REVIEW-ARTICLE
THE MUSIC OF GOTTSCHALK

The Piano Works of Louis Moreau Gottschalk. Edited by Vera Brodsky Lawrence. Editorial advisor Richard Jackson. Complete in 5 volumes. With a Biographical Essay by Robert Offergeld. New York: Arno Press & The New York Times. 1969.

The Centennial Catalogue of the Published and Unpublished Compositions of Louis Moreau Gottschalk. Prepared for Stereo Review by Robert Offergeld. New York: Ziff-Davis Publishing Co., 1970.

Louis Moreau Gottschalk: Forty Works for Piano. Alan Mandel, piano. Desto Records (DC 6470-73 Stereo). Recorded at Stereo Sound Studios by Jerry Newman, Engineer. Eight sides, boxed.

In view of the general reluctance among American musicologists to regard Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829-1869) as a composer worthy of "serious" scholarly interest, it is not at all surprising that the two major editorial enterprises in connection with the Gottschalk centenary have been accomplished outside the sphere of academic scholarship: one sponsored by a daily newspaper, the other by a general periodical. While the individuals immediately concerned with these publications are unquestionably competent in their respective fields, none of them could be described as a pillar of the academic establishment.

Robert Offergeld, in his Introduction to the Piano Works titled "The Gottschalk Legend: Grand Fantasy for a Great Many Pianos" reveals an extraordinary empathy for his subject, treating him almost as a fictional character, bringing him alive in the full context of his amazing career instead of burying him under a mass of footnotes and other pedantic impedimenta. There will be some who would prefer the full trappings of scholarship, including a conventional critical apparatus. Yet it would be a mistake to confuse substance with manner in this brilliantly perceptive presentation of a living legend. The outward apparatus may be missing, but not the critical insight and the historical grasp—even to the perspicacious comment that "history has not operated on Gottschalk at all." This last remark, indeed, sums up the entire dilemma of American musical composition in the nineteenth century: it remains isolated in its own time, never having entered the stream of history. No matter how many "histories" of American music are written, or how many monographs and dissertations are ground out from the academies, this ahistorical isolation will persist until more of our early composers come to be accepted as *necessary* links in the cultural continuity of the nation. Mr. Offergeld concedes that Gottschalk is "ahistoric," but maintains that this is not the same thing as being

obsolete. Within and beyond the biographical framework of his Introduction, he undertakes to demonstrate, very persuasively, that the music of Gottschalk—or at least much of it—is *not* obsolete.

Before going on to discuss the historical and aesthetic factors involved in an evaluation of Gottschalk's music, let me say something about the organization and the criteria of this edition. First, this is not an "edited" edition, but a facsimile reproduction of contemporary editions of the piano music (including the outside title pages), with no emendations whatsoever and no critical apparatus of any kind. The principal criteria for choosing a specific edition were authenticity and legibility—the latter important because "the present edition is intended for performers as well as for students and scholars." There is a total of 112 compositions originally issued by fifteen publishers: eleven from the United States, three from Europe, and one from Brazil. The chief publishers are William Hall & Son of New York, Oliver Ditson Company of Boston, and B. Schott's Söhne of Mainz. A practical problem was "the multitude of languages and titles attached to Gottschalk's pieces"—a practice fertile in confusion. French and English titles for the same piece—often bearing no semantic relation—are common; and many pieces have in addition a descriptive subtitle, such as *Polka de salon.* The editor's solution has been to list in the Table of Contents "the principal titles as they appear in this edition whatever their language, in alphabetical sequence." The main title is printed in large capitals, the translation or alternate title in smaller capitals, and the subtitle in upper and lower case. All translations and alternate titles are cross-referenced in the Comprehensive Index for all five volumes, which is printed at the end of each volume. In addition there is a separate Table of Contents at the beginning of each volume. This gives dates (or approximate dates) of composition, derived from the *Centennial Cataogue* compiled by Robert Offergeld. Another acknowledged source of data is the doctoral dissertation, *The Piano Music of Louis Moreau Gottschalk,* by John G. Doyle (New York University, 1960). No attempt is made to supply missing opus numbers, nor to reconcile existing ones.

