

LOUIS MOREAU GOTTSCHALK (1829-1869): THE ROLE OF EARLY EXPOSURE
TO AFRICAN-DERIVED MUSICS IN SHAPING AN AMERICAN MUSICAL
PIONEER FROM NEW ORLEANS

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by

Amy Elizabeth Unruh
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Dissertation written by

Amy Elizabeth Unruh

B.A., Bowling Green State University, 1998

B.F.A., Bowling Green State University, 1998

M.M., Bowling Green State University, 2000

Ph.D., Kent State University, 2009

Approved by

_____, Co-Chair, Doctoral Dissertation Committee
Terry E. Miller

_____, Co-Chair, Doctoral Dissertation Committee
John M. Lee

_____, Members, Doctoral Dissertation Committee
Richard O. Devore

_____,
Richard Feinberg

Accepted by

_____, Interim Director, School of Music
Denise A. Seachrist

_____, Interim Dean, College of the Arts
John Crawford

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* All photographs were taken by the author unless otherwise noted.

PREFACE

My interest in Louis Moreau Gottschalk began when I encountered a brief mention of him in a textbook for an American music class. His adventures and compositions captured my curiosity immediately. Nevertheless, I was unprepared for what I noticed later while looking at a score of one of Gottschalk's earliest works for piano, *Bamboula*. Though his piano compositions sounded nothing like any of the diverse West-African genres I had studied over the previous thirteen years, when I perused the score of *Bamboula*, I was struck by how similar its structure seemed to be to that of a West-African percussion ensemble. Was it merely a coincidence, perhaps suggested by the title, or something more?

Investigating Gottschalk raised many questions. How much African influence might there be in Gottschalk's early works? Did this influence extend beyond the African-derived melodies he quoted and his choice of titles for certain works? Why did Europeans find Gottschalk "exotic" while people in the Caribbean and Latin America welcomed him as one of their own? Was he intriguing because he was a foreigner or because of what he could do? Was Gottschalk welcomed nearly everywhere he performed because of his showmanship or was there something deeper? As I delved further into Gottschalk and his music, my inquiries soon turned into a research paper, and eventually this dissertation.

The following work is the result of the encouragement and effort of people too numerous to mention here. First, I thank my family and friends for their reassurance and support throughout this rewarding and multifarious process, in particular my mother, Nancy Unruh, and father, Jerry Unruh.

For first introducing me to the joys of exploring diverse cultures through music and dance, I thank Dr. Steven Cornelius and Dr. David Harnish. I especially thank the numerous musicians and dancers who have shared their knowledge of various African musics and dances with me including (but not limited to) Dr. Steven Cornelius, Habib Iddrisu, Bernard Woma, Godwin Agbeli, and Vicki Doe.

Thank you in particular to Dr. Terry Miller whose generosity and guidance made it possible for me to return to school and acquire my Ph.D. Thank you as well, to Dr. Richard Devore for introducing me to Gottschalk's music and leading me unbeknownst to my dissertation topic.

For their countless hours of constructive feedback and suggestions on this work, I am greatly indebted to my co-advisors Dr. Terry Miller and Dr. John Lee, and committee members Dr. Richard Devore and Dr. Richard Feinberg. Without them this work would not have been possible.

In addition, thank you to Linda Iceman and Daniel Boomhower for providing answers to my multitude of questions. For supplementing my knowledge of French, thank you to Sara Miller. Thank you also to Tracie Setzer for her willingness to share her knowledge of the history of New Orleans, the Bourbon Orleans Hotel, and the Orleans Ballroom. Finally, thank you to Bob Goerke and Larry Terkel for helping me stay balanced throughout this journey. Namasté to all.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“Africa is a verb to me.”¹

--Katherine Coryton White

“The drums have been silent but they have not been absent.”²

--John Miller Chernoff

Louis Moreau Gottschalk’s virtuosic talent as a pianist and innovation as a composer enabled him to establish himself as one of the first American musicians to achieve widespread recognition in both Europe and the Americas. His unparalleled success resulted not only from his immense talent and musical passion but also from the opportunities he had to hear and study assorted musics from Europe, Africa, the Caribbean, South America, and the United States. Gottschalk’s music was a synthesis, a hybrid of the musics he encountered, and he skillfully incorporated disparate styles of music into his compositions, producing some of the most highly original works written by an American composer to that time.

Based on the available evidence, the most plausible hypothesis that explains the distinguishing features in Gottschalk’s works will be the one examined here. During his childhood in New Orleans, Gottschalk was immersed both formally and informally in diverse musics from Africa and Europe, and these experiences afforded him significant opportunities.

¹ Quoted in Robert Farris Thompson, *African Art in Motion: Icon and Act* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), x.

² John Miller Chernoff, “The Artistic Challenge of African Music: Thoughts on the Absence of Drum Orchestras in Black American Music,” *Black Music Research Journal* 5 (1985): 4.

While it is widely acknowledged that Gottschalk incorporated African-derived Creole melodies into some of his works, deeper musical links connecting Gottschalk to Africa have been largely ignored or underemphasized. Gottschalk's treatment of rhythm and rhythmic layers is strikingly similar to that of some West- and Central-African music. A number of researchers have mentioned in passing that Gottschalk was trying to evoke African-derived musical sounds from his childhood in his earliest compositions, but none have looked in depth at what that approach entailed, or at how central Gottschalk's exposure to African-derived music might have been in shaping him as a composer.

The closest approach is that of Paul Ely Smith in his article "Gottschalk's 'The Banjo,' op. 15, and the Banjo in the Nineteenth Century." *The Banjo* exists in two versions, the first of which may have been written while Gottschalk was studying music in Europe as a young man. Smith, however, focuses on the second version, written after Gottschalk returned to New Orleans from Europe, the version that is best-known today. Through detailed analysis, Smith demonstrates that *The Banjo* shows Gottschalk must have known African-American banjo music and playing techniques firsthand. In *The Banjo* Gottschalk was not merely imagining how an African-American banjo player might have sounded—he was showing us how they did sound. Likewise, this study proposes that when Gottschalk titled one of his earliest piano works *Bamboula*, he was making it clear that he was reinterpreting on the piano the African drumming traditions he heard in his childhood.

By looking at Gottschalk's earliest compositions, this investigation will suggest that he was already able to reproduce what he had heard during his childhood in New Orleans with amazing accuracy. This sound likely facilitated Europeans' perception of

him as “exotic.” Gottschalk’s early exposure to African-derived musics set him apart from his European contemporaries while simultaneously providing him with a background similar to his Caribbean counterparts.

This study will also attempt to show how the African-derived concepts that Gottschalk absorbed during his childhood enabled him to compose fluently in the hybrid music traditions of the Caribbean and South America he encountered later in his life. Gottschalk’s combined incorporation of African- and European-derived elements, along with his talent, proved advantageous to him in both Europe and Latin America.

Gottschalk’s link to Africa goes beyond the apparent surface details. This research will suggest that Gottschalk’s early exposure to African-derived musics resulted in his incorporation of musical, learning, and performance practices that parallel those of West and Central Africa. While some of these parallels by themselves do not demonstrate a certain link to Africa, the presence of such a large number of parallels and the context in which Gottschalk grew up suggest a likely and considerable connection. It is hoped that this dissertation will fill the void in previous attempts to understand Gottschalk and his music by focusing on the contributions of Africa that up until now have been largely unrecognized.

An Overview of Previous Research and Sources

The music of Louisiana-born Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829-1869), though studied in depth by a number of respected scholars, continues to be a rich resource for new perspectives. While taking all previous scholarship into account, this study seeks to focus on new questions about the local influences on Gottschalk's work, in particular those derived from African cultures.

The most significant Gottschalk scholars include John G. Doyle, Richard Jackson, Francisco Kurt Lange, Vernon Loggins, Robert Offergeld, James Perone, S. Frederick Starr, and Robert Murrell Stevenson. Pianists who have made contributions to Gottschalk research, as well as the revival of his music, include Jeanne Behrend, Eugene List, and John Kirkpatrick. This study is indebted to all of them for their hard work and contributions to the field.

S. Frederick Starr's *Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (2000), first published as *Bamboula: The Life and Times of Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (1995), provides a thorough biography of Gottschalk's life and became an early foundation for this research. Due to the course of Gottschalk's life that Starr uncovers and describes, it was first possible to see how a strong case for Gottschalk's link to African-derived music might be conceivable. Starr provided impetus and awareness of how to continue exploring early theories pertaining to this study. In addition to Starr's work, two bibliographies, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk 1829-1869: A Bibliographical Study and Catalog of Works* by John Doyle, and *Louis Moreau Gottschalk: A Bio-Bibliography* by James Perone, have been vital in locating material on Gottschalk.

The earliest biography of Gottschalk is a short work by P. Arpin, *Life of Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (c. 1852), that concludes with Gottschalk's return from France. A similar work by Henry Didimus, *Biography of Louis Moreau Gottschalk, The American Pianist and Composer*, was published in 1853. Mary Alice Ives Seymour published the first substantial biography of Gottschalk, *Life and Letters of Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, under the name Octavia Hensel in 1870, just one year after Gottschalk's death. Seymour was one of Gottschalk's students and included information from his family in her book,

although her descriptions of him are often highly sentimental and opinionated. As a result of the content of her work, some writers speculated that she had an affair with Gottschalk, an accusation that did not help his already damaged reputation.

Luis Ricardo Fors' lengthy biography, *Gottschalk*, first appeared in 1880 and is only available in Spanish. Fors was a Spanish journalist who had been exiled for his political views. He knew Gottschalk briefly during the composer's South American tour and had to rely on Gottschalk's good friend Nicolás Ruiz Espadero for information, often filling in gaps with inaccuracies and becoming especially imaginative regarding Gottschalk's love life.³ However, Fors' biography has some importance because he had many of Gottschalk's letters in his possession when he wrote it.⁴

Also valuable is the more recent narrative-style biography *Where the Word Ends*, by Vernon Loggins, first published in 1958. Though somewhat imaginative, Loggins' work is nevertheless quite factual. Gottschalk would inspire fictional novels based on his life as well, including *Only a Woman's Heart* by Ada Clare, based on her love affair with Gottschalk, and *Concert Grand* by Howard Breslin.

The most direct source for information on Gottschalk's life is the composer himself. Gottschalk scholars have the luxury of Gottschalk's travel journals preserved in his *Notes of a Pianist*, which also includes the musician's personal childhood memories. *Notes of a Pianist* was first published in 1881 by J. B. Lippincott & Company. Some of the entries had been printed during Gottschalk's lifetime in *La France musicale*, *L'Art musicale*, and the *Atlantic Monthly*. His sister, Clara Gottschalk, obtained his journals

³ John Doyle, "The Piano Music of Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829-1869)," (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1960), 6.

