

LOUIS MOREAU GOTTSCHALK'S ASSIMILATION
OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ELEMENTS
IN *SOUVENIR DE PORTO RICO*

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ABSTRACT

LOUIS MOREAU GOTTSCHALK'S ASSIMILATION
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By

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There are few academic works on how Louis Moreau Gottschalk was influenced by New Orleans' geographical, social, and musical milieu. The early childhood of Gottschalk was a time of tremendous social, emotional, and intellectual growth with exposure to African-American and European music. To address this absorption, this study proposes an analysis into the childhood background and musical career of the pianist-composer and of his Creole piano piece *Souvenir de Porto Rico*. This study relies on several key sources: critics' responses, secondary biographies, and the composer's personal diary. These sources are important to explain Gottschalk's assimilation of African-American elements which were inevitably connected to his cultural experiences. The goal of this project is to shed light on the impact that these influences had on the musical character of Gottschalk.

A portion of this study looks at the professional activities of Gottschalk and his

reception in America and abroad, particularly in Paris. Through Gottschalk's Parisian and American experiences his musical style was crystallized. His ability to synthesize many cultural elements into a style of his own was indeed remarkable.

PREFACE

American composer and pianist Louis Moreau Gottschalk, born and reared in New Orleans, was as a virtuoso performer of Romantic piano pieces that were regarded as remarkable by the critics of the time. According to Irving Lowens and Frederick Starr, his compositions foreshadowed early jazz by using a variety of syncopated rhythms and ragtime styles.¹ Gottschalk drew from a relatively untapped source of inspiration to achieve his nationalistic approach in a Romantic musical climate dominated by the influences of Schumann and Chopin, the novelties of Berlioz and Richard Wagner, and of the eminent virtuosos such as Paganini, Liszt and Thalberg. This paper attempts to present how Gottschalk utilized many African American stylistic characteristics that later surfaced in jazz. Through an analysis of *Souvenir de Porto Rico*, this study will uncover the many elements that the composer used and integrated into his pieces.

Gottschalk, a white Haitian Creole, was a celebrated figure in Europe, the United States, and South America, and his musical works created a national and international sensation during his lifetime. His innovative exploration of African American melodies and rhythms is rooted in the cultural mix of African, French, Haitian, Creole, and South American styles he heard as a child. The syncopated

1. Irving Lowens, and Frederick S. Starr. "Gottschalk, Louis Moreau." *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. 2nd ed. Edited by Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (New York: Grove's Dictionaries, 2001) Vol. 10, 199-205.

rhythms and jagged melodic lines of his compositions emerged almost fifty years before early ragtime would popularize its use. He masterfully united the classical sensibilities associated with the French, and a variety of non-traditional, ethnic Creole and African American-based material.

In this study a particular emphasis is placed on describing the elements that Gottschalk drew from Creole culture, and how he adapted those traits into *Souvenir de Porto Rico*. The study draws from information found in various formats such as periodicals, book-length monographs, documentaries, recordings, dissertations, and music scores. A wide range of sources was consulted to present an in-depth understanding of Gottschalk's musical aptitude and to investigate why and how his musical style was so distinctive.

The thesis consists of a biographical section, a discussion of the influential characteristics of Gottschalk's musical works, an analysis of *Souvenir de Porto Rico*, and an evaluation of Gottschalk's artistic achievements. The author will perform *Souvenir de Porto Rico* for a graduate recital on May 22, 2009, at California State University, Long Beach, to demonstrate how the composition uses elements that were largely unexplored by traditional classic composers of the time. It seamlessly combined a mixture of European and African-American stylistic features. This piece is regarded as the finest and most eminent creation of the composer.

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CHAPTER 1

THE FORMATIVE YEARS

Louis Moreau Gottschalk's Creole music has an uncanny power to grab one's interest, stir the emotion, and lift the spirit. His musical characteristics are attributable to socio-cultural influences of New Orleans. Amid such African-American and European cultural identities, he absorbed New Orleans' multicultural heritage and formed his own personal character in the course of time. This chapter uncovers how the social and cultural milieu of New Orleans influenced Gottschalk's childhood experiences.

New Orleans as a Multicultural City in the 1830s

New Orleans was a multi-cultural city. In 1803 Napoleon sold the French control territory in North America to the United States in the Louisiana Purchase. In 1804, the Haitian Revolution took place. Due to the influx of numerous colonial French, Spanish settlers, and Haitian refugees, New Orleans developed as a major city of racial and ethnic diversity. By the 1830s, the Louisiana territory had become a melting-pot of various races and classes. The city was made up of three groups of people: whites, blacks, and Creole.

Most of the city's public policy makers and commercial leaders were white immigrants who were of Irish, German, and French ancestry. Racial segregation was regulated by law and through social norms. White supremacy and a demand for

laborers led to the exploitation of slave labor. White slave owners owned two or three slaves in their household. Even unskilled white proletarians could find employment easily in the remarkable demand for labor.

Life for blacks was much different. In the ongoing slave trade, blacks' social position was unequal in the areas of lineage, profession, and occupation. A prosperous community, including free persons of color and freed slaves and their offspring, was often educated and middle-class, and many were property owners.¹ Slaves were often used as household servants and manual laborers. Skilled black artisans lived as though they were free. They worked in the city, plied their trades and reported periodically to their owners for the sole purpose of making a stipulated monetary payment from their earnings. Blacksmiths, hostlers, barbers, engineers, printers, carpenters, and even druggists were hired from the ranks of New Orleans slaves. Other less skilled slaves were committed to the extensive plantations as laborers.² The major commodity crops of cotton, sugar cane, and corn were cultivated by this labor force outside the city.

A community of Creoles forged a new local identity. Creoles were persons of various racial backgrounds who were mixed with French/Spanish colonists, African-American arrivals, and Native-American inhabitants who had lived in the area before it became the Louisiana Territory. Historically, the Code Noir, issued at Versailles in

1. Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999), 2-6.