The bulk of Mr. Offergeld's Introduction is devoted to a rather detailed but nonetheless vivid account of Gottschalk's life, which he divides into eight biographical periods: *Childhood in New Orleans* (1828-42), *Youth in Paris* (1842-49), *Tours of Switzerland and the French Provinces* (1850-51), *The Spanish Apotheosis* (1851-52), *Initial Tours of the United States and the West Indies* (1853-59), *The Hiatus* (1860-62) [when he lived as "an amatory nomad" in the West Indies], *Reappearance in the United States* (1862-65), *Escape and Finale* (1865-69). The last period covers Gottschalk's final years in South America, which Mr. Offergeld treats

somewhat skimpily by comparison with other phases of the biography. (It is regrettable that the results of Dr. F.C. Lange's extensive research on Gottschalk's activities in South America have as yet not been published *in toto.*) In an epilogue titled "New Frame for an Old Daguerreotype," Mr. Offergeld presents an evaluation of Gottschalk's piano music that pivots on its viability while discussing aesthetic, stylistic, technical, topical, cultural, and metaphorical factors ("It has always been perfectly clear to everybody that the Gottschalk sound in general is a sentimental metaphor.")

The main question is, can Gottschalk's piano music, once so vastly popular, be rescued from "a hundred years of near oblivion?" Underlying this there is another question, perhaps even more pertinent: If so, *why?* Rescuing music from oblivion has long been a main task of musicology, but the "how" (i.e., the process itself of "rescuing" old music from oblivion through scholarly research) rather than the "why" is usually emphasized. This is because the scholarly "rescue" and reediting of "forgotten" music of the past has too often been regarded as an end in itself (an attitude that is beginning to show signs of infiltrating the field of early American music). The absence of the customary scholarly apparatus, plus the whole tenor of the introductory materials, makes clear that the intent of the present edition is not merely to reprint the piano music of Gottschalk, but to justify that enterprise in terms of the actual viability of the music. The publication was not designed as a Centennial Monument; for that, a marble statue would have done as well. The enterprise (as I read the signs) stands or falls on the issue of *viability.*

Mr. Offergeld of course argues for the affirmative, and he does it eloquently—even to the touch of virtuosity so much in keeping with his subject. He is not trying to tell us that this is *great music* (why should it be?), but it has certain unique qualities (or certain common Romantic qualities uniquely displayed); that even the much-maligned "The Last Hope" has its saving graces (the stylishness of a sentimental tear-jerker that calls for "a steady hand and a fund of irony"); that the music, whatever its faults of taste, is "absolutely first-rate" in its "idiomatic naturalness" for the piano; and that these pieces "survive and continue to work in performance . . . as examples of a personal and highly finished style." Many of them, moreover, are laden with the vital stuff of American history: "Like few documents in our history, *The Union* speaks for the boisterous, tender, awkward, visionary, and all but forgotten America that Lincoln bereaved." Mr. Offergeld maintains that this piece "retains a nostalgic power to stir forgotten and old-fashioned emotions" (which, as he notes, is prophetic of Charles Ives). One may agree or disagree with the affirma-

tions of one who obviously writes *con amore;* but now that the music is once more available in this handsome edition, it should be abundantly clear that this is no collection of "frilly museum pieces," but rather an impressive blending of sentiment and sensuousness, of style and virtuosity, of topicality and romanticism, brilliantly suited to the resources of the piano.

Nevertheless, grateful as we are for this splendid edition—indubitably a landmark in the republication of early American music—those of us who for many years have advocated the publishing of "Monuments of American Music," are now squarely confronted by several questions: Does this edition meet the criteria of musicology for historical editions? Does the lack of a comprehensive scholarly apparatus detract from its ultimate value? Is the absence of musical editing detrimental to its usefulness for purposes of performance? These are actually questions of general import that should have been debated long ago by American musicologists. In the absence of any scholarly consensus on criteria, publication of the *Monumenta Americana* will inevitably proceed along empirical lines and with pragmatic ends in view. And who has the wisdom or the experience to say that this is not as it should be? Is not this approach in keeping with an American tradition? Is it not consistent with the basic character of our culture? May not a publication that emphasizes viability rather than "apparatus" represent an American approach to an American subject? I do not propose to render judgment on these questions; but I believe they should be asked and debated now, as the trend for republication of early American music rapidly gathers momentum.