⁴ S. Frederick Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 440.

from Rio de Janeiro after his death and spent two years in the 1870's sorting and organizing the often loose and damaged pages, as well as transcribing Moreau's faded and nearly illegible handwriting. Such difficulties led to misspelled names and issues with the chronological order and dates of some entries. Clara's future husband, Dr. Robert E. Peterson, translated the entries from French to English. Gottschalk's entries cover his travels in the West Indies from 1857 to 1862, in the United States from 1862 to 1865 and in South America from 1865 to 1868.⁵ Gottschalk himself admits in his "Notes of the Author: Which May Serve as a Preface" that his travel journal entries were "written without order and without connection," and "were at first destined to be read only by myself."⁶

Most of the text of *Notes of a Pianist* had already been in print prior to Clara Gottschalk Peterson's English language edition. Although some of Gottschalk's friends found her biography to be exaggerated, her husband's translations of Gottschalk's journals prove highly accurate. According to S. Frederick Starr, "A comparison of the original published articles and Clara's edition of them reveals that she faithfully transcribed the originals, reorganizing them or providing bridges only when essential."⁷ When discrepancies surface between Clara's version taken from Moreau's handwritten journals and the portions Gottschalk published, it is because Clara relied on his unpublished versions. In other words, Gottschalk had done the editing.⁸

The present version of *Notes of a Pianist* is edited by Jeanne Behrend. It first appeared in 1964, and was reissued in 2006 with a forward by S. Frederick Starr as a

⁵ Jeanne Behrend, *Prelude to Notes of a Pianist*, by Louis Moreau Gottschalk, ed. Jeanne Behrend (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964) and acknowledgments.

⁶ Louis Moreau Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist*, ed. Jeanne Behrend, with a foreword by Frederick Starr (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 3.

⁷ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 441.

⁸ Ibid.

tribute to the city of New Orleans following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina.

During his South American tour Gottschalk did not keep his diary current, so Francisco Curt Lange's *Vida y muerte de Louis Moreau Gottschalk en Rio de Janeiro, 1869*, published in 1951, helped to fill in the details of the end of Gottschalk's life.

Due to the time period in which Gottschalk lived, many of my sources are historical written documents (books, diaries, journal articles, newspaper articles, and manuscripts) and the works of other scholars based on these documents. Gwendolyn Midlo Hall's research was paramount in establishing which specific African cultures were present in New Orleans during Gottschalk's childhood.⁹ Jerah Johnson and Eileen Southern shed light on African survivals at Congo Square.¹⁰ The journals of travelers to New Orleans, especially the detailed accounts of Benjamin Henry Latrobe, were helpful in establishing how New Orleans was musically unique for a city in the United States.¹¹ For more general information on New Orleans music and history, works by Ned Sublette and Henry Kmen were very valuable.¹²

In addition to historical context, this work will emphasize evidence for Gottschalk's musical link to Africa as revealed in his compositions, learning processes, and performance practices. This approach has relied on the research of J. H. Kwabena Nketia, Ruth M. Stone, Gerhard Kubic, John Miller Chernoff, and Eric Charry among others to explain the West- and Central-African musical, learning, and performance

⁹ Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Slavery and African Ethnicities in the Americas: Restoring the Links* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

¹⁰ Jerah Johnson, *Congo Square in New Orleans* (New Orleans: Louisiana Landmarks Society, 1995); Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1971).

¹¹ Benjamin Henry Latrobe, *Impressions Respecting New Orleans Diary and Sketches: 1818-1820*, ed. Samuel Wilson, Jr. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951).

¹² Ned Sublette, *The World That Made New Orleans: From Spanish Silver to Congo Square* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill books, 2008); Henry Kmen, *Music in New Orleans: The Formative Years 1791-1841* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966).

processes and practices that this study will attempt to show parallel those of Gottschalk.¹³

Further parallels between Gottschalk and his works, and African survivals in African

American traditions are based on the works of Robert Farris Thompson, Melville J.

Herskovits, Dena J. Epstein, Olly Wilson, Rudi Blesh and Harriet Janis, as well as J. H.

Kwabena Nketia and Gerhard Kubik again.¹⁴

Other sources of interest to this research are diverse. They range from the childhood musical memories of Gottschalk's sister Clara preserved in her transcriptions, *Creole Songs of New Orleans*, to studies on how the brain learns music, such as those discussed in Daniel J. Levitin's *This is Your Brain on Music*. Many sources refer to Gottschalk's playing, such as entries by John Sullivan Dwight in his *Dwight's Journal of Music: A Paper of Art and Literature*. Others focus on Gottschalk's travels to specific places, such as Robert Murrell Stevenson's "Gottschalk in Buenos Aires," or on specific Gottschalk compositions, such as Paul Ely Smith's "Gottschalk's 'The Banjo,' op. 15, and the Banjo in the Nineteenth Century." In addition, the New York Public Library

¹³ J. H. Kwabena Nketia, "Unity and Diversity in African Music: A Problem of Synthesis," in *The Proceedings of the First International Congress of Africanists* (London, Wisconsin: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd., 1962); J. H. Kwabena Nketia, *The Music of Africa* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1974); Ruth M. Stone, *Music in West Africa: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Gerhard Kubik, *Theory of African Music*, vol. 1, (Wilhelmshaven: Florian Noetzel, 1994); John Miller Chernoff, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility: Aesthetics and Social Action in African Musical Idioms* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); Eric Charry, *Mande Music: Traditional and Modern Music of the Maninka and Mandinka of Western Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

¹⁴ Robert Farris Thompson, *Dancing Between Two Worlds: Kongo-Angola Culture and the Americas* (New York: The Caribbean Cultural Center, 1991); Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1941); Melville J. Herskovits, "What has Africa Given America?" in *The New World Negro*, ed. Frances S. Herskovits (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966); Dena J. Epstein, "African Music in British and French America," *The Musical Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (January 1973): 61-91; Olly Wilson, "The Significance of the Relationship between Afro-American Music and West African Music," *The Black Perspective in Music* 2, no. 1 (spring, 1974): 3-22; Rudi Blesh, *Shining Trumpets: A History of Jazz* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946); Rudi Blesh, and Harriet Janis, *They All Played Ragtime*, 4th ed. (New York: Oak Publications, 1971); J. H. Kwabena Nketia, "African Roots of Music in the Americas: An African View," chap. 13 in *Ethnomusicology and African Music (Collected Papers)* (Accra, Ghana: Afram Publications (Ghana) Ltd., 2005); Gerhard Kubik, *Angolan Traits in Black Music, Games and Dances of Brazil: A Study of African Cultural Extensions Overseas* (Lisboa: Junta de Investigações Científicas do Ultramar, 1979).

houses Gottschalk holdings, including family scrapbooks and Gottschalk biographer S. Frederick Starr's thirty boxes of related research materials and notes.

The availability of scores of Gottschalk's works, especially Vera Brodsky Lawrence's five-volume collection of *The Piano Works of Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, makes many of his compositions easily accessible for research. Scores of his songs and of some of his orchestral works, including his *Grand Tarantelle* and *La Nuit des tropiques*, have also been published. In addition, the New York Public Library owns the majority of surviving Gottschalk scores.

Following Gottschalk's death, chaos ensued. The consequences for future research were detrimental, most notably the loss of Gottschalk's manuscripts. The Rio de Janeiro publishing house of Narciso, Arthur Napoleão & Cia purchased twenty-three volumes of music and other papers at auction, resulting in a legal battle with New York publisher William Hall & Sons, with whom Gottschalk had an exclusive contract. Adding to this confusion was Gottschalk's friend Cuban composer and pianist Nicolás Ruiz Espadero whom Gottschalk had named as his literary executor. Gottschalk's manuscripts would remain in Rio despite more than two years of litigation. While some were acquired by the New York Public Library in the 1960s, others have yet to resurface.¹⁵

Because Gottschalk spent roughly twenty years of his life traveling and living out of steamer trunks, composing and performing as he traveled, many of his works have not survived. Others may have fallen victim to adoring fans, especially in the Caribbean and South America. Still more disappeared following the auction of Gottschalk's possessions

¹⁵ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 11-12.

in Rio de Janeiro after his death.¹⁶ Some works survived in the hands of Gottschalk's friend Arthur Napoleão and were catalogued by Luis Fors in 1880.¹⁷ Other scores have survived, many of which are now part of the collection of the New York Public Library's Lincoln Center Library and Museum of the Performing Arts, including a number of scores that had been in the possession of Gottschalk's close friend, Nicolas Ruiz Espadero. With the help of Eugene List seven more scores were purchased by the library from Abrahão Carvalho of Rio de Janeiro.¹⁸ The acquisition of the four volumes and seven scores in this find is detailed in Harold C. Schonberg's article, "Let's Get to Gottschalk."¹⁹

In 1984, the New York Public Library also acquired what Richard Jackson calls the "Glover-Gottschalk material." This fortunate cache was discovered in a trunk that had been stored in a Philadelphia basement by Byron Otto Rhome, a grandson of Gottschalk's sister Blanche. As part of Rhome's estate the trunk was willed to his sister, Lily Glover of Asbury Park, New Jersey. An old letter from researcher Robert Offergeld caught the attention of Lily's son Lawrence, thereby saving its contents from likely destruction (some even had notes attached to them reading "To be burned.") The trunk's contents included: three of Gottschalk's pocket diaries, two French drafts of *Notes of a Pianist* in Clara Gottschalk Peterson's handwriting, letters between Gottschalk and various family members and others, playbills advertising Gottschalk's concerts, about sixty music manuscripts (some autographed), twelve scrapbooks containing a great variety of mementos such as concert reviews and caricatures of Gottschalk, and a letter

¹⁶ Robert Offergeld, *The Centennial Catalogue of the Published and Unpublished Compositions of Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (New York: Stereo Review, 1970), 6-7.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Harold Schonberg, "Let's Get to Gottschalk," *The New York Times*, 25 February 1968.

from Gottschalk containing his own version of the scandal that forced him to flee California for South America, never to return.²⁰

A handful of Gottschalk materials have remained in New Orleans. The Louisiana Historical Society in New Orleans has in its possession a small number of Gottschalk mementos and manuscripts.²¹ In addition, The Historic New Orleans Collection has around three hundred Gottschalk-related items including letters, manuscripts, and published sheet music.²²

Adding to the pleasure of researching Gottschalk is his tendency to write under names other than his own. Often displaying a sense of humor, Gottschalk wrote works under the pseudonym of Seven Octaves, even dedicating his *Fairyland, Schottische de Concert*, “To my dear friend L. M. Gottschalk.”²³ Gottschalk also wrote under the names Oscar Litti, A.B.C., and Paul Ernest.