2. Henry Arnold Kmen, *Music in New Orleans: The Formative Years, 1791-1841* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), 43.

1724, had forbidden intermarriage or concubinage between whites and slaves; however, the law was not strictly enforced. The mixed-race class arose from interracial marriages between wealthy European men and enslaved or free black or mixed-race women. The children from these relationships became a free class of mixed-race people.³ Young women had more options to be elevated to the position of noble than men. Becoming a mistress and having a mixed race child were alternatives open to women. One drop of white blood was sufficient not only to allow freedom from slavery, but also to open the doors of education, allow the ownership of property, and afford other privileges afforded to whites.

Gottschalk's Family History

Gottschalk's father and mother had lived in different worlds. Edward Gottschalk, the musician's father, was a native of London, educated in Germany. As a businessman, who had a Jewish ancestral background, he ran his own firm and was involved in real estate, currency trading, commodities marketing, and trading slaves before he went bankrupt. Edward was connected to other wealthy member of the Jewish community including commission merchants, merchant bankers and slave traders.⁴ He and others in his community who earned their wealth controlling money and trading real estate were members of the higher levels of a stratified social structure. Gottschalk's own description of his childhood in his *Notes of a Pianist* was that he

3. Lynne Fauley Emery, *Black Dance in the United States from 1619 to 1970* (Palo Alto, Calif: National Press Books, 1972), 149.

4. Frederick S. Starr, *Bamboula!: The Life and Times of Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 16-24.

lived in affluence.⁵ When Edward Gottschalk married a fifteen-year-old Creole of Saint Domingue descent, Aimée Bruslés, it was not a surprise that his wealthy lifestyle and significant assets provided a type of security that Aimée was unaccustomed to.

Aimée, Gottschalk's mother, was daughter of Theodat-Camille Bruslés and Alixe-Josephine Deynault. Her parents were refugees from Haiti, the French colony of Saint-Domingue. As was often the case with Haitian refugees, they were poor, which determined their quality of life. Unequal social status created a lack of access to education and political power; however, like other blacks and creoles, they found hope that they could achieve better social conditions and the right of a free and just existence through the Catholic Church. They spoke French and Haitian creole languages and followed French cultural customs. The Bruslés had eight children and the family was highly musical. The wedding, at the St. Louis Cathedral in 1828, brought rejoicing to the Bruslés because of the abundance of Edward's valuable possessions. Gottschalk's parents' respective lives influenced the musician's mental world.⁶

Louis Moreau Gottschalk, the first of seven children, was born in New Orleans on 8 May 1829. Like other Creoles, his birth certificate was issued a year and a half after he was born reflecting the high infant mortality rate in this community.⁷ During his early years, young Moreau experienced multi-cultural influences that served to

5. Louis Moreau Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist*, Jeanne Behrend, ed., (New York, 1964), 47.

6. Starr, 18.

7. Ibid., 15.

develop his distinct personality. The boy was influenced by his mother's language, culture, and music. Gottschalk could speak French and English. His French was excellent because of his interactions with his mother, grandmother Bruslés, his black nurse Sally, and two other slaves who were from the French colony. Moreau Gottschalk's English was characterized by a French accent. Edward Gottschalk was an authoritative father, an active supporter of his son's musical success and a reliable financial provider. His example helped form Gottschalk's inner character. He was a well-educated, multi-lingual man who exhibited good business sense and dedication to all he did. He brought into Moreau's life a cultural heritage of accumulated knowledge and values that the boy absorbed into his being. However, the marriage of an extravagant woman and an extremely active man was doomed to fail, as they rarely saw each other. In Gottschalk's twenty-seventh year, both his parents died, his mother in Paris, his father in New Orleans.

The Impact of New Orleans Music on Gottschalk as Child in the 1830s

Music in New Orleans was flourishing in the 1830s. African-influenced and European styles of music were in the mainstream. Both formal and informal music fertilized the development of jazz. Subsequently, New Orleans became an historic city because of the emergence of jazz, which developed in large measure as "a single expression of the consciousness" of African-American people in the African musical tradition.⁸ African-American people were pioneers in the fusion of African and European music traditions.

8. Billy Taylor, *Jazz Piano: A Jazz History* (Dubuque, Iowa: W.C. Brown Co. Publishers, 1983), 3.

As a formal music, opera was New Orleans' cultural glory throughout the nineteenth century. The Italian operas of Rossini, Bellini, and Donizetti, and the German operas composed by Meyerbeer, were most successful. There were three dominant opera venues operating simultaneously. One was the Orleans Theater (Théâtre d'Orléans) run by John Davis. The theater, which was later replaced by the French Opera House in 1858, soon became part of a rivalry with Camp Street Theater. Camp Street Theater was led by James Caldwell. On 30 November 1835 Caldwell opened the largest theater in the United States in the keen competition with St. Charles Theater to attract patrons.

New Orleans now had three theaters presenting opera to a population of only about sixty thousand-twenty-five thousand whites, twenty thousand slaves, and fifteen thousand free colored. When one considers that Caldwell's new theater alone had room for four to five thousand spectators, it is clear that Negroes formed an essential part of the audience. Thus the St. Charles reserved a section for free colored at one dollar a seat, as well as a section for slaves, who with their master's written permission and fifty cents could gain an admittance.⁹

Music-loving audiences demanded a more modern and urban sound in show business. The Marigny Theater which opened on 3 April 1838 featured French vaudevilles and comedies for free persons of color exclusively.¹⁰ Théâtre de la Renaissance opened on 19 January 1840, for all classes, and produced comedies, dramas, opera-comiques, vaudevilles, and tragedies.

Music and dance were interconnected and dance was performed in various contexts, like ceremonies and social gatherings. The music used for these

9. Kmen, 138-39.

10. Ibid., 235.

performances ranged from shivarees, street serenades, and minstrel songs to ballroom pieces. Many diaries of travelers who visited New Orleans in the early nineteenth century commented on the real passion this city had for dancing. "They dance in the city, they dance in the country, they dance everywhere."¹¹ Though social dancing was frowned upon to some degree by purists, or religionists, it appeared everywhere irrespective of rank.