Robert Offergeld's Centennial Catalogue of Gottschalk's published and unpublished compositions is a model of scholarship accomplished with elegance and *élan.* The result of much persistent research, it also reveals a remarkable heuristic flair—beginning with Mr. Offergeld's keen reading of a passage in *Notes of a Pianist* wherein Gottschalk, in the midst of a bitter complaint about his intolerable isolation in Virginia City, casually mentions having composed "two or three hundred pieces" (this was in 1865). Concerning this passage, Mr. Offergeld writes characteristically:

> An admittedly imprecise remark, and as such no doubt beyond the pale of decent scholarship. But it was my respectful view of this estimate—it comes after all from one who, even in a state of extreme irritation, might be expected to know—that eventually became the motor and motto of my Gottschalk catalogue . . .

The Centennial Catalogue contains 298 main entries—an impressive tribute both to Gottschalk's off-hand veracity and to Mr. Offergeld's industrious tenacity. Yet the Catalogue is not offered as complete: the compiler believes that "many more titles and without question more manuscripts,

remain to be unearthed. Nevertheless, the Catalogue contains more than twice the number of pieces heretofore credited to the composer." In his Introduction, Mr. Offergeld goes on to speak of the peripheral "twilight zone" of the Gottschalk *oeuvre,* "in which unidentified titles make brief and tantalizing appearances before vanishing." Much of the Introduction is concerned with the mystery of these documented but unlocated pieces, as well as with an analysis of the available primary sources—notably the rare and valuable list published in New York in 1863, which has not hitherto received the attention it deserves. (The present Catalogue contains a facsimile of this list.)

The Catalogue proper occupies pages 14 to 33 of Mr. Offergeld's publication and is followed by a two-page "Chronology of Composition Dates," listed alphabetically by year. The Catalogue is extensively annotated, not only with bibliographical data, but also, in many cases, with supplementary biographical data and other pertinent information that enables the reader to place a particular composition in its historical context. Some entries—e.g., for *Le Bananier, Le Banjo, The Andes, Isaura di Salerno* (opera seria), and *Mazeppa*—are almost miniature essays. Large orchestral works, such as Symphony No. 1 *(La Nuit des Tropiques)* are thoroughly documented, so that one knows exactly what each version represents—including a version that was "reconstructed and arranged." Information on performance is also given.

In the concluding paragraph of his Acknowledgments, Mr. Offergeld writes: "It must in simple justice be noted that a publishing project of this nature is seldom undertaken by a periodical in general circulation." Very true! We are all indebted both to Mr. Offergeld and to Stereo Review for this extremely valuable and handsomely presented contribution to American musical bibliography.

Recordings of piano music by Gottschalk—notably those made some years ago by Eugene List—have been included in LP catalogues from time to time, and then have disappeared as is usual with music that is generally regarded as "marginal." Now comes the most ambitious recording of Gottschalk's music ever undertaken: no less than forty pieces interpreted by an American pianist whose previous recordings include the Complete Piano Works of Charles Ives. To me it seems natural that an interpreter of Ives should be attracted to the music of Gottschalk. Though the two composers were worlds apart in some respects (Ives would have detested the genteel sentimentality of such pieces as Last Hope and The Dying Poet), they shared a common interest in the American vernacular, particularly the national and patriotic songs of the U.S.A. Each was rooted in a regional culture: strongly individualistic yet imbued with the spirit of time and place. Gottschalk was the first—and perhaps also the last—American composer who fully and contemporeaneously participated in the pristine moment of Romanticism. He brought to that moment the sensuous charm and elegant sentimentality of his native Louisiana, the novelty and vigor of the American vernacular, and the exotic rhythms and accents of the Caribbean. Unlike other American composers, he was nourished—not smothered—by the Romantic tradition.

The forty piano pieces so admirably performed by Alan Mandel are widely representative both in time and character. Every type of composition —from the pretty Pasquinade to the grandiose variations on the Brazilian National Anthem, from the Afro-American Bamboula to the Chopinesque Grand Scherzo—is represented in the album. Chronologically, too, the selections range over the entire span of Gottschalk's production. Doubtless this wide range and variety account for the fact that this reviewer heard all eight sides at a sitting without any feeling of surfeit. Credit should also be given to the skillful manner in which the sequence of pieces has been arranged. This is guided neither by chronology nor genre, but by the performer's taste and a desire to make each side as attractive as possible for the listener. On all counts, including a brilliant performance that does justice to the virtuoso qualities of the music as well as to its stylistic elegance and sentimental appeal, Alan Mandel has rendered a valuable service to American music. Let us hope that these recordings convince a large number of listeners that Gottschalk's piano music, above and beyond any "historical interest" that it may possess, has also the indispensable quality of being fully enjoyable.

G.C.