Goals and Methodology

This dissertation will reconstruct to the extent possible the musical life and culture of New Orleans at the time of Gottschalk’s childhood. It will document the strong presence of African-derived musics in his childhood environment and attempt to show how characteristics from these musics and musical cultures were manifested in hybridized and generalized forms in his compositions. It will suggest how Gottschalk’s way of learning music parallels the way music is often learned in the West- and Central-African regions from which enslaved Africans were brought to New Orleans.

²⁰ Richard Jackson, “More Notes of a Pianist: A Gottschalk Collection Surveyed and a Scandal Revisited,” *Notes*, 2nd ser., 46, no. 2 (December 1989): 352-375.

²¹ “Gottschalk Mementos in New Orleans,” *Music* 17 (April 1900): 663-664.

²² Robert D. Bush, and Blake Touchstone, “Notes and Documents: A Survey of Manuscript Holdings in the Historic New Orleans Collection,” *Louisiana History* 14, no. 1 (winter 1975): 89-96.

²³ Behrend, in Gottschalk, *Notes*, 413.

Furthermore, it will propose that Gottschalk's way of performing music and interacting with his audiences parallels the way West- and Central-African musicians typically do.

One of the biggest challenges will be reconstructing what New Orleans would have sounded like during Gottschalk's childhood. Not only are there obviously no recordings available, but also in regard to African-derived musics, there are almost no transcriptions available because most African and African-derived musics were transmitted orally. Therefore, written observations of travelers to New Orleans and Africa, as well as the oral traditions of the African cultures that contributed to the culture of New Orleans during Gottschalk's childhood, will be the primary sources. It should be noted that surviving written accounts of African and African-derived music of the time typically come from cultural outsiders, individuals of European ancestry who might not have fully understood what they were hearing.

This study will also look at contemporary music practices of the African cultures that contributed to New Orleans culture at the time and extract fundamental and shared elements that were most likely part of these oral musical traditions for many generations. The fact that certain characteristics remain consistent over time and place suggests they are deeply rooted. Therefore it is logical to assume that these characteristics would have been present in New Orleans as part of these cultures, since Spanish and French rulers generally tolerated the survival of African-derived musics.²⁴ Furthermore, this work will note similarities in current musical practices, and musical practices contemporary to Gottschalk, in places where these same African cultures contributed to musical hybrids in the Caribbean and South America.

²⁴ On the contrary, in places that were historically under British rule, enslaved Africans and their descendents were not permitted to continue African musical and cultural practices.

Prominent researcher of music in Africa and the African Diaspora Gerhard Kubik points out that

Ethnohistory uses written, including pictorial, and oral source material. One of its objectives is to reconstruct the history of peoples and their cultures, even long-term developments, through the chronological “stringing” of a tight *sequence of sources*. . . . Under favourable conditions it is possible, therefore, to compare with good results *synchronous* material, such as present-day field recordings and pictures and project the results of such comparisons back into history. This is possible whenever there is good reason on the bases of extra-historical (i. e., structural, sociological or psychological) evidence, that the traits to be compared have displayed a certain “historical inertia,” that they have tended to resist change for one or the other reason. In the music of Black Africa it is possible to isolate a few elements which seem to show a high degree of historical stability for musico-structural reasons. . . . *time-line patterns* were named as a very stable element, besides others.²⁵ (Kubik’s italics)

This work will use historical accounts and present-day oral traditions to project continuity into the past, thereby establishing the African musical, learning, and performance processes and practices present in New Orleans during Gottschalk’s childhood.

In regard to how to research and define African music, renowned African musicologist and ethnomusicologist J. H. Kwabena Nketia recognizes that there are two viewpoints from which researchers can view African music: “the perspective of those aspects of music that are shared by African societies on a continental or regional basis, or by a number of societies in disparate areas” or “from the viewpoint of the specializations which set individual ethnic groups apart musically.”²⁶ He continues:

This is because experience has shown that whereas the particular musical piece, the repertoire and particular instruments belong to individual societies who make them, the principles of music making, structural organization and certain idiomatic usages are common. Moreover the sound sources that are drawn upon often overlap considerably as one moves from one African society to another, while the modes of musical expression in melody and rhythm are similar.²⁷

²⁵ Gerhard Kubik, *Angolan Traits in Black Music, Games and Dances of Brazil*, 47-48.

²⁶ J. H. Kwabena Nketia, “African Roots of Music in the Americas,” 318.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 319.

Nketia defines African music as:

any music—whether it is made by the Yoruba in Nigeria or a religious cult group in Bahia, Cuba or Jamaica, or by the Nyamwezi, the Akan or the Fon—which utilizes African sound sources, structural principles and procedures common to traditional African societies.²⁸

This study will use both of these approaches, looking at shared African-derived characteristics and unique aspects of a specific area as necessary.

This investigation will establish which African elements are likely to be found in Gottschalk's works and practices, and demonstrate that parallels between certain Gottschalk compositions and African-derived music and musical processes and practices exist. It will argue that there is structural evidence in his early piano works which can only be explained by African-derived musical influence that occurred during his childhood in New Orleans. This study will also point out places in Gottschalk's later works where African-derived musical influence was extended as he traveled throughout the Caribbean and South America. In addition, this work will note how Gottschalk differed from his European contemporaries while simultaneously sharing other similarities with them.

After examining Gottschalk's compositions, this investigation will look for further parallels with the African musical traditions that contributed to New Orleans in documents that reveal how Gottschalk learned and performed music. Furthermore, it will compare how he was received in Europe (where there was little African musical influence), with responses to his music and performances in the Caribbean and South America (where audiences were familiar with African-derived musics.)

²⁸ Ibid.

Finally, this work will look at similarities between Gottschalk's compositions and African-American musical genres, including later developments in, and emanating from, New Orleans. These parallels further reinforce the likelihood that African-derived music shaped Gottschalk's compositions. The degree to which West- and Central-African musical processes and practices shaped Gottschalk and his works is much harder to determine. What will be clear is how his musical pluralism anticipates and defines later developments in American music, a significance that should not be overlooked.

CHAPTER II

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Louis Moreau Gottschalk, or Moreau as his family preferred to call him, was born on May 8, 1829, in New Orleans. He grew up in a diverse family as well as a diverse city. His father, Edward Gottschalk (1795-1853), was born in London of Jewish descent, and was educated in Germany before moving to the United States. Moreau's sister Clara recalled that their father spoke eight or nine languages.¹ In 1828, Edward Gottschalk married fifteen-year old Aimée-Marie de Bruslé. Frederick Starr points out that the Gottschalks' marriage was a typical marriage of convenience at that time in New Orleans between a businessman new to the town and a French Creole.² Louis Moreau was the eldest of their seven surviving children. His siblings included Celestine, Edward Jr., Clara, Augusta, Blanche, and Gaston. A fifth sister, Thérèse Aimée, born only a year and a half after Moreau, died of cholera at one and a half years of age.

Despite being a foreigner in New Orleans, Gottschalk's father, Edward, had quickly become involved in numerous profitable business pursuits, including the slave trade. However, New Orleans also had a sizable population of free African-Americans, many of whom were mulatto. Called "free people of color," they could enter professions and own property, including slaves.³ Daughters of the mulatto population in New Orleans often became mistresses of wealthy white men. While such relationships were extremely common (such as the relationship between Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings), individuals of differing racial backgrounds could not legally marry. Edward

¹ Starr, S. Frederick Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 19.

² Ibid., 24.

³ Ibid., 23.

Gottschalk already had such a mistress beginning prior to his marriage to Aimée Bruslé. Her name was Judith Françoise Rubio, and her relationship with Edward Gottschalk began in 1822. She and Edward Gottschalk had two sons and three daughters, the youngest born in 1833.⁴ While Louis Moreau Gottschalk never mentions or acknowledges his half-brothers and half-sisters, S. Frederick Starr points out that it is very likely he was aware of them because Edward Gottschalk kept the Rubios' residence in close proximity to his own.⁵

Gottschalk's mother, Aimée Bruslé, was of French descent and was a Roman Catholic, the daughter of French upper-class refugees overthrown during the successful slave revolt in Saint-Domingue, later renamed Haiti.⁶ His maternal grandfather, Antoine de Bruslé, had been Governor of the Province of St. Rose on the northern part of the island.⁷ Moreau's maternal ancestors lived in the lush central village of Petite Rivière d'Artibonite where the elite had the leisure time to pursue music, dance, and theater.⁸ Gottschalk's maternal grandmother barely escaped the revolution, having boarded a ship to Jamaica after hiding in the woods for days. She would later tell and retell stories of the revolution to young Moreau.⁹

As a French Creole, a cultured foreigner of French descent, Gottschalk's mother likely inherited from her parents a passion for music, theater, and dance. Though one generation removed from the island, Aimée Bruslé would retain many of the

⁴ Ibid., 23.

⁵ Ibid., 24.

⁶ Jeanne Behrend, *Prelude to Notes of a Pianist*, by Louis Moreau Gottschalk, ed. Jeanne Behrend with a forward by Frederick Starr (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), xxiv.

⁷ "America's Pianist, Louis Moreau Gottschalk's Life and Labors," in *The Times Democrat*, 5 March 1900, reel #3 (scrapbook 3), Gottschalk Collection, New York Public Library.

⁸ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 25-26.

⁹ Louis Moreau Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist*, ed. Jeanne Behrend, with a forward by Frederick Starr (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 12.

characteristics of the French elite of Saint-Domingue, and would eventually move to Paris later in life. In turn, she would foster Moreau's love of music and young Gottschalk would become fascinated with his mother's world.¹⁰ In adulthood, Gottschalk still had an affinity for his childhood culture, even when he encountered it elsewhere. In an entry from St. Pierre (Martinique) he affectionately writes: "The Creoles are, of all people, the most hospitable and the most prompt to feel."¹¹

Gottschalk was fluent in English and French from childhood and spent the first twelve years of his life in New Orleans except for a temporary visit to Pass Christian, Mississippi in 1832. Prompted by the death of Moreau's sister, Thérèse Aimée, Edward Gottschalk Sr. moved the family to a small cottage on the Gulf of Mexico where their only neighbors were a few Native Americans who had survived the arrival of the Spanish.¹² It was here at age three that Gottschalk made his first attempts to play the piano.¹³

Gottschalk showed numerous signs of early musical genius and talent. Early biographer of Gottschalk's life, Henry Didimus, reports that at age three Moreau would sit on the floor and imitate his mother playing the piano, and there are also stories of Moreau, at that age, sitting at the piano and reproducing an aria from Meyerbeer's *Robert le Diable* after hearing his mother singing it.¹⁴ According to one of Moreau's sisters:

When Moreau was three years old, our mother, being ill, was taken to Pass Christian, to the seaside. One day, every one in the house was startled by a faint but most exquisite melody on the piano. The tone and touch were perfect. As no one in the house but mamma [*sic*] played that air, she was the first to rush into the

¹⁰ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 26.

¹¹ Gottschalk, *Notes*, 21.

