

# Admirers pay homage to ragtime great, Scott Joplin

**NEW YORK** — When Scott Joplin died on April 1, 1917, at the age of 48 he was buried at St. Michael's

cemetery here without ceremony or gravestone. He died penniless and friendless, although he was recognized as the pre-eminent ragtime pianist of his day.

His ragtime compositions, such as "The Entertainer," "Maple Leaf Rag" and "Roso Time Rag" were among the most popular tunes at the turn of the century, and they began to come to the public's atten-

tion again last year, when they were released as part of the sound track of the Academy Award-winning movie, "The Sting." The music itself won an Oscar for Marvin Hamlisch, who adapted it for the film.

Because of the movie, millions of people have listened to the music of Scott Joplin.

Thirty of those people quietly gathered last Sunday at St. Michael's in Astoria in the borough of Queens to pay their respects to the composer and to express their feelings of shame that "this renowned and unique American lies in an unmarked grave in Queens."

"I can't begin to imagine how many millions of dollars have been made from Joplin's music," said George Taylor of Queens. "It's surprising that not one of the people who made that money is here."

Joplin would probably not have been surprised. At the height of his success, phonograph records were just beginning to gain public acceptance, and his music was the kind played in dance halls and saloons — not in concert halls. Thus, the only real source of in-

come that Joplin has was from his own performances and from the sale of music.

During those years, however, copyright laws were used strictly for the benefit of sheet music publishers. Throughout his career Joplin received outright payments from the publishers — never any royalties from the sale of his music.

"Few black composers existed in those days, yet Scott Joplin would not allow himself to be defeated by prejudice and discrimination, even though he felt he was chasing a dream," said Felix Cuervo, president of the Native New Yorkers Historical Association, which sponsored Sunday's gathering.

The American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers has indicated that it will place a grave site in October.

Cuervo said he hoped that enough money would be raised to place a stone at the burial site.

"In a way, it's kind of nice," said one observer, "that the people who care

are the ones whom Joplin made a little happier, and not the ones who are a lot richer."

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