In addition to other social attractions, balls for dancing were also popular. By 1841, over eighty identifiable ballrooms or sites for dancing had been put into operation in New Orleans.¹² In these numerous places, the frequency of either balls for European whites or Quadroon balls as a part of African dancing were presented with New Orleans music by each of the diverse cultural groups.

Informal street music was performed by anonymous vendors and minstrelsy performers. For instance, "Green-sass men with vegetables, cymbal men with cruller, Negro girls carrying rice caked on their heads, and all sorts of vendors peddled their wares with song and rhythm."¹³ Blackface minstrel shows which were influenced by these vendors, the plantation slaves, and banjo playing were commonplace elements of New Orleans' cultural scene.

11. Berquin-Duvallon, *Vue de la Colonie Espagnole du Mississipi ou des Provinces de Louisiane et Floride Occidentale, en l'Annee 1802* (Paris, 1803), 238-84; quoted in Kmen, 4.

12. Ibid., 4-7.

13. Ibid., 235.

Congo Square was key to the expansion of informal African-American music in New Orleans. As early as 1786 the law forbade slaves to dance in the public squares on Sundays and holy days until the close of evening service. Early in 1799, a visitor recorded seeing Negroes dancing on a Sunday night and described the edge of town he saw commenting “vast numbers of Negro slaves, men, women and children, assembled to gather on the levee, . . . dancing in large rings.”¹⁴ On the following Sunday, he witnessed the scene again. The city was filled with “upwards of one hundred Negroes of both sexes” singing, playing and dancing on the levee.¹⁵ The slaves’ Congo Square performance in New Orleans presented a rare glimpse into African musical style. African-based music made a strong and dynamic impact on Gottschalk’s work, helping him to maintain a wonderfully dynamic attraction.

In 1817, a law restricted Negro dancing to Sundays before sundown and in places to be designated by the mayor. He approved one site only, Congo Square located across Rampart Street from the French quarter, where the dancing could be held under police supervision.¹⁶ Since Louisiana’s French and Spanish colonial period, African slaves received Sundays off from their work in the “Place De Negres,” where they sang, danced, and played music. The passion of dancing allowed the slaves to lighten the burden and monotony of their daily tasks.

14. Ibid., 226.

15. Ibid., 227.

16. Henry Bradshaw Fearon, *Sketches of America; A Narrative of a Journey of Five Thousand Miles Through the Eastern and Western States* (New York: B. Blom, 1969), 277-78.

Musical Experience in Gottschalk's Childhood

Gottschalk took musical inspiration from his childhood experiences preeminently inspired by African and European cultural traits. He was exposed to the music emanating from the surrounding environment. His nurse Sally hummed a tune which was the mournful spiritual Louisiana slaves had derived from the delightful old English dance song "Skip-tum-lu, my Darling."¹⁷ Gottschalk was very much attracted to the music, dance, and drumming heard in Congo Square.¹⁸ While there is no proof that he visited Congo Square, it is likely that due to the proximity of his house, he heard the music played there. He also enjoyed street vendors dancing, playing, and singing. By the time Gottschalk was thirteen, the young imitator could perceive and capture new melodies and harmonies much faster than he could absorb two languages. Later Gottschalk's compositions, like *Bamboula*, *La Savane*, and *Le Bananier*, drew from this African music. European classical music also electrified the young man's ear. He was diligent in practicing long and hard to reach peak performance level, as he mastered Bellini's *Il Pirata* and *Norma*, Rossini's *Semiramide*, Donizetti's *Lucrezia Borgia*, and Meyerbeer's *Rober le diable* in his early years. Thus, the composer absorbed a wide of range of musical styles in his native New Orleans.

Gottschalk's musical aptitude was recognized early, and he began to play African songs and melodies he had heard on the piano with one hand at the age of four. When the city experienced the serious hardships of a severe cholera epidemic in 1832-

17. Vernon Loggins, *Where the Word End: The Life of Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1958), 11.

18. Starr, 39.

33, the disease killed many people including Gottschalk's little sister Thérèse on 9 June 1833. His family moved from Rampart to Pass Christian in 1834 because Aimée was distraught over the loss of her baby. In an effort to ease Edward's wife's pain, he bought a piano for her, but young Louis was also drawn to the instrument. He responded to music by clapping his hands, tapping his feet, and swaying his body to the rhythms. He learned Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable* intently, and the song *Hail Columbia* as well as African songs from memory. The young music lover, imitated all the types of music he heard in his spare time which helped to develop his ear and sense of harmony.

Young Gottschalk received piano lessons from François Letellier, who was one of the musicians of the Orleans Theater. His formal training began when his family returned back to New Orleans and Rampart in 1835. Edward Gottschalk became increasingly interested in the musical upbringing of his son. Letellier was also the organist and choir master at the St. Louis Cathedral. After he tested the younger Gottschalk, he decided to become his piano instructor. One of his ways to teach was solfège which was the technique of sight-singing each note of the score. The young student learned how to sing and play piano by ear.¹⁹

Gottschalk had significant performance opportunities when he was young. Since he played the organ at St. Louis Cathedral during mass at seven years old, he became famous in the area. Gottschalk's father was very proud of his son's musical talent and reputation. He endeavored to arrange for Gottschalk to give public

19. Loggins, 25.

performances. At nine years old, Moreau gave his informal public debut at the new St. Charles Hotel and performed at opera venues, salons, and the St. Louis Hotel ballroom.

After Gottschalk gained popularity through performing at public places as a child, Edward Gottschalk and Letellier decided to send Moreau to Paris to complete his musical education. At the age of twelve, after the farewell concert at the St. Charles Hotel 23 April 1841, the young pianist experienced a new direction in his musical career. Gottschalk was not just a local boy anymore. He had become an accomplished performer, appearing on the same stages with friends and music instructors like Félix Miolan, concertmaster of the Théâtre d'Orléans, and William Vincent Wallace a well-known violinist. Excited to have the opportunity to learn music in a new city, Moreau Gottschalk left New Orleans and sailed to Paris on 17 May 1841.