¹² John Doyle, "The Piano Music of Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829-1869)," (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1960), 12; Gottschalk, *Notes*, 291.

¹³ Gottschalk, *Notes*, 291, Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 16.

¹⁴ Henry Didimus, *Biography of Louis Moreau Gottschalk, the American Pianist and Composer* (Philadelphia: Deacon & Peterson, 1853), 5; Behrend, Prelude to *Notes*, xxxi.

drawing-room; and there, to her infinite surprise, she found little Moreau standing on a high stool, playing the melody she had sung to him in the morning.¹⁵

By age five, Louis Moreau Gottschalk was living with his immediate family and some extended family members in a four-story house at 518 Conti Street.¹⁶ This house sat approximately half a mile from Congo Square where enslaved people and free people of color gathered on weekends to play African and African-derived musics, sounds that in the days before automotive traffic would easily have traveled into the Gottschalk home. It was in this same home and at this same time that Louis Moreau Gottschalk's formal musical education began when his father, Edward Gottschalk, hired Parisian tenor, composer, and music professor François J. Narcisse Letellier to instruct his eldest son in music.¹⁷ Gottschalk progressed quickly with his piano lessons and at age seven, assisted by Letellier, played the organ for High Mass at the St. Louis Cathedral.¹⁸ Gottschalk also studied violin with Félix Miolan, the concertmaster of the Théâtre d'Orléans.¹⁹

Moreau performed from an early age. At age eight he gave a benefit concert for his violin instructor, Félix Miolan, who returned the favor by serenading the child with his friends outside his bedroom window later that night.²⁰ According to Moreau's eldest surviving sister, young Gottschalk also played frequently at the evening parties of a New Orleans music teacher, Mrs. Boyer. She urged Moreau's father to send him to Paris to continue his studies.²¹ Letellier would also insist that Louis Moreau Gottschalk broaden

¹⁵ Octavia Hensel, *Life and Letters of Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (Boston: Oliver Ditson and Company, 1870), 38-39.

¹⁶ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 31.

¹⁷ Irving Lowens, and S. Frederick Starr, "Gottschalk, Louis Moreau," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed. vol. 10, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 2001), 199; Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 34.

¹⁸ Hensel, 39.

¹⁹ Behrend, Prelude to *Notes*, xxv.

²⁰ Hensel, 40.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 40-41.

his musical studies in Paris. Gottschalk gave a farewell concert on April 23, 1841, prior to setting sail.²² Slight disagreement remains as to Gottschalk's exact age when he left New Orleans and arrived in Paris, due in part to inconsistencies of dates. After thorough research into the subject, Clyde Brockett concludes that Gottschalk left New Orleans on May 1, 1841, and arrived in France on June 19, 1841.²³ This means Gottschalk turned twelve while en route.

Gottschalk was already highly educated when he left for France. At Harby's academy in New Orleans, he had studied orthography, penmanship, reading, arithmetic, history, geography, and grammar, taught in English. A native Frenchman, M. Mauroy, tutored him in French.²⁴ His Parisian education would extend considerably beyond music as well. Madame Dussert, who ran the boarding school Moreau first attended in Paris, arranged for him to study fencing and equestrian skills. He learned Italian well enough to read Petrarch and Machiavelli, and his skills in Italian were immensely useful later when he worked with Italian opera singers and librettos.²⁵ He also studied Latin, Greek, and the "modern classics."²⁶

Madame Dussert took Moreau to meet and play for virtuoso pianist and composer Sigismund Thalberg (1812-1871). In a letter home to his parents dated June 8, 1842, Moreau wrote "Imagine my joy when I finished playing and Thalberg took my hand and said to Madame Dussert 'This child is surprising! He now needs lessons in composition, for I can see from here what he will become.'" Moreau agreed with Thalberg, adding "if I knew how to put my ideas into music I would do so very quickly. But first I must learn

²² Behrend, *Prelude to Notes*, xxiv-xxv.

²³ Clyde W. Brockett, "Autobiographer Versus Biographer: How Factual is Gottschalk?," *The Sonneck Society Bulletin* 19, no. 3 (1993): 9-12.

²⁴ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 33.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 56.

²⁶ Behrend, *Prelude to Notes*, xv.

composition.”²⁷ Madame Dussert also took young Moreau to meet Pierre Zimmerman, head of the piano department of the Conservatoire. Zimmerman, however, was much less congenial than Thalberg had been, sending Gottschalk away without an audition and remarking that “America is only a land of steam engines.”²⁸ Not having the Conservatoire as an option, Gottschalk began piano lessons with German-born pianist Karl Hallé (1819-1895) and continued after six months with Camille-Marie Stamaty (1811-1870), a piano student of Friedrich Kalkbrenner (1785-1849) and Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) and also teacher of Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921).²⁹ Pierre Maleden (1806-?) became his composition teacher. Hallé would introduce Gottschalk to the music of Bach and Beethoven. Stamaty prepared Gottschalk for his private debut in Paris on April 2, 1845.

Moreau’s debut occurred shortly after his mother and six siblings had moved to Paris in 1844.³⁰ The program included Chopin’s Concerto in E Minor for which the composer himself was present. Gottschalk’s sister Clara recounts that Chopin said to Moreau following the young pianist’s performance: “Give me your hand, my child; I predict that you will become the king of pianists.”³¹ Another colorful account states that following his debut,

Overwhelmed by thousands of applauses showered upon him by a most intelligent audience, the young artist threw himself into the arms of his mother, so happy, so proud of her son, and murmured with enthusiasm the names of two absent ones—the name of his father and that of his master, Mr. Letellier.³²

²⁷ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 48.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 50.

²⁹ John Doyle, “The Piano Music of Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829-1869),” 15.

³⁰ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 64.

³¹ Behrend, *Prelude to Notes*, xxxii.

³² William L. Hawes, “Louis Moreau Gottschalk,” *Musical Courier* 43 (11 September 1901): 17.

Gottschalk's aunts, the Comtesse de Lagrange and the Comtesse de Bourjally, introduced him to the aristocratic salons of Paris.³³ He would meet Victor Hugo, Théophile Gautier, Alexandre Dumas *père*, Alphonse de Lamartine, Count d'Orsay, Hector Berlioz, Jacques Offenbach, Georges Bizet, and Camille Saint-Saëns.³⁴ Gottschalk also attended several of Hector Berlioz's "music festivals" or monster concerts, thereby planting the idea in young Moreau's head for his own later monster concerts.³⁵

By age fifteen, Gottschalk had begun composing. His first compositions, written for his mother's birthday, were *Ossian*, and *Danse des ombres*, later renamed *Danse ossianique*. Then, while suffering from typhoid fever, he began sketching *Le Bananier*, *La Savane*, and *Bamboula*.³⁶ After recovering his health, Gottschalk focused on studying harmony with Hector Berlioz and the two became friends.³⁷

Due to the economic recession in Paris, Gottschalk would not make his second Paris debut until November 1847, focusing instead on studying composition rather than performing.³⁸ In the months leading up to the July 1848 Revolution, Gottschalk was invited to perform at the salon of Émile Girardin (1806-1881), an influential Parisian stockbroker and founder of the newspaper, *La Presse*. Gottschalk had arrived at the top of the Parisian social scene.³⁹ In 1848 Gottschalk also gave a series of concerts with Berlioz.⁴⁰

³³ George Ferris, *The Great Violinists and Pianists*, (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1888), 267.

³⁴ Behrend, *Prelude to Notes*, xxv-xxvi.

³⁵ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 58.

³⁶ Hensel, 43.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 44.

³⁸ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 63.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 67-68.

⁴⁰ William Arms Fisher, "Louis Moreau Gottschalk: The First American Pianist and Composer," *The Musician* 13, no. 10 (October 1908): 437-440.

To escape the fighting of the Revolution, Gottschalk went to visit an acquaintance, Dr. Eugene Woillez, director of a large psychiatric hospital in Clermont-sur-l'Oise, about an hour north of Paris by train. During his half-year sojourn, Gottschalk would begin composing African-European hybrid works. The results were four pieces published under the name "Gottschalk of Louisiana:" *Bamboula*, *La Savane*, *Le Bananier*, and *Le Mancenillier*.⁴¹ In these works, Gottschalk incorporated the Creole melodies and African-derived sounds of his childhood in New Orleans. They would become known as his "Louisiana Quartet," and his timing could not have been better. Nineteenth-century Europe was reacting against the "universal truths" of the Enlightenment. The resulting Romanticism included a fascination with anything deemed "exotic." In their preference for the non-universal, Parisians found diversity and anything unique and therefore "authentic" to be in vogue. Romanticism inclined to the exotic, and in the nineteenth century France was acquiring colonies and exploring its new territories in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Especially popular were representations of African cultures that played upon the romantic nostalgia of French soldiers who had returned from conquering Algeria. Parisians were also enamored of the forged Scottish epic *Ossian*. Gottschalk took full advantage of the situation, rewriting his *Polka de Salon*, op. 1 as *Danse ossianique*, op. 12, as well as composing *Le Lai du denier ménestrel* in a pseudo-Scottish vein.⁴² While these "Scottish" themed works contained nothing truly Scottish, Gottschalk's early Creole works are full of authentic cultural links, and France's history gave Louisiana a special place in Parisian imaginings as they obsessed with "the

⁴¹ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 68-70.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 71.

orient.” Gottschalk stands out from other composers of the time because in his Creole works he was not depicting a “primitive other” but rather a core part of himself.

On April 17, 1849, at age nineteen, Gottschalk played his first paid performance at the Salle Pleyel in Paris.⁴³ He played Beethoven’s Sonata in C-sharp Minor, op. 27, no. 2 (later named the “Moonlight Sonata”), a Chopin Mazurka, and his much-anticipated *Bamboula* to a full and enthusiastic crowd. *La France musicale* captured his success, stating “Gottschalk is henceforth placed in the ranks of the best performers and of the most renowned composers for the piano.”⁴⁴

From 1850 to 1851 Gottschalk toured France and Switzerland, also making stops in Belgium and Italy. On April 28, 1850, he took part in a benefit concert for the Pleyel & Co. piano workshops that had suffered a great fire. Following this performance, Adolphe Adam wrote “Gottschalk has all the grace and charm of Chopin, with more decided character; less magisterial than Thalberg, he has perhaps more warmth; less severe than Prudent, he has more grace and elegance.”⁴⁵ In May of 1850 Gottschalk departed for Switzerland where he continued playing successful concerts and benefits to warm and exuberant audiences.⁴⁶

Gottschalk’s wave of success persisted as he spent eighteen months in Spain from 1851 to 1852 under the patronage of Queen Isabella II. Here he composed several pieces in local Spanish idioms, exploring the use of Spanish dance rhythms in *La Jota aragonesa*, *Manchega*, and *Souvenirs d’Andalousie*, *caprice de concert sur la caña*, *le fandango*, *et le jaleo de Jerez*. The biggest frenzy in Spain resulted from his June 13,

⁴³ Ibid., 79.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 79.

