & tenors] You should lead us,
[basses] We will trust you as our leader,
[sopranos] We want you as our leader,
[altos & tenors] You should lead us,
[basses] We will trust you as our leader,
[sopranos] Lead us, lead us, and we will surely rise.
[altos & tenors] If you lead we will surely rise.
[basses] You must lead for you are wise, And we will surely rise.
[sopranos] We want you to lead, You should lead us,
[altos & tenors] We want you to lead, You should lead us,
[basses] We want you to lead, You should lead us,
[sopranos] Lead us, lead us, And we will always follow you.

[altos & tenors] If you lead we'll always follow you.

[basses] Dear, your bidding we will do, and we will always follow you.

[all] We feel blue, dear, we feel blue!

[sopranos] We want you as our leader, We want you to lead us.

[altos & tenors] You should lead us, You should lead us.

[basses] We will trust you as our leader, We will trust you as our leader.

Treemonisha: If I lead the good women, Tell me, who will lead the men?

Chorus Men: You, you, you, you, you!

Treemonisha: Women may follow me many days long,
But the men may think that I am wrong.

Chorus Men: No, no, no, no, no!

Chorus (all): We all agree to trust you, And we will be true.

We all agree to trust you, And we will be true.

Treemonisha: There's need of some good leader, And there's not much time to wait.

To lead us in the right way Before it is too late.

For ignorance is criminal In this enlightened day,

So let us all get busy, When once we have found the way.

Chorus:

[sopranos] We want you as our leader,

[altos & tenors] You should lead us,

[basses] We will trust you as our leader,

[sopranos] We want you to lead, for none could lead like you,

[altos & tenors] You should lead, for none could lead like you,

[basses] We will trust you as our leader, No one else could lead like you,

[sopranos] You know what is best to do.

[altos & tenors] You know what is best to do.

[basses] For you know what is best to do.

[sopranos] We want you as our leader,

[altos & tenors] You should lead us,

[basses] We will trust you as our leader,

[sopranos] We want you as our leader,

[altos & tenors] You should lead us,

[basses] We will trust you as our leader,

[sopranos] Lead us, lead us, and we will surely rise.

[altos & tenors] If you lead we will surely rise.

[basses] You must lead for you are wise, and we will surely rise.

[sopranos] We want you to lead, You should lead us,

[altos & tenors] We want you to lead, You should lead us,

[basses] We want you to lead, You should lead us,

[sopranos] Lead us, lead us, And we will always follow you.

[altos & tenors] If you lead we'll always follow you.

[basses] Dear, your bidding we will do, and we will always follow you.

[all] We feel blue, dear, we feel blue!

[sopranos] We want you as our leader, We want you to lead us.

[altos & tenors] You should lead us, You should lead us.

[basses] We will trust you as our leader, We will trust you as our leader.

Treemonisha: I will lead you; O yes, I will lead you.

[chorus] lead now, please lead now,

Treemonisha: O yes, I will lead you.

[chorus] please lead,

Treemonisha: Yes, I will lead you.

[chorus—sopranos, altos, tenors] for we will trust you,

[chorus—basses] We will trust you as our leader.

[Track 9]

No. 27 A REAL SLOW DRAG.

(Treemonisha and Lucy stand on bench in rear of room.)

Directions for The Slow Drag.

1. The Slow Drag must begin on the first beat of each measure.
2. When moving forward, drag the left foot; when moving backward, drag the right foot.
3. When moving sideways to right, drag left foot; when moving sideways to left, drag right foot.
4. When prancing, your steps must come on each beat of the measure.
5. When marching and when sliding, your steps must come on the first and third beat of each measure.
6. Hop and skip on second beat of measure. Double the Schottische step to fit the slow music.

SCOTT JOPLIN.

Treemonisha: Salute your partner, do the drag, drag, drag.

(Salute partners.)

(Slow Drag forward.)

Stop and move backward, do the drag.

(All stop.)

(Slow drag backward.)

All of you stop.

(All stop.)

Look to your right and do the drag, drag, drag.

(All look to right.)

(All Slow Drag sideways to right.)

To your left, to your left, That's the way.

(All Slow Drag sideways to left.)

(All stop.)

(Salute partners.)

Treemonisha and Lucy *(All march, doing the dude walk):*

Marching onward, marching onward, marching to that lovely tune.

Marching onward, marching onward, happy as a bird in June.

Sliding onward, sliding onward, listen to that rag.

(All stop, put right hand to ear and listen to music.)

Hop, and skip, now do that slow – o, do that slow drag.

(All dance.)

Dance slowly,

(All prance.)

prance slowly, while you hear that pretty rag.

(All dance.)

Dance slowly,

(All prance.)

prance slowly,

(All Slow Drag.)

Now you do the real “Slow Drag.”

(All walk.)

Walk slowly,

(All whisper to partners while walking)

talk lowly,

Treemonisha, Lucy, and Chorus *(All stop, put right hand to ear and listen to music.):*

Listen to that rag,

Hop *(All hop.)* and skip, *(All skip.)*

now do that slow – o,

(All Slow Drag forward.)

do that slow drag.

Treemonisha *(All Schottische.):* Move along, Don’t stop, don’t stop dancing,

Drag along,

(All Slow Drag.)

Stop.

(All stop.)

Move along,

(All Schottische.)

Don’t stop, Don’t stop dancing,

drag along,

(All Slow Drag.)

Doing the real slow drag.

Move along,

(All Schottische.)

don’t stop, don’t stop dancing

(All Slow Drag.)

Drag along, Stop!

(All stop.)

(All Schottische.)

Move along, don’t stop, don’t stop dancing,

(All Slow Drag.)

Drag along, doing the real slow drag.

Treemonisha and Lucy *(All march, doing the dude walk):*

Marching onward, marching onward, marching to that lovely tune.

Marching onward, marching onward, happy as a bird in June.

Sliding onward, sliding onward, listen to that rag.

(All stop, put right hand to ear and listen to music.)

Hop,

(All hop.)

and skip,

(All skip.)

now do that slow – o,

(Slow drag forward.)

do that slow drag.

Full Company *(All dance.):*

Dance slowly, prance slowly, while you hear that pretty rag.

Dance slowly, prance slowly, Now you do the real “Slow Drag.”

Walk slowly, talk lowly,

(All stop, put right hand to ear and listen to music.)

Listen to that rag.

Hop

(All hop.)

and skip,

(All skip.)

now do that slow – o

(All Slow Drag)

do that slow drag,

(All stop.)

slow – o – o – o.

(Curtain down.)

(End of Opera.)

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Produced and engineered by Judith Sherman

Engineering and editing assistance: Jeanne Velonis

Preface reading engineered by Jim Weaver, Townsquare Media, Texarkana, AR.

Digital mastering: Paul Zinman, SoundByte Productions Inc., NYC

Recorded May 31 and June 1–2, 2011 at the American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York City

Design: Chris Ware

Piano by Steinway and Sons.

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The *Treemonisha* performance materials and scores heard on this recording are available for rental.

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This recording was made possible by grants from The National Endowment for the Arts, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the Francis Goelet Charitable Lead Trust.

The performers wish to dedicate this recording to all of their teachers.

Preface reading thanks: Mrs. LaErma White and family; Dr. Teretha F. Harper, Chair, African-American Committee–Texarkana Regional Arts & Humanities Council; and Nita Fran Hutcheson, Executive Director, Main Street Texarkana.

Special thanks to Chris Ware.

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