The Paris that Gottschalk entered for the first time had the distinction of being both the center of the political revolution in Europe and a cultural mecca. In the musician's struggle for success, like many musicians he turned his art into a business by exploiting its commercial aspects. Gottschalk, whose performances increased the sales of his composition, catered to public taste. The next chapter will cover his musical career in Europe and America.

CHAPTER 2

THE FORGING OF A NEW STYLE

Gottschalk formed his style while living in Paris and America as a pianist-composer. From the competitive musical environments of Paris and the United States to the financial struggles he experienced after his father's bankruptcy, Gottschalk faced a number of factors that affected his professional activity. Though Gottschalk was compared to Chopin, Liszt, and Thalberg, who were great pianists of the time, his actual career success was unlike theirs. This chapter covers Gottschalk's Parisian and American experiences, and demonstrates how his musical style was formed as a result of his travels and exposure to various cultural elements.

Parisian Musical Experience

When thirteen-year-old Gottschalk arrived in Paris, the city was growing as a leading cultural center. In Paris, from 1815 to 1848, a period of relative political stability and economic growth throughout most of Europe and America, music flourished.¹ Paris was the unrivaled center of the music community, boasting numerous opera houses of distinction and a musical culture in which opera's influence was universally felt.² Wealthy Parisians patronized the opera houses, concert halls

1. Jim Samson, *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 57.

2. Ibid., 62.

and even opened the salons in their homes for famous musicians to perform in. Pianist-composers (*Stile brillante*) were favorites of affluent patrons of music.

The eighteenth century piano underwent tremendous changes that led to the modern form of the instrument. This revolution was in response to a consistent preference by composers and pianists for a more powerful, sustained piano sound, made possible with technological resources such as high-quality piano wire for strings. Over time, the tonal range of the piano also increased from five octaves to seven octaves.³ The piano was now more expressive and could more effectively convey emotions. The instrument attained high popularity in the French capital between 1835 and 1848.⁴

Popular pianist-composers were fortunate to receive royalties from piano manufacturers. The Pleyel firm manufactured pianos used by Chopin, and the Erard firm manufactured those used by Liszt. In 1821, the doubled depression of the piano keys was invented by Sebastien Erard. The hammer striking the strings allowed a note to be repeated even if the key had not yet risen up to its maximum vertical position.⁵ This allowed fast playing of repeated notes, a technique innovated by Liszt. Many formidable pianist-composers were not only sponsored by leading piano manufacturers to promote their wares, but they played at venues created by Salle Erard

3. John-Paul Williams, *The Piano* (New York: Billboard Books, 2002), 19.

4. Starr, 5.

5. Williams, 24-5.

or Sally Pleyel, where they developed their pianism.⁶ Chopin, the most famous of the salon musicians, was known for a degree of perfect touch and delicate sound, while Liszt was renowned for rapid and repeating notes. Many pianistic techniques were produced by composer-pianists through opera fantasies, concertos, rondos, and sets of variations. Amateur and professional pianists took advantage of the newfound popularity of the piano and competed for sponsorship from the piano manufacturers. There is no record that Gottschalk received sponsorship from a piano manufacturing firm in Paris, but later in America he contracted with Chickering and Company.

Paris was the capital of virtuoso pianism. The leading stars included Dussek, Steibelt, Hummel, Kalkbrenner, Herz, Pixis, Liszt, Thalberg and Chopin, of whom the last three were particularly prominent and influenced Gottschalk. Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849) was a great pianist-composer of the Romantic period. There is no record that the two were peers, but Gottschalk was inspired by Chopin's musical sensitivity, delicacy and reserve. Chopin's *bel canto* style of phrasing, legato and rubato were used primarily for the piano as a solo instrument. His legato execution and his inventive approach to fingering and using the pedal combined a romantic enthusiasm with impeccable technique and disciplined control. Chopin was criticized for a lack of volume because he played too softly and too delicately. His small hands made for an enchantingly delicate touch. Composer Stephen Heller discussed Chopin's hand size and dexterity: "it was a wonder to behold one of those small hands stretching to master a third of the keyboard. Like the jaws of a snake preparing to swallow a

6. Starr, 51.

rabbit.⁷ Whereas Liszt and Thalberg engaged in public rivalry, Chopin shunned a career as a concert pianist and earned his living by composing and teaching. Liszt and Thalberg both enjoyed huge successes in the concert hall, though socially it was difficult to assimilate into aristocratic circles and gain acceptance.

Another artist who influenced Gottschalk was Liszt, whose music Gottschalk played on each of his concerts. Berlioz called Liszt the ‘king of pianists.’⁸ Liszt gave some three thousand concerts from Paris to London to Vienna between 1838 and 1847. Wherever Liszt could find an auditorium such as a national theater, hotel lobby or opera house, he earned a fortune with his playing. There is no doubt that Liszt’s style included an element of showmanship, dramatic gesture and notable technical skill. He had an innovative but unconventional style. He was ambidextrous and refused to recognize the traditional division of the keyboard; his right hand taking over whole passages in the bass, while the left crossed over to the descant. Gottschalk described Liszt’s music as “erratic” and “incomprehensible,” but he was technically challenged by playing it.

Fans of Liszt and Thalberg argued over, who was the greater pianist? Liszt was a more aggressive player, while Thalberg was admired for his magnificent calmness and grace.⁹ Thalberg was known as “the man with three hands.”¹⁰ His

7. Stephen Heller, *Chopin* (Reinbek, 1959, vol. 25), p. 155; quoted in Dieter Hildebrandt, *Pianoforte, a Social History of the Piano* (New York: G. Braziller, 1988), 71.