⁴⁵ Fisher, 437.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

1852 premier of *El Sitio de Zaragoza (The Siege of Saragossa)*. The work was originally programmed as a “grand symphony for ten pianos” and included the Spanish national hymn, *La Marcha Real*.⁴⁷ Though the three-hundred page score is now lost, a fragment survives as a piano solo, *La Jota aragonesa*. Gottschalk’s successes in Spain would come to an abrupt end when on November 29, 1852 he set sail back to France without a send-off.⁴⁸ Rumors suggest the queen gave him twenty-four hours to leave the country, perhaps due to an affair he was having or to worsening political tensions between the United States and Spain.⁴⁹ Other speculation suggests Gottschalk’s father had requested him to come to New York.⁵⁰ After a brief return to Paris, Moreau left for New York on December 27, 1852, on a steamer booked by his father, and accompanied by a young gypsy boy named Ramón whom he had adopted.⁵¹ In Europe Gottschalk had given two to three hundred concerts in Belgium, Italy, France, Spain, and Switzerland, and enjoyed success.

When Gottschalk returned to the United States from Europe, he found a country where the general public, not the aristocracy, provided the primary support for the arts. He would have to meet their needs to survive as a composer and pianist. Gottschalk would need to interact with his audiences, but he may have already learned how to do this in New Orleans. African aesthetics, which encouraged audience participation and call and response, were well established in Gottschalk’s home town. Whether because of this influence or not, or merely out of financial necessity, Gottschalk developed a

⁴⁷ Robert Offergeld, “The Gottschalk Legend: Grand Fantasy for a Great Many Pianos,” in *The Piano Works of Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 5 volumes, Vera Brodsky Lawrence, ed. (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), xx.

⁴⁸ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 115.

⁴⁹ Offergeld, “The Gottschalk Legend,” xxi; Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 115.

⁵⁰ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 115.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 116.

performance style that catered to his audiences and in some ways blurred the separation between audience and performer.

On February 11, 1853, Gottschalk played his debut concert in New York City at Niblo's Saloon on the southeast corner of Broadway and Prince Street. Unlike similar establishments, Niblo's was not a brothel but a small concert hall.⁵² Despite having to compete with an abundance of touring pianists, Gottschalk won over his audience and enjoyed positive remarks from the critics. The *Home Journal* noted the February 11th debut, stating that "We mention the date, because we are convinced that the musical history of the country will require that it should be preserved."⁵³ Following his second concert in New York City, P. T. Barnum offered Gottschalk a \$20,000 contract, but acting on his father's advice, Gottschalk refused.⁵⁴ Two weeks later Gottschalk performed in Philadelphia, earning the title the "King of Pianists" as audiences responded to his incorporation of American patriotic airs into his compositions.⁵⁵

Gottschalk was not prepared for the financial struggles that awaited him in the United States. As a child in New Orleans, he had lived in the comfort of his father's affluence, thereby enabled to do what he enjoyed most, music; this affluence had continued as Moreau concertized in Europe. Although his performances in New York were successful, Gottschalk lost considerable money. His financial troubles would be compounded later that year by the death of his father, following which Gottschalk would assume financial responsibility for his mother and six siblings who remained in Paris.

⁵² Ibid, 131.

⁵³ Ibid., 136.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 137; Fisher, 438.

⁵⁵ Offergeld, "The Gottschalk Legend," xxii.

Edward Gottschalk Sr. died in New Orleans of yellow fever on October 23, 1853.⁵⁶

Gottschalk learned of his father's impending death just before taking the stage for the first time in Boston, at Music Hall on October 18, 1853, following which he would receive the first of music critic John Sullivan Dwight's harsh criticisms.⁵⁷

After a series of financial setbacks, Gottschalk and his career were helped financially by patron Jonas Chickering (1798-1853), who settled a number of Gottschalk's debts. Gottschalk had already been an avid supporter of Chickering pianos, which were perfect for him. The pianos were strong enough to withstand hard use without breaking strings because of the bracer bars Jonas Chickering invented. By the time a year later when Gottschalk learned whom his benefactor was, Chickering had died.⁵⁸ Gottschalk continued to favor Chickering pianos, performing on them and acting as a traveling salesman for them at the same time.⁵⁹ In the meantime, Gottschalk's financial problems soon returned.

Realizing he now had his family in Paris to take care of as well as his father's debts to pay off, Gottschalk went on a concert tour, travelling to New Orleans and then to Cuba, before returning to New York in the fall of 1855. Gottschalk reflected on his situation in his journal:

From my birth I had always lived in affluence, thanks to the successful speculations entered upon by my father. Certain of being able to rely upon him, I quietly permitted myself to follow those pursuits in which I anticipated only pleasure and enjoyment. Poorly prepared for the realities of American life by my long sojourn in the factitious and enervating atmosphere of Parisian salons, (where I easily discounted the success which my youth, my independent position, the education which I had received, and a certain originality in the compositions

⁵⁶ Richard Jackson, "More Notes of a Pianist: A Gottschalk Collection Surveyed and a Scandal Revisited," *Notes*, 2nd ser., 46, no. 2 (December 1989): 353.

⁵⁷ Fisher, 438.

⁵⁸ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 54-56.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 154.

which I had already published, partly justified), I found myself taken unawares, when one day, constrained by necessity and the death of my father, hastened by a series of financial disasters, I found myself without other resources than my talents to enable me to perform the sacred duties bequeathed to me by him. I was obliged to pay his debts and to sustain in Paris a numerous family, my mother and six brothers and sisters.⁶⁰

When Gottschalk returned to New Orleans in 1853, he found a much different city than the one he had left. While he was in Europe, New Orleans had doubled in population. Now only one fifth of its people were free people of color or enslaved people. For the first time, the city's English-speaking Protestants had taken control of the government from the French-speaking Creoles, and both found a common rival in the city's growing population of Irish immigrants. As for Gottschalk, he went straight to his grandmother's house.⁶¹ From New Orleans, he continued to Cuba.

Gottschalk made his first trip to Cuba from February 1854 to February 1855. When he arrived, France and the French language were in vogue among the upper class of Havana. Gottschalk was embraced by the numerous talented pianists of the city, including Nicolás Ruiz Espadero (1832-1890), who would become his lifelong friend.⁶² Espadero would later suggest to Gottschalk that he use his own emotions derived from his life experiences as inspiration for his compositions.⁶³

In 1854, Gottschalk would also come to know Manuel Saumell (1817-1870), master of the Cuban *contradanza*. Starr writes:

It was Saumell above all who introduced Gottschalk to the elegant and sensuous subtleties of the *contradanza*. And it is Saumell who stands at the head of the genealogy of lyrical, syncopated music that extends through Gottschalk to a host of late-nineteenth-century Cuban masters and thence to Scott Joplin, Jelly Roll Morton, Artie Matthews, and other creators of American ragtime. We may smile

⁶⁰ Gottschalk, *Notes*, 47.

⁶¹ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 140.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 174-5.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 201-202.

when the Cuban writer Natalio Galan compares the meeting of Saumell and Gottschalk with the meeting of Socrates and Plato or of Buxtehude and Bach, but he at least appreciated the significance of the moment.⁶⁴

It was in these Cuban dance pieces that Gottschalk would again encounter the African-derived rhythms of his childhood in New Orleans, rhythms that would continue to inspire new compositions.

During his first trip to Cuba Gottschalk would also encounter the Tumba Francesa, a group of free black and mulatto African drummers who had fled the revolution in Saint-Domingue. The refugees had settled just across the water from Saint-Domingue in Santiago de Cuba. In Spanish colonies, slaves could join mutual aid societies called *cabildos*, which helped them to preserve African cultures and practices. The *Sociedades de Tumba Francesa* grew out of such societies. They referred to themselves as French because they had come from Haiti but did not want to be associated with the revolution, and were named for their dances called *tumbas*.⁶⁵ They would assemble on Sundays to sing and dance to the accompaniment of Afro-Caribbean drumming traditions that can be traced to the Bantu and Carabali of West Africa.⁶⁶ Gottschalk was so enamored with one particular group that he would later import them to Havana to perform in the premier of his first symphony, *La Nuit des tropiques*.

In the early spring of 1855, Gottschalk returned to New York and experienced his greatest successes in the United States to date, playing a series of concerts at Dodworth's Hall on Broadway.⁶⁷ In the winter of 1855 to 1856 alone he gave at least eighty concerts

⁶⁴ Ibid., 184-5.

⁶⁵ Ned Sublette, *Cuba and Its Music: From the First Drums to the Mambo* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2004), 117.

⁶⁶ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 188.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 221-243.

in New York City in addition to those in surrounding areas.⁶⁸ Around this time he also began writing as a journalist under the name Seven Octaves, and began his “Conservatory of Music,” probably the first conservatory in the United States, to accumulate some additional income.^{69, 70} On a personal note, his mother Aimée passed away on November 2, 1856, of a stroke, but Gottschalk would push onward.⁷¹ On January 10, 1857, he played the notably difficult first movement of Adolf Henselt’s Concerto in F Minor (op. 16) with the New York Philharmonic, taking improvisatory liberties with the score as he was inclined to do.⁷² Soon thereafter, he departed for Cuba again, this time with teenage soprano Adelina Patti and her father Salvatore.

The year 1857 would also see the birth of Gottschalk’s only child, a son named Aubrey. Aubrey was the result of Moreau’s three-and-a-half-year-long affair with aspiring actress and writer Ada Clare (born Ada McElhenney), who missed no opportunity to air the details of their relationship in the press. Gottschalk apparently abandoned the pregnant Ada in June of 1856.⁷³ Though Aubrey’s birth and death dates are uncertain, he would not live to adulthood, passing away sometime in the mid-1860s.

Gottschalk’s second trip to the Caribbean lasted from February 1857 until 1862. While in “the tropics” he spent time not just in Cuba and Puerto Rico, but also in Martinique and Guadalupe. Gottschalk’s passion for incorporating African-derived musical and performance practices would thrive. Robert Offergeld acknowledges that “Most importantly, Gottschalk now tapped at its source, primarily in Cuba and Puerto

⁶⁸ Ibid., 154-56.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 234, 238.

⁷⁰ The Oberlin Conservatory of Music, founded in 1865, is the oldest continuously operating music conservatory in the United States.

⁷¹ Fisher, 438.

⁷² Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 242-3.

⁷³ Ibid., 258.

