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## Treemonisha, Scott Joplin's opera, a bridge to new arts experiences

By Dwight Hobbes  
Arts Critic

The only thing I can see wrong with an outfit like Project SUCCESS is that we need a whole lot more outfits just like it. The arts, after all, constitute a fairly unsung option for kids who face strong odds against them making something of themselves. Usually, in fact, when we think of kids who make it in theatre, dance, acting, what-have-you, we tend to think of either the privileged or those who get into public performing arts high schools. Thanks to Project SUCCESS, more kids are getting at least introduced to the arts. And even if they don't pursue it as a career, they have the opportunity to appreciate it. Lives have been changed that way. Young "inner city" lives in particular.

The organization bills itself as a non-profit organization that began by serving 200 kids in Minneapolis in 1994, and, ever since, has grown to serve more than 8,000 between both the Twin Cities. It utilizes theater and school-based workshops to inspire young folk to imagine, believe in, and pursue life's possibilities. And this time around it does so in partnership with North Star Opera and Minneapolis' North Community High School. Youth will be exposed to the artistry of ragtime pioneer Scott Joplin, whose composition "The Entertainer" made Marvin Hamlisch a star, the entire score being alternately written and influenced by Joplin. Joplin, by the way, was posthumously awarded a Pulitzer Prize for his contributions to American music. You'd be surprised what youngsters are capable of when they encounter

such a part of their culture and get the wild idea that maybe they too can do something extraordinary. That's how we came up with more than a few public school spawned geniuses -- from writer James Baldwin to performer-actor Mos Def.

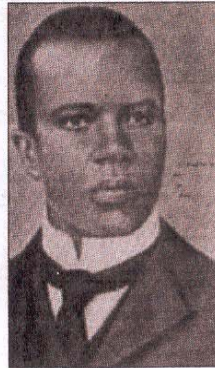
For good measure, youngsters will get a taste of premiere talents who, just like themselves, are based right here in the Twin Cities.



Adrienne Diercks

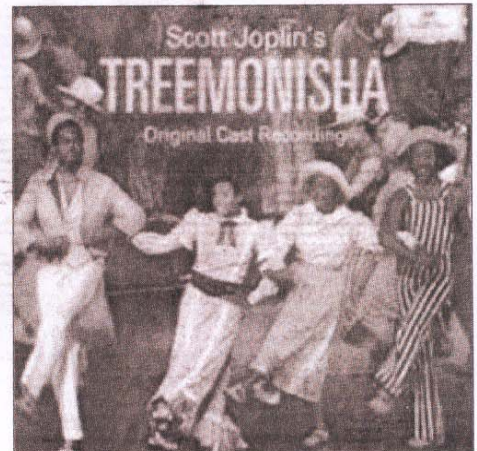


Settu Jones



Scott Joplin

That's the work of director Ricky Thompson, actor-singer-dancer T. Mychael Rambo, vocalist Joe Carter and set designer Settu Jones as well as singers Lisa Butcher, E. Mannie Cadet



and members of Leigh Morris Chorale and the T. J. Anderson. Not bad, at all. The show is North Star Opera's production of Scott Joplin's TREEMONISHA: Turn to 4

### Treemonisha

From 2

Joplin's historic opera Treemonisha, which has as part of its run, special performances for North High students on Feb 15 and 17 at Concordia University's E. M. Pearson Theater in St. Paul. It's the story of a young African American woman who, because of her education, is able to lead her community forward to a better life in the post-slavery South. The tale is an allegory of how Joplin viewed the problems of the African American community during his time: he firmly believed in empowerment through education. A refreshing bonus: the protagonist is an 18-year-old Black heroine who's not a foul-mouthed hoochie-mama or some other stereotype, but fictional forbear of the women's liberation movement.

Project SUCCESS executive director Adrienne Diercks created the organi-

zation, inspired by the impact she saw a workshop at the Guthrie Theater have on students. A powerful theatrical experience became the starting point for an in-depth discussion of the play's relevance to students' own lives and the choices they anticipated making for the future. She got such strong positive response from both students and the Guthrie that she established Project SUCCESS as a pilot program at North High to help seniors actively plan for life after graduation. They were guided to set and achieve personal goals, and encouraged to prepare a clear method of operation for their futures.

How wrong can you go with something like this? And can't you just see the benefit of more such goings on. While Bill Cosby and others are bad-mouthing the grassroots from on high, Project SUCCESS rolls up its sleeves and gets busy at the task of salvaging same,

empowering youth. Could we not stand a whole lot more institutions following this lead?



HELPING KIDS DREAM WITH  
THEIR EYES OPEN