8. Dieter Hildebrandt, *Pianoforte, a Social History of the Piano* (New York: G. Braziller, 1988), 104.

9. *Ibid.*, 78.

right hand performed virtuosic lines, while his left hand was fully occupied with accompanying octaves and stylish tremolos that descended to booming depths. When both hands seemed fully engaged with technical passages, a highly expressive melody might spring forth. Thalberg's "third hand" consisted of his two thumbs, which carried the melody over long stretches of the piece. Gottschalk Creole compositions required the European virtuosity he learned from these pianists.

Scarcely had Gottschalk embarked upon a career as a pianist in Paris, when his admission for the Paris Conservatoire was turned down without audition by the director. The director, Zimmerman, had also turned down Liszt and Jacques Offenbach in the past. Gottschalk began to study with German-born Charles Hallé (1819-1895) who was a famous pianist and a friend of Berlioz. Charles Hallé was the first pianist to play the complete series of Beethoven piano sonatas in England. Gottschalk also studied piano with Camille Stamaty and composition with Pierre Maleden.

In private salons Gottschalk had been expanding his musical career. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the salon was a crucial venue for success on a par with the opera house and the concert hall in Paris.¹¹ The musical performances were equivalent to formal concerts in which older repertory or new compositional works were played. Celebrated virtuosos appeared at the most prestigious salons, which

10. Ibid., 79.

11. Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music California Studies in 19th Century Music*, 5 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 147.

were usually held at the homes of upper middle-class families, sometimes due to a friendship with the host or, at least in Paris, in preference over public concert engagements.¹² The performers could gain pupils, pay the debt back to their hosts, and obtain financial reward by performing at private parties.¹³

When Gottschalk performed Chopin's piece in front of a patron, the Countess de Bourjolly, he gained her support. With her backing, Gottschalk opened his first public concert at the Salle Pleyel in Paris on 2 April 1845. Gottschalk, along with his teacher Stamaty chose the pieces from Chopin's *Concerto in E Minor*, Thalberg's fantasy from Rossini's *Semiramide*, and Liszt's fantasy from Meyerbeer's *Robert le Diable*. The free concert was performed in front of peers, teachers and a few famous musicians.

Though there was no financial gain because the concert master charged a lot of money to his father, the fifteen-year-old Gottschalk was impressed by Chopin's attendance and polite encouragement backstage. Chopin politely thanked him for choosing his concerto, praised his own interpretation, and prophesied that he would have great success as a virtuoso.¹⁴ Perhaps Chopin was interested in the young Creole pianist and how he would perform his piece, but it is likely he attended the performance to see his close and respected friend Auguste Franchomme (1808-1884) was also

12. Samson, 62.

13. Ibid., 62.

14. Loggins, 58.

playing. While the Paris press was not interested in evaluating the student's concert, the New Orleans press celebrated his success.

Gottschalk's musical style differed from the European classical music of Chopin, Liszt, and Thalberg. His cultural background defined and influences contributed to his style. Gottschalk was reminded how fabulous Chopin's music was when he attended Chopin's concert of his own compositions in 1848. In the same year, the seventeen-year-old Gottschalk moved to Clermont-de-l'Oise to avoid the whirlwind of the February 1848 Revolution. Gottschalk, who was often ill, sought the care of a physician in this peaceful place. The physician, a close friend of one of his patron's, encouraged the young, talented musician to develop his musical strengths and qualities. Loggins presents their serious conversation as a turning point to Gottschalk:

"Did you find any value in what you wrote?" asked the head physician, suddenly becoming serious. "No," said Moreau. "That is, I don't think so. Just some Negro tunes which have been a part of me all my life." "They're perhaps more a part of you than you've ever thought," said the doctor. "It might be to your advantage to study their musical possibilities."¹⁵

Gottschalk began drawing from compositions that had been written in the delirium of his recurring illness. From his remembrances of New Orleans, the Congo Square dance *Bamboula*, op. 2, Sally's savanna melody *La Savane*, op. 3, *La Bananier*, op. 5: *Chanson des negres* and *Le Mancenillier*, op. 11 were created. His mother did not appreciate her favored son being regarded merely as a superficial composer of African material, however; his Creole compositions created a sensational success. In 1851, Berlioz noted:

15. Ibid., 71.

Mr. Gottschalk was born in America, whence he has brought a host of curious chants from the Creoles and Negroes; he has made from them the themes of his most delicious compositions. Everybody in Europe now knows Bamboula, Le Bananier, Le Mancenillier, La Savane, and twenty other ingenious fantasies.¹⁶

Gottschalk's performance with his own creations possessed an African dynamism that might bother some modern practitioners of the classical music tradition. Though his fame was broadly spread, his exotic piano pieces were debated by critics. Five years after performing in front of Chopin, Gottschalk gave his second concert in the Salle Pleyel on the evening of Tuesday, 17 April 1849. In the same year, Gottschalk's hero Chopin died on 17 October 1849. Gottschalk was compared with Chopin's authentic musical heritage and his keyboard virtuosity. Gaining a foothold of success with his compositions, he began to concertize in Switzerland, France and Spain during 1850-52. Indeed, this tour had a considerable impact on Gottschalk's career. The reviews were mixed. Receiving no invitation, from patrons in Europe, Gottschalk returned to America in January of 1853. This he did with the advice of his father, who had been contributing to his son's musical career for twenty years in spite of having filed for bankruptcy two decades earlier.¹⁷

American Musical Experiences

Gottschalk constantly traveled and concertized throughout North and South America. As a prolific concert pianist, he gained the audience's favor; however, the

16. Richard Jackson, *Introductions to Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (New York: Dover Publication, 1973) p. v; quoted in Ned Sublette, *Cuba and Its Music: From the First Drums to the Mambo* (Chicago, Ill: Chicago Press Review, 2004), 149.