Rico, the vital Afro-Hispanic musical vein that would nourish his best realized and most engaging works.”⁷⁴ In Cuba, Gottschalk would meet and befriend the young Portuguese pianist Arthur Napoleão. Gottschalk would form a partnership with Napoleão, writing two-piano works for performance with him. In San Juan and Plazuela, Puerto Rico, Gottschalk became familiar with Puerto Rican *danzas*, adding another Afro-Caribbean genre to his repertoire. In 1858, he gave his first “monster” concert in Puerto Rico. He included eight maraca players and eight guiro players for the first time in a concert music ensemble.⁷⁵ Then in 1859, he spent nearly a year in the French colonies of Martinique and Guadeloupe, continuing to write pieces with African-derived rhythms such as *Ojos criollos* for four hands and *Souvenir de la Havane*.

Some of Gottschalk’s larger productions begin to emerge at this time. For a February 2, 1860, grand festival in Havana, Gottschalk composed the opera *Fête champêtre cubaine*, a *Triumphal Hymn* and a *Grand March*. The performance included an orchestra of six-hundred fifty, a choir of eighty seven, fifteen solo singers, fifty drums, and eighty trumpets.⁷⁶ Then on February 17th, 1860, he premiered *La Nuit des tropiques*, his best-known orchestral work, in Havana. Gottschalk referred to the event as a “gran proyecto,” a “festival gigantesca.” The work showcased his innovation and originality. He included six “harmoni-flautas” to depict the serene calm of a tropical night and went out of his way to bring in the king of the Association of French Negroes, and his ensemble, the Tumba Francesa from Santiago.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Offergeld, “The Gottschalk Legend,” xxv.

⁷⁵ Sublette, *Cuba and Its Music*, 150.

⁷⁶ Gottschalk, *Notes*, 26.

⁷⁷ Behrend, in *Notes*, 33.

Gottschalk spent the better part of 1860 to 1862 wandering among the islands in self indulgence, neglecting his career and performing when he happened upon a piano. He disappeared so much from the public scene that some speculated he was dead. Despite his absence, he did continue composing works including *Suis-moi!* and *O Ma Charmante, épargnez-moi!* during this time. In February of 1862, having run out of money and feeling dissatisfied with his idle lifestyle, he resumed touring in the United States, beginning with a concert at Irving Hall in New York on the 11th.⁷⁸

From 1862 to 1865 he played over 1,100 concerts in the northern, eastern, and western United States and Canada, traveling over 95,000 miles. The Civil War prevented him from concertizing in the south.⁷⁹ Max Strakosch (1834-1892), Gottschalk's manager, arranged most of his tours in the United States, including this one. Regarding the tour, Gottschalk wrote in his diary:

I have given eighty-five concerts in four months and a half. I have travelled fifteen thousand miles by train. At St. Louis I gave seven concerts in six days; at Chicago, five in four days. A few weeks more in this way and I should have become an idiot! Eighteen hours a day on the railroad! Arrive at seven o'clock in the evening, eat with all speed, appear at eight o'clock before the public. The last note finished, rush quickly for my luggage, and en route until next day to recommence always the same thing! I have become stupid with it. I have the appearance of an automaton under the influence of a voltaic pile. My fingers move on the keyboard with feverish heat, and for the moment it is not possible for me to hear the music, without experiencing something of the sensation of that hero of Alexander Dumas *films*, condemned for one month to eat nothing but pigeon. The sight of a piano sets my hair on end like the victim in the presence of the wheel on which he is about to be tortured. Whilst my fingers are thus moving, my thought is elsewhere. Happier than my poor machine, it traverses that field, and sees again those dear Antilles, where I gave tranquilly a little concert every two or three months comfortably, without fatiguing myself, where I slept for weeks the sleep of the spirit, so delicious, so poetical, in the midst of the voluptuous and enervating atmosphere of those happy lands of the *dolce far niente*, whose lazy breezes murmuring softly bear on their wings the languid and distant harmonies of the country, and whose quiet and dreamy birds seem never to

⁷⁸ Fisher, 438.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

arouse from the contemplation of all the marvels of this terrestrial paradise except to love and to sleep. What an awakening for me after five years of this tropical gypsy life.⁸⁰

During the Civil War, Gottschalk sided with the Union but his views on slavery and human equality are mixed and not without prejudices. On March 5, 1862, he wrote in his journal:

Besides, the South—whose courage and heroism I honor, while deploring the blindness that has precipitated it into a war without issue—the South leans upon two political errors. In the nineteenth century, nationalities are no longer broken—the general movement tends to unification. No one fraction of the people has the right to reclaim its autonomy, if it does not carry with it greater guarantees of progress and civilization than those of the majority enslaving it. But the South in wishing to destroy one of the most beautiful political monuments of modern times—the American Union—carries with it only slavery. It is, indeed unbecoming to my fellow-citizens of the South to ask for the liberty of reclaiming their independence, when this independence is to be made use of only for the conservation of the most odious of abuses and the most flagrant outrage upon liberty. I do not have any illusions regarding the Negro. I believe him very inferior morally to the white. No race so maltreated as this by chance has been could have remained as ... (remaining part not found)⁸¹

Gottschalk was well aware of the effects of slavery. When he inherited his father's enslaved people following his father's death, he freed them.

Gottschalk's last performances in the United States took place in California over nearly a five-month period before he became caught up in a scandal. On September 18, 1865, he sailed from San Francisco to Panama, forced to leave abruptly due to an inflated charge of inappropriate behavior. Gottschalk and a local acquaintance, Charles Legay, apparently went on a late-night carriage ride with two young women from the Oakland Female College, and made the mistake of not returning the women to their residence until 2:30 a.m. The "impropriety" exploded in the press, leaving Gottschalk in a very

⁸⁰ Gottschalk, *Notes*, 102-3.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 56.

dangerous situation and likely to fall victim to vigilantes.⁸² Some would later suggest Gottschalk was framed.⁸³ Gottschalk's answer to the charges was as follows:

It is beneath my dignity as a man of honor to notice such slanders. Surely my friends can never credit them, and if believed by those who are not my friends, I only pray kind Heaven give them better minds. A man whose nature allowed him to commit so dishonorable an act could also lie, and disown it! Let the story of my whole life be told, every act scrutinized; and if you can find in it anything to prove me capable of such unmanly conduct, cast me from your regard, blot my name forever from your memory.⁸⁴

In a letter possibly written in Peru in 1866 to his friends back home Gottschalk gives his full-length version of the "scandal" and further denies any wrongdoing.⁸⁵

After a stop in Mexico, Gottschalk disembarked in Panama, where he gave a concert before continuing on to Peru, which at the time was in a desperate state of revolution.⁸⁶ While in Lima in November of 1865, he witnessed a fierce revolutionary battle, which he and his piano narrowly escaped.⁸⁷ Gottschalk would spend the next three years performing in Peru, Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay, finding continued success in Santiago, Buenos Aires, and Montevideo. He would compose his second symphony, *A Montevideo*, as a tribute to the Uruguayan capital.

On May 10, 1869, Gottschalk arrived in Rio de Janeiro, where Dom Pedro, the Emperor of Brazil, invited him to his palace, igniting a close but brief friendship that would last until Gottschalk's death.⁸⁸ On June 2, 1869, the royal family was present as Gottschalk gave his first concert in Rio de Janeiro.⁸⁹ The concert was well received but the tropical climate was beginning to complicate Gottschalk's health. By August,

⁸² Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 378-80.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 381-2.

⁸⁴ Behrend, in Gottschalk, *Notes*, 320; Hensel, 162.

⁸⁵ Jackson, "More Notes of a Pianist," 352-375.

⁸⁶ Doyle, "The Piano Music of Louis Moreau Gottschalk," 33.

⁸⁷ Gottschalk, *Notes*, 354.

⁸⁸ Fisher, 438.

⁸⁹ Doyle, "The Piano Music of Louis Moreau Gottschalk," 35.

Gottschalk had become critically ill, and nearly died from yellow fever. Fortunately, he managed to make at least a partial recovery and return to concertizing in October.⁹⁰

Performances involving multiple pianos on stage were in vogue, something Gottschalk found to be advantageous. He would become known for such productions, as well as monster concerts and huge festivals, an idea likely inspired by and learned from Berlioz. Berlioz had put on a music festival on August 1, 1844, commemorating the Paris World's Fair of Industrial Products, which involved nearly one thousand performers en masse on stage.⁹¹ Expanding upon his earlier monster concerts, Gottschalk's first monster concert in Rio de Janeiro on October 5, 1869, included thirty-one pianists and two orchestras. He followed this on November 12 and 15 with two benefit concerts, again including thirty-one pianists, and on November 18, with a concert including the Liedertafel chorus, twenty-five pianists and two orchestras.⁹²

On November 24, 1869, Gottschalk conducted yet another monster concert in Rio. Requiring 15,000 pages of music and originally planned for 800 performers and 80 drums, in actuality, only 650 showed up.⁹³ Fatigued from overwork and tropical illness, on November 25 an exhausted Gottschalk collapsed after playing *Morte! (She Is Dead!)* in a concert organized by the Sociedade Philharmonica Fluminense. The next day he tried to take the stage for a repeat of his festival from two days prior, but could not due to severe abdominal pain.⁹⁴ On December 8, Gottschalk was moved to Tijuca, just outside

⁹⁰ Fisher, 438.

⁹¹ Behrend, Prelude to *Notes*, xxxiv-xxxv.

⁹² Jeanne Behrend, Postlude in *Notes of a Pianist*, by Louis Moreau Gottschalk, ed. Jeanne Behrend (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), 404.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 403-4.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 405-6.

of Rio, in the hopes that he would recover, but he gradually worsened.⁹⁵ Gottschalk died just before dawn on December 18, 1869, of “peritonitis caused by a burst appendix.”⁹⁶

Some uncertainty surrounded Gottschalk’s death. Other rumored but untrue causes included the yellow fever with which he had been seriously ill the previous fall.⁹⁷ The most farfetched idea suggested that some of Gottschalk’s students hit him in the back with a sandbag as he was leaving the theater because Gottschalk had reprimanded them earlier for disturbing his piano tuner.⁹⁸

Gottschalk’s funeral was a city-wide event. “So vast were the throngs that crowded his funeral in 1869 that the entire city of Rio de Janeiro had to be closed for several days.”⁹⁹ News of his death reached North America on January 20, 1870, via a mail steamer from Rio. The next day, the *New York Times* carried his obituary, followed by the *Chicago Tribune* on January 22.¹⁰⁰ Gottschalk’s body was returned to New York the following fall. In October, following a ceremony at St. Stephens’, he was reburied in Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn, New York, next to his brother Edward.¹⁰¹

That Gottschalk’s musical talent and personality left an impression on those whom he encountered is undisputed. Contemporaneous descriptions of Gottschalk’s piano playing listed by Jeanne Behrend in her prelude to *Notes of a Pianist* include “cascades of pearls,” “golden touch,” “glittering star dust,” and often, “The piano does

⁹⁵ Fisher, 438.

