

James P. Johnson

Jazz Musicians

Scott #2985

Issued Sept 16, 1995 in Monterey, CA

Designed by Thomas Blackshear



James Price Johnson was born on February 1, 1894 in New Brunswick, New Jersey. One of America's most noted Jazz Artists, he was known as the King of the Stride Piano during the 1920s. His early music training included the study of classical techniques under an Italian piano instructor.

James combined elements of ragtime, blues, popular music, ring-shout dance rhythms and his own inimitable style to create the first distinctive jazz piano style, Harlem Stride. His 1921 composition, Carolina Shout was the first recorded jazz piano solo.

In 1923 James became the first African American musician on the staff of the QRS Piano Roll Company. He also wrote Running Wild that year, a Broadway production which featured the Charleston, the tune that became the theme for the Roaring Twenties.

James wrote many other jazz standards including: If I Could Be With You, Old Fashioned Love, Snowy Morning Blues and You Can't Lose a Broken Heart. He wrote Harlem Symphony and Jazzamine Piano Concerto which were performed during his lifetime and have recently been rediscovered. He also collaborated with poet Langston Hughes on an opera production.

Both Bessie Smith and Ethel Waters used James as an accompanist. Duke Ellington and Fats Waller were both taught by James.

During the 1940s James suffered several strokes but remained active. He suffered a major stroke in 1951 which forced his retirement. James P. Johnson died in New York city on November 17, 1955.

Sources:

Encyclopedia Britannica

Encyclopedia Africana

Atlanta Music Group (AMG)