17. Starr, 118.

critics' response was nuanced. When Gottschalk gave his second grand concert at Niblo's Garden in New York 1853, those critics who agreed with the public's praise were delighted by Gottschalk, while those who rejected the public's taste as vulgar questioned his artistic merit.¹⁸ He performed his fantasia on themes from Mehul's *Le Jeune Henri*, a Scottish song, *Jerusalem* fantasy, Liszt's sextet *Lucia de Lammermoor*, and his three pieces, the mazurka *La Moissonneuse* (op. 8), *Danse ossianique* (op. 12), and *Le Bananier* (op. 5). His creole piece *Bamboula* was discussed as "neither brilliant, imaginative, nor even difficult and simply too eccentric, too American."¹⁹

In Boston, Gottschalk's first concert was set for 18 October 1853. The critics mentioned that Gottschalk's technique was unsurpassed, especially his use of syncopation and marked accents. *Dwight's Journal of Music* denounced Gottschalk's second concert:

No concert-giver ever came more loudly heralded; he was declared a great artist, a peer with Thalberg, Liszt and even Chopin, Chopin wrote immoral tone-poems, too good, too true to be largely popular; what Gottschalk gave us we found showy, *ad captandum*, light and dazzling,-music to show off a player, rather than to task both soul and fingers of a fervent interpreter.²⁰

John Sullivan Dwight's judgment was that Gottschalk refused to play the classics and that his own compositions quoted too generously from lowbrow American popular music of the day with disrespect for the past. Dwight was a Northern critic who

18. Ibid., 135.

19. Ibid, 136.

20. John Sullivan Dwight, *Dwight's Journal of Music*. Boston: Oliver Ditson & Co, 1852. 19 November 1853, p. 53-54.

worshiped European classical music primarily the work of Beethoven.²¹ Gottschalk who descended from a slave-owning Southerners was annoyed by this response and described Boston in general as a less than desirable environment for his music:

Adieu, Boston! You are stiff, pedantic, exclusive (Mr. D. [i.e., Dwight] is its oracle)! Your enemies say that you are cold and morose, for myself, I say that you are intelligent, literary polished . . . Besides, I love pedantry and vanity when they engender such results as the great organ [at Musical Hall] and the bronze statue of Beethoven in the library.²²

Just as African-Americans were discriminated against as a social norm, African-American music was also considered subordinate to European classical music.

However, during the mid-19th century, the sheet music industry developed in tandem with African-American popular music style. Since 1829 Thomas “Daddy” Rice’s songs in sheet music form achieved the largest sales. Stephen Foster was also influenced by African-American music and emerged as the first major popular songwriter. Many of Foster’s songs were derived from the blackface minstrel shows which were popular during his time. Gottschalk’s pieces were published as was Foster’s *Old Folks at Home, Oh! Susanna, My Old Kentucky Home*, and *Good Night*.

Sheet music sales brought about a revolution of popular music. There was a massive explosion of popular music with the piano becoming commonplace in the middle class home. Gottschalk’s numerous publications earned a nice profit and his concerts were directed toward the sale of sheet music. The composer suggested that

21. Loggins, 137-39

22. Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist*, p. 232-34; quoted in S. Frederick Starr, *Bamboula! The Life and Times of Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 169.

sales would suffer if the music was too difficult for amateurs.²³ Gottschalk wrote marketable pieces that were geared towards concert audiences' tastes and would profit from the nation's growing taste for mass entertainment. His social parlor music demanded by publishers included *Battle of Bunker Hill*, *Siege of Saragossa*, variations *God Save the Queen* and *Hail, Columbia*, *American Reminiscences*, *polka de salon*, *The water Sprite* (op. 27), *Forest Gade* (op. 25), *The Union*, and *The Banjo*.

A cooperative agreement between the composer and publisher was necessary to help each sell their works and receive a good share of royalties. In this period Gottschalk was no exception like many other composers. For instance, in his contract with Gould and Co. in Philadelphia there was a provision that he would receive ten percent of gross sales. Publishers found it advantageous to offer composers better royalty terms and to enter into contracts for exclusive publishing rights.²⁴

In effect, the composer's methods crystallized in tandem with interest from publishers and the growth the popular song market. Particularly, numerous sentimental American character pieces were in great demand including *The Dying Poet*, *The Dying Swan* and *Morte*. When he performed *Morte!!*, a great many women reacted with ostensibly emotional responses.²⁵ *Last Hope*, a soulful ballad, created a

23. Starr, 211.

24. Leonard Feist, *An Introduction to Popular Music Publishing in America* (New York, N.Y.: National Music Publisher's Association, 1980), 15.

25. Gottschalk to William Hall, 24 October 1869, Hensel, *Life and Letters*, p. 175; quoted in S. Frederick Starr, *Bamboula! The Life and Times of Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 197.

boom and was issued in continual editions and copies, published widely throughout the Americas, and exported to Europe.²⁶ Thus, Gottschalk forged his style and produced diverse musical creations including operatic transcriptions, intimate European character pieces, exotic works based on African themes, patriotic works and dance compositions.²⁷

While in the Caribbean, the Creole pianist-composer began a renewed period of writing music. Gottschalk produced many compositions, including *Souvenir de Porto Rico*. The pianist-composer arrived in Havana on December 1856, where he stayed until returning to the United States in 1862, at the start of the Civil War. Gottschalk lived a fulfilling life as a composer and began keeping a journal to record his travels. He referred to the time between returning to the United State after Paris and going to the Caribbeanas as the “lost years.” Later his journal became *Notes of a Pianist*. The next chapter will analyze *Souvenir de Porto Rico* and focus on the musical elements that he used.

26. Starr, 196

27. Laura Moore Pruett, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk, John Sullivan Dwight, and the Development of Musical Culture in the United States, 1853-1865* Dissertation (Ph. D.) Florida State University, 2007, 35.