⁹⁶ S. Frederick Starr, “Louis Moreau Gottschalk: Almost Forgotten Celebrity,” *The Instrumentalist* 53 no. 56 (September 1998), 66.

⁹⁷ Eric Thacker, “Gottschalk and a Prelude to Jazz,” *Jazz & Blues* (March 12, 1973), 10.

⁹⁸ Ernest L. Bolling, “Our First Musical Ambassador: Louis Moreau Gottschalk,” *The Etude* 50 (February 1932), 98.

⁹⁹ Starr, “Louis Moreau Gottschalk: Almost Forgotten Celebrity,” 66.

¹⁰⁰ “Death of Gottschalk.” *New York Times*, 21 January 1870; “The Death of Gottschalk,” *Chicago Tribune*, 22 January 1870.

¹⁰¹ Fisher, 438; Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 13.

not sound like a piano when he plays it.”¹⁰² Despite his relatively short life, the volume of Gottschalk’s works is quite large. Since many of his works have been lost, establishing an exact count is a challenge. Jane Behrend concludes that “Gottschalk wrote over one hundred works for piano, several songs, orchestra pieces, and three operas.”¹⁰³ Robert Offergeld has compiled a significantly longer and more detailed list of 298 entries in his *Centennial Catalogue* of Gottschalk’s compositions. Offergeld includes works that have now been lost and counts works published under more than one title only once.

Gottschalk also had a lively sense of humor that surfaces throughout his travel journals preserved in his *Notes of a Pianist*. In an entry dated late summer 1857 he writes, “My health is good. I have for some months invariably commenced all my letters with the same phrase for the purpose of falsifying the absurd stories that have circulated, and still circulate, about me since my illness at Santiago—stories that the newspapers of the United States and of Cuba hasten to publish with a great many commentaries. I wish to speak of my death. The sad event took place at Santiago three months ago....”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Behrend, Prelude to *Notes*, xxix-xxx.

¹⁰³ Behrend, in Gottschalk, *Notes*, 411.

¹⁰⁴ Gottschalk, *Notes*, 16.

CHAPTER III

CULTURES OF NEW ORLEANS DURING GOTTSCHALK'S CHILDHOOD

A History of New Orleans from 1699 to the Mid-Nineteenth Century

Throughout New Orleans' history, influxes of African, European, and American cultures would shape it into a unique blend unlike anything in the rest of the United States. By the time of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 under President Jefferson, New Orleans was already a melting pot of cultures and languages, both spoken and musical. New Orleans was founded in 1718 by the French and was first populated through the forced migration of convicts and prostitutes. From 1762 to 1803 it came under Spanish rule, and then returned to French control for twenty days before being turned over to the United States. While under Spanish control, New Orleans witnessed the effects of the American, French, and Haitian revolutions. As a consequence, New Orleans was culturally different from the rest of the South.

Much like other French and Spanish colonies, New Orleans had three groupings of people—whites, enslaved people, and free people of color. The free black Creoles of New Orleans emerged from French and Spanish rule with confidence and circumstances elsewhere only available to whites. Many had occupational skills and military experience. They often intermingled with enslaved people, living together and having families. Free people of color could own their own businesses, properties, and even their own enslaved people. Because of Louisiana's history of French and Spanish Catholic rule, which was relatively more culturally and religiously lenient than that of the British, African cultures stood a much better chance of survival in New Orleans than elsewhere in the United States. As a port city, New Orleans also became an important crossroads for

cultural exchange, becoming heavily involved in the slave trade, maintaining close ties to Havana, and receiving waves of refugees from Saint-Domingue.

As the founding European culture in New Orleans, the French would have a lasting impact on the city. The French first occupied New Orleans in 1699 under the control of the Company of the West, and starting in 1718, the *Compagnie des Indes occidentales* (Company of the Indies).¹ Survival at the mouth of the Mississippi was especially challenging at first, making it difficult to convince French settlers to move there. As a result, early attempts by the French to populate Louisiana included forced emigration where prisoners from France, some of them forcibly wed, were shipped off to the territory. These circumstances led to a harsh and sometimes hostile environment. Later waves of French immigrants included the Acadians (Cajuns), refugees from the French and Indian War, who arrived around 1763, and refugees from the Haitian Revolution in Saint-Domingue (1791 to 1804), primarily arriving between 1809 and 1810. French refugees from Saint-Domingue became known in New Orleans as the “foreign French.” The French would remain the dominant European culture in New Orleans during its time under Spanish rule and would continue to do so beyond the Louisiana Purchase.

After 1731, France had abandoned the idea of making profits from Louisiana and ceded the colony to Spain in 1763. In 1769, Spanish general Alejandro O’Reilly arrived from Havana with 2,000 men to take control. His census of New Orleans counted 1,803 whites, 1,127 enslaved blacks, 99 free people of color, and 61 enslaved Native Americans. O’Reilly’s troops outnumbered the city’s white population and Spain used

¹ James A. Rawley, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981), 114-15.

New Orleans as a military outpost until 1803. Eighty percent of the city was destroyed by fire in 1788. A second fire ripped through the city in 1794, allowing the Spanish to rebuild it in their style and giving the “French Quarter” a look similar to Havana.²

Spanish rule had a significant effect on the development of New Orleans’ Afro-Louisianan culture. Not only did enslaved people have Sundays and holidays off to more or less do as they pleased, they also had the right to work on the side and purchase their freedom. This was not typically the case in the rest of the United States. Under Spanish rule, slave owners did not need official permission to free enslaved people as they had under French rule. Enslaved people could own property and slave owners could not refuse enslaved peoples’ petitions to buy their own freedom. Nearly 1,500 enslaved people in New Orleans would purchase their own freedom or be freed by free people of color during Spanish rule.³ Because of this period of relative freedoms, enslaved people were able to continue and preserve African cultural elements. They continued to speak African languages, play their drums, and dance as they had in Africa. New Orleans, like Havana, would develop a large population of free people of color. Additionally, New Orleans and Cuba would both be transformed musically and culturally when waves of French and African refugees arrived as they fled the Haitian revolution in Saint-Domingue.

Following the American acquisition in 1803, an influx of white settlers into the region led to tremendous growth in New Orleans’ enslaved population. In 1810, there were 34,660 enslaved people in the State of Louisiana. In New Orleans the number of

² Ned Sublette, *Cuba and Its Music: From the First Drums to the Mambo* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2004), 106.

³ Ned Sublette, *The World That Made New Orleans: From Spanish Silver to Congo Square* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2008), 96-7.

enslaved people grew from 2,126 in 1788 to 7,355 in 1820 to 18,208 in 1840. By the Civil War, there were 331,726 in the state. In those same years, free people of color in New Orleans grew from 823 to 6,237 to 15,072.⁴ New Orleans became an expanding slave market as northerners bred enslaved people for profit, bringing their offspring to the Louisiana Territory to sell. Unlike enslaved people who were born and raised in New Orleans and those who were refugees from Saint-Domingue, these enslaved people had lost much of their African cultural heritage.

The Anglo-Americans who began arriving in 1803 were culturally quite different and would have a profound effect on New Orleans. R. Randall Couch elaborates:

Had they been able to do so, the Americans who inundated New Orleans after the Purchase, certainly the first generation of them, would have suppressed any number of local Creole customs, practices, and institutions which they found distasteful, morally questionable, or potentially dangerous to the public tranquility. Their list of objectionable behavior ranged from Sunday dancing through masked balls to Mardi Gras. But Anglo-Americans had been unable to achieve their moralistic agenda because the Creoles held political power in the city and the state . . . until the mid 1840s. And, it should be emphasized, the Americans, once they were in a position to make political changes, found that as the years had passed they themselves, through intermarriage with Creoles or through long years of residence among Creoles, had become ever more creolized in thought, taste, and behavior. Hence they became less and less willing to impose changes upon the Francophone population.⁵

New Orleans would hold its own, later perpetuating its musical and cultural traditions as its musicians traveled up the Mississippi River and beyond, contributing to a rich American heritage of hybrid musics.

⁴ Daniel E. Walker, *No More, No More: Slavery and Cultural Resistance in Havana and New Orleans* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 5.

⁵ R. Randall Couch, "The Masked Balls of Antebellum New Orleans," *Louisiana History* (fall 1994): 425.

Creoles

The label “Creole” has been a source of some confusion and ambiguity.

Linguistically, its roots are in the French, Spanish, and Portuguese languages and cultures. The term *créole* in French refers to someone of foreign origin. Likewise, the Spanish used the term *criollo* to refer to Spaniards born outside Spain. In Portuguese, the word derives from the term *crioulo* that was used to distinguish an enslaved person of African descent born in the New World from someone born in Africa.⁶ During the slave trade the term differentiated enslaved people born in and already accustomed to the New World.⁷ This meaning later transferred to Europeans. The French and the Spanish also first used the term to specify the origins of enslaved people, and later to refer to individuals of French (*créole*) or Spanish (*criollo*) descent born abroad.

Though the word Creole is linguistically European, it may have been Africans who first used it to specify place of birth. In the early 1600s, Garcilaso de la Vega, commenting on the term Creole, wrote:

The name was invented by the Negroes. . . . They use it to mean a Negro born in the Indies, and they devised it to distinguish those who come from this side and were born in Guinea from those born in the New World. . . . The Spanish have copied them by introducing this word to describe those born in the New World, and in this way both Spaniards and Guinea Negroes are called *criollo* if they are born in the New World.⁸

In Spanish, *criollo* comes from the verb *criar* meaning “to raise (a child).” *Criollos* were children born and raised in the New World.

⁶ Arnold R. Hirsch, and Joseph Logsdon, eds., *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 60.

⁷ Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 157-8.

⁸ Hirsch, 137.

In the French colony of Saint-Domingue, Creole simply meant native born, without reference to color.⁹ Likewise in New Orleans, in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Creole came to mean someone of non-American ancestry born in Louisiana, and eventually came to refer to the entire French-speaking population of New Orleans, again regardless of color. Gottschalk's mother was considered a Creole because she was of French descent and born in Louisiana. During this era of history, Creole did not yet mean someone of mixed racial descent as other terms such as mestizo (mixed European and Native American Indian ancestry) or mulatto (mixed European and African ancestry) were designated for such persons. Abroad, however, it was often assumed that a person who was a Creole had at least a trace of African ancestry.¹⁰ While some have made this assumption about Gottschalk, his ancestry is clearly European.

After the Louisiana Purchase, the label Creole was used to distinguish between what was native to Louisiana and what was Anglo-American.

Louisianans of French and Spanish descent began referring to themselves as Creoles following the Louisiana Purchase (1803) in order to distinguish themselves from Anglo-Americans who started to move into Louisiana at this time. The indigenous whites adopted the term, insisting, most unhistorically, that it applied exclusively to them.¹¹

Yet, in the nineteenth century the term Creole eventually grew to imply someone of racially mixed ancestry.¹² Within the black community of New Orleans, the term later came to refer to lighter-skinned individuals who had French names, and by the twentieth century, in general to Louisianans of at least partial African descent.¹³

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 138-40.