CHAPTER 3

ANALYSIS OF *SOUVENIR DE PORTO RICO*

In December 1856, Gottschalk arrived in Havana. The next year he composed *Souvenir de Porto Rico*, during a vacation in Plazuela. Gottschalk noted the favorable effects of this period of rest and recuperation in his *Notes of a Pianist*:

What charming souvenirs these four weeks, so rapidly elapsed, have left me!- the happiness this peaceful country life gives me! Solitude, for me, is repose- is the absence of the thousand distractions of this unquiet, giddy existence to which my career of nomad artist condemns me. In solitude, in reveries, and in contemplation I find fertile sources of inspiration . . . I have enjoyed at Plazuela what I have been deprived of for so many years, the first of all joys: "not having to give a concert"--that is to say, not being obliged, at a fixed hour, to bestow a certain quantity of inspiration for the price of a few dollars, but to find one's self in the home life of the family; that is to say, to have the heart warmed by the contact of good and amiable people and to forget the thousand and one jealousies and miseries to which the talented artist is exposed.¹

Main Elements

Gottschalk used Afro-Cuban folk melodies, swing-feel syncopation and ragtime to create an exotic sound. Thus, these melodies and rhythms contribute to work to the texture of a pianistic work to make the music exquisite. *Souvenir de Porto Rico*, a solo piano piece, requires outstanding technical ability. In the piece, Gottschalk employed a cantabile style of phrasing influenced by Chopin's musical characteristics, such as legato, rubato, and chromaticism. His rhythms, however, were products of his childhood exposure to African-American music. The composer created music that

1. Louis Moreau Gottschalk *Notes of a Pianist* (Philadelphia: Presser, 1881), 19-20.

expresses melancholy emotions and features a wide dynamic range. This chapter presents how form, harmony, texture, and dynamics function in the piece.

TABLE 1. A Graph of Formal Structure of Gottschalk's *Souvenir de Porto Rico*

Intro	A	B	C	A	B
mm.	mm.	mm.	mm.	mm.	mm.
1~16	17~48(1) 59~74(2) 85~110(3) 127~142(4) 159~174(5)	49~58(1) 75~84(2) 111~126(3) 143~158(4) 175~182(5)	183~229	230~245(6) 262~277(7) 288~303(8)	246~261(6) 278~287(7)

The overall form of *Souvenir de Porto Rico* is an ABCAB (see Figure 1): the A section presents one theme, the B section presents another theme and the C section is developmental. Gottschalk's variation has a formal repetition with changes of rhythm, timbre and dynamic. Like Chopin, an icon of European pianists who composed many variations for piano, Gottschalk knew a theme well and often improvised variations on it.



FIGURE 1. Gottschalk, *Souvenir de Porto Rico*, main theme, mm. 17-24.

Improvising on themes given by members of the public was one way of manipulating audience reaction. There was also a financial imperative to do so, given the cut-throat competition of virtuoso pianism.²

Like *Bamboula*, the introduction begins with a harmonic cadence in the bass range that mimics the drum beats of Congo Square. Each section of A and B contributes to an organization which makes the presentation of the musical idea intelligible.



FIGURE 2. Gottschalk, *Souvenir de Porto Rico*, B section, mm. 49-58.

Gottschalk uses the C section as the main climax for virtuosic display. It is surely one of the most important sections in terms of aesthetic balance. This rhythm figures prominently in the left hand of active syncopation with ragtime.

2. Jim Samson, *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 67.



FIGURE 3. Gottschalk, *Souvenir de Porto Rico*, C section, mm. 183-194.

The C section is connected to the rest of the AB variations to complete the conclusion.

The variation ends with the sublime ending chords contrasting with the “*Danza* (op. 33),” another Havana piece with syncopations that predates ragtime as well. The intriguing offbeat rhythm was later used widely in jazz. In Starr’s words:

Syncopations based on the Afro-Caribbean *tresillo* and *cinquillo* rhythms (“*da-dum-da-dum*, *da-dum*” and “*da-da-dum-da-dum*”) lighten the ponderous theme, which builds to an extraordinary climax in which Gottschalk introduces syncopations more arresting than any others to be heard in composed music before the age of ragtime and jazz.³

Gottschalk’s African-influenced piece shows a Caribbean rhythmic energy and verve, and its uplifting march like spirit is enhanced by pervasive use of a rich, harmonic language characterized by minor and major tonalities. The piece is based on very traditional key relationships and the two main key areas are E-flat minor and its

3. Starr, 265.

equivalent F-sharp major. These elements produce exotic colors, tones, and moods.

The texture is an important factor in delineating sections of this work.

Gottschalk conceives most of this variation linearly, with lines presented in a monophonic texture or combined with varying complexity into a polyphonic texture.

There is also homophonic texture to create differentiation. The overall texture divided into A B is polyphonic and monophonic, and C is homophonic. The A B section is thin, repeating the melody, whereas the C section is much thicker in density. This thin texture in the A B section continues and climaxes in the C section. Thus, these different textures create pianistic diversity.

Dynamics play a significant role in making the piece mysterious and beautiful in 2/4. This variation of volume brings about the excitement of tension and release. In the A B section, the piece moves forward with the remarkable momentum and the warmth of theme II. The dynamic level on the C section reaches the climactic peak with fortissimo chords, accents and high register passage which are electrifying. Along with this dynamic expression each variation has its own character that erupts with rhythmical dash.

The structure in *Souvenir de Porto Rico* is a study of contrasts: AB vs. C in form, minor vs. major tonality in harmony, and polyphonic vs. homophonic in texture. The variation presents these elements successively, and these elements contribute to a pianistic work bringing forth aesthetic balances which show a mix of clarity, lucidity and color. Thus, harmonies, various textures, timbre (as related to piano technique), and dynamic range contribute to a distinctive quality and demonstrates to the piano's exceptionally refined sound.

Pre-jazz Elements

Jazz has primarily been an American musical art form. It originated at the beginning of the nineteenth century due to the confluence of African and European music traditions. Its style was built on African complex rhythms and songs and Western-instrumental skills and harmony. Gottschalk functioned as an intermediary between European and African culture. This section will discuss the pre-jazz elements used by the composer.

The ancestors of today's African-American population were brought to the United States as slaves. In the New World, rituals and musical practices revealed complexly rhythmic music, syncopated beats, and shifting accents. Their singing and dancing was accompanied by drums, clapping and shouting. Many songs were coded messages of revolt (such as work songs, and field hollers).⁴ They also found comfort in Christian hymns.

Gottschalk's off-beat rhythm drew from Africans drum patterns. An important instrument in the field where people danced was the Bamboula. It was the rhythmic guide which controlled the movement of the slave dances. The fast and complex rhythm encouraged improvisation in dance. One eighteenth-century traveler describes the performance of bamboula:

The man who plays the large drum strikes it deliberately and rhythmically, but the baboula player drums as fast as he can, hardly keeping the rhythm and, as the sound of the baboula is much quieter than that of the big drum and is very

4. John Miller Chernoff, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility: Aesthetics and Social Action in African Musical Idioms* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 40.

penetrating its only use is to make noise without marking the beat of the dancer or the movements of the dancers.⁵

The banjo (bonjour, banza or banja) which has four strings was referred to by Thomas Jefferson as the only instrument of African origin to find its way to the United States.⁶ A medical doctor visited the islands of Madera, Barbados, Nieves, St. Christopher, and Jamaica in the late 1600s and on feast days he watched the slaves dancing and singing.⁷ Slaone wrote in 1707 about some of the musical instruments:

They have several sort of instruments in imitation of Lutes, made of small Gourds fitted with Necks, strung with Horse hairs, or the peeled stalks' of climbing Plants or Withs, These instruments are sometimes made of hollow'd timber covered with Parchment or other Skin wetted, having a Bow for its Neck, the Strings ty'd longer or shorter, as they would alter their sounds.⁸

The banjo was used extensively in minstrelsy and in the early performances of ragtime.⁹ Blacks used the banjo as a rhythm instrument to accompany their dancing. A number of the early white banjoists who performed in minstrel shows had exposure, direct or indirect, to black music played on the banjo. The influence of the banjo extended to piano players as well. The piano already had its own tradition and growing literature, which were different from those developing for the banjo. The fact

5. Pere Labat, *Nouveau Voyage Aux Isles de l'Amerique*, trans by Anthony Bliss (2 vols.; the Hgue, 1724), II, 52; quoted in Emery, 18.

6. Emery, 17.

7. Ibid., 16.

8. Sir Hans Sloane, *A Voyage to the Islands* (2 vols.; London: B. M., 1707), I, xlviii; quoted in Emery, 17.

9. John Edward Hasse, *Ragtime: Its History, Composers, and Music* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1985), 53.

that pianists composed pieces based on their impressions of banjo playing suggests that they recognized it as a music distinct from piano literature. Gottschalk's *The Banjo* mimicked banjo style heard performed from the banjo playing at dances performed in the Congo Square, in the street or minstrel shows. Other pieces showing this influence are: *Imitation of the Banjo* composed by W. K. Batchelder in 1854 and dedicated on the cover to "T. F. Briggs, (The World Renowned Banjoist,) of Christy's Minstrels, N.Y." In 1883 *New Coon in Town* by J. S. Putnam was published with the subtitle *Banjo Imitation*.¹⁰

As pianos became available to blacks, a transference of banjo pieces and style occurred. Scott Joplin listened to their music and practiced it in his piano ragtime rhythms. Joplin's mother reportedly played the banjo, so he many have had early exposure to the banjo at home.¹¹ Joplin himself played in dance halls, where he heard popular tunes played in a syncopated style. One very popular tune was *The Banjo* by Gottschalk.¹² "Banjo imitation" compositions came out and spread quickly and the African-American syncopated rhythmic variations developed to become ragtime.

Ragtime is a dance-based American vernacular music, featuring a syncopated melody against an even accompaniment, which arose in the 1890s and faded by the late

10. Ibid., 58.

11. Ibid., 58.

12. James Haskins, *Scott Joplin the Man Who Made Ragtime* (New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books, 1978), 74.

1910s.¹³ The earliest kind of popular song identified as ragtime was the “coon song,” a Negro dialect song, frequently of an offensively denigrating nature.¹⁴ African-American music was an integral part of mainstream American culture. Africans who were brought to Latin-America were allowed to retain more of their African traditions in the New World. Latin American music has many elements which have been identified as purely African and others which can be easily traced to African sources.¹⁵

European and African elements mingled to produce one result in the Spanish islands of the Caribbean, another in the England islands, a third in the French islands...In all of those places, the process of cross-fertilization of musical styles continues, but elements of European and West African tradition survive, sometimes in pure form.¹⁶

Before the Civil War, African-American music was primarily played on homemade instruments and directly linked to the African precedents. Ragtime was the first truly American musical genre, predating jazz. Even though the ragtime pianist-composer Scott Joplin became famous, Gottschalk was the first innovative pianist-composer who used African-American musical traits. Gottschalk's *Souvenir de Porto Rico* (1857) is early evidence of rag syncopations.

Recital Reflection

The author's performance of *Souvenir de Porto Rico* demonstrates that the piece demands virtuosic technique with apparent ease and emotion. In the ragtime part,

13. Hasse, 2.

14. Ibid., 5.

15. Billy Taylor, *Jazz Piano: A Jazz History* (Dubuque, Iowa: W.C. Brown Co. Publishers, 1983), 44.

16. Ibid., 2.

there is an attempt to explore the aspects related to African-American devices. This is possibly the most challenging part. Though it begins very calmly and melancholily, as it goes along it breaks into a joyful celebration.

Timbre in this piece is remarkably varied to help create beauty. One element is the method of touch and articulation. The slur, staccato, accent and legato styles produce different timbres, and these methods of intensity contribute to more sectional differentiation. Another timbral element is that of register. Gottschalk exploits the full range of the piano by using a pedal point in the left hand and high octaves in the right hand. It is hoped that pianists in the jazz idiom will continue to explore and perform the work of Gottschalk, and recognize how they are an antecedent to pre-jazz styles.

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