¹¹ Richard A. Long, "Creole," in the *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, Stephan Thernstrom, Ann Orlov, and Oscar Handlin, eds. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1980), 247.

¹² Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 157-8.

¹³ Sublette, *The World That Made New Orleans*, 79-80.

The works of George Washington Cable written in 1886 concerning the Creoles of New Orleans should be considered here.¹⁴ Cable was Creole by birth but not culture, and his writings infuriated the Creole culture of New Orleans.¹⁵ He was writing as an outsider. This is why he had to rely primarily on Moreau de Saint-Méry's *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de l'isle Saint-Domingue* and Clara Gottschalk Peterson for material for his articles in *The Century Magazine*.¹⁶ What especially angered the Creoles was the idea that Cable had discovered them, as if they needed his validation.¹⁷

African Cultures in New Orleans

During a period of over four hundred years, eleven to twelve million enslaved people came to the New World, but less than five percent came to what would become the United States.¹⁸ The African empires and kingdoms where enslaved people originated included Kanem-Bornu, Kongo,¹⁹ Ghana, Hausa, Ashanti, Dahomey, Benin, Oyo, and Mali. These civilizations were complex and sophisticated societies and political units. They included the modern-day countries of Benin, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria, the

¹⁴ George Cable, "The Dance in Place Congo," *The Century Magazine* 31 (February 1886): 517-532; George Cable, "Creole Slave Songs," *The Century Magazine* 31 (April 1886): 807-828.

¹⁵ Hirsh, 174-7.

¹⁶ Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de l'isle Saint-Domingue* (Paris: Société Française d'Histoire d'Outre-Mer, 1984).

¹⁷ Hirsh, 177.

¹⁸ Michael T. Coolen, "Senegambian Influences on Afro-American Culture," *Black Music Research Journal* 11, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 2.

¹⁹ Africanists typically spell Kongo with a *K* rather than a *C* to distinguish the traditional Kongo civilization and the Bakongo people from the Belgian Congo created during colonialization and the modern-day countries of Congo and the Democratic Republic of Congo. See Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1983), 103.

Republic of The Gambia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo.²⁰ These cultures would have a profound effect on the music of New Orleans and Louis Moreau Gottschalk.

Africans came with Europeans on the earliest expeditions to the Americas, accompanying Balboa, Cortés, and Pizarro.²¹ During the slave trade, Africans came from three general geographic regions in West and Central Africa. Furthest north is Greater Senegambia or the Upper Guinea region, the savanna belt that extends eastward from Senegal, Guinea, and Sierra Leone to the north of the Sudanese rainforests.²² This area is primarily Muslim and includes the Wolof of Senegambia, the Malinke of Guinea, the Hausa and Fulani from northern Nigeria, and the Mandingo who extend across Senegambia and Sierra Leone.²³ They were the descendants of the Mali Empire who were primarily deported through Senegambia to New Orleans while it was under French rule.

Central Africa was the southernmost area from where enslaved Africans came, an area known as the Congo-Angola region located south of the Congo River, which included the Bantu ethnic groups. These enslaved Africans were mostly from an area between Cabinda in Kongo and Luanda in Angola, also known as the Bantulands. This region included the Bakongo peoples of the former Kingdom of Kongo.²⁴ They mostly arrived in New Orleans while it was under Spanish rule.

²⁰ Bill Wyman, with Richard Havers, *Bill Wyman's Blues Odyssey* (New York: DK Publishing, Inc., 2001), 19.

²¹ Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade 1140-1870* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 95, 102-3; Robert Murrell Stevenson, "The Afro-American Musical Legacy to 1800," in *American Music: A Diversity Experience* (first published in *Musical Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (1968): 475-502); Los Angeles: Copymat, 1989), 476.

²² Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Slavery and African Ethnicities in the Americas: Restoring the Links* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

²³ John Storm Roberts, *Black Music of Two Worlds*, 2nd ed. (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1998), 2-3.

²⁴ Robert Farris Thompson, *Tango: The Art History of Love* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), 51.

The third region, called Lower Guinea, covers the coastal rainforests of West Africa, stretching from Cote d'Ivoire through Nigeria, and the modern-day countries of Ghana, Togo, and Benin. Enslaved Africans from the major Ghanaian, Dahomean, and Nigerian ethnic groups, including the Ashanti, Ewe, Fon, Ibo, and Yoruba, came from this region.²⁵ This area includes the Bight of Benin, which stretches from the Volta River to the Niger River, and the Bight of Biafra, which stretches from the Niger delta to the Sanaga River.²⁶ They were the descendants of the Kingdom of Dahomey and would come to New Orleans while it was under Spanish rule, and in greater numbers as they fled the revolution in Saint-Domingue.

These three geographic regions parallel African linguistic and cultural groupings. According to John Thornton, "Using language, we can divide the parts of Atlantic Africa that participated in the slave trade into three culturally distinct zones, which can be further divided into seven subzones."²⁷ These zones are Upper Guinea (speaking Mande, Wolof, and numerous other languages), the Angola coast (including the Ndongo [Ngola] and Kongo kingdoms and speaking Bantu languages), and Lower Guinea (speaking Akan and Aja languages).²⁸ Under French rule, Upper Guinea was the most highly represented, Lower Guinea was a minority, and only one ship came from the Angola Coast.²⁹ In other words, Senegambians constituted the largest percentage of enslaved Africans brought to French territories in the New World during the early years of the slave trade.³⁰

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Hall, *Slavery and African Ethnicities in the Americas*.

²⁷ John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 186-7.

²⁸ Ibid., 186-192.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Coolen, 2.

According to researcher Ned Sublette, “New Orleans was from the beginning the most Africanized city in North America.”³¹ The first enslaved Africans arrived in New Orleans in 1719 from Senegambia.³² Because of the careful records kept by the French, we can account for twenty-three ships carrying 5,951 Africans arriving in Louisiana while it was under French rule, plus an additional 122 Africans from a captured British ship from Angola. The majority of these had arrived by January of 1731.³³ A total of 3,909 of these earliest enslaved Africans (sixteen of the twenty-three French slave ships) and about two thirds of the total embarked from Senegal.³⁴

The Company of the Indies, a private company licensed by the king of France, held a monopoly on the slave trade from the Greater Senegambia region to Louisiana. Counting enslaved Africans who arrived in Louisiana beginning in 1726 (rather than 1719 as Ned Sublette [above] does), Daniel Walker and Gwendolyn Midlo Hall arrive at slightly different numbers but agree with Sublette on a Senegambian majority. According to Hall, between 1726 and 1731, 3,250 of the 5,987 enslaved Africans brought to Louisiana were from Senegambia, and nearly all of them were arranged by the Company of the Indies.³⁵ Walker similarly concludes that of the 5,987 known enslaved Africans who arrived in Louisiana under French rule (up to 1763), 65.9% were from Senegal and Gambia, 29.1% were from the Bight of Benin, and 4.9% were from the Congo/Angola region. They included individuals from the Bamana,³⁶ Mende, and

³¹ Sublette, *Cuba and Its Music*, 105.

³² Ibid.

³³ Sublette, *The World That Made New Orleans*, p. 57.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 34.

³⁶ “Bambara” was originally an insult used by Muslim Africans to imply that the Bamana were barbaric. To avoid the prejudices of this term, I have replaced the label of “Bambara” with Bamana, the actual name of the ethnic group even if the label Bambara was used in the source material as it was here. Bambara later became a generic term that Europeans in Africa applied to enslaved people who disembarked from Senegal.

Malinke (from Senegambia), Ewe-Fon and Yoruba (from the Bight of Benin) and Bakongo (from Congo/Angola) ethnic groups.³⁷ The early enslaved Senegambian people would form the foundation of Louisiana's Afro-Creole culture.³⁸

Enslaved people generally had short life spans, leading to an ongoing influx of new enslaved people from Africa, thereby keeping the connection to Africa recent and close. Yet, in Louisiana, under French rule, most enslaved people from Africa had arrived by 1731. New Africans would not arrive again in large numbers until after the Spanish took control in 1763. This thirty-year suspension in time and distance from direct contact with Africa allowed for the beginnings of a hybrid African culture to evolve in New Orleans. The foundation of this African hybrid was Senegambian, and later influxes of other African cultures would add layers to this foundation, building it into New Orleans' Afro-Creole heritage.

Culturally, Senegambia was a major crossroads of trade and warfare in Africa where diverse peoples amalgamated and learned from each other. This necessary openness to other cultures and ideas would feed the formation of New Orleans' Afro-Creole culture, where language and cultural differences were not barriers, but rather resources for creativity and growing new hybrids.

Of the enslaved people who embarked from Senegal, many were from further inland along the Niger River.³⁹ The Mande peoples of Senegambia trace their ancestry to the Mali Empire of the thirteenth century. They include the Bamana,⁴⁰ Mandinka,

As Gwendolyn Midlo Hall has shown, these enslaved people were primarily Mande-speaking Bamana men and Mandingo women. See Hall, *Slavery and African Ethnicities in the Americas*, 96-100.

³⁷ Walker, 4-5.

³⁸ Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, p. 34.

³⁹ Sublette, *The World That Made New Orleans*, 59.

⁴⁰ "Bambara" was used in this source. It has been changed to Bamana for the above mentioned reason. See note 36.

Maninka, Malinke, Mandinga, Many, Dyula, Duranko, Wangara and Wolof peoples.⁴¹

The Mande peoples share many cultural traditions, including an ancient caste system. Professional musicians and oral historians called *jali* or *jeli* are part of the *nyamakala* artisan class and are responsible for the preservation of highly significant musical and cultural traditions.⁴² Like the *nyamakala*, the *numu* class is also associated with music making. As sculptors and blacksmiths, they are known for playing the *djembe* drums they make.⁴³ Because of their high social status, jali were rarely subject to the slave trade; however, other Mande musicians were. Characteristics of Mande music, proverbs and culture traveled to Louisiana.⁴⁴

The Mande peoples also had a rich merchant and market tradition, and upon arriving in New Orleans, they discovered a similar model in the local Native American communities. The two populations soon intermixed, and by the end of the nineteenth century, the African-descended culture of New Orleans had almost completely absorbed the local Native Americans.⁴⁵ Under French rule, the *Code Noir* required enslaved people to have written permission from their masters in order to do any type of work such as trading goods at the market, or to gather in numbers as they did at the market. Authorities chose to “assume” that participating enslaved people had such permission although often they did not because the Sunday market was critical in providing much-needed supplies, especially food, to the city. Therefore, the market continued existing

⁴¹ Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 45; Sublette, *The World That Made New Orleans*, 59.

⁴² Eric Charry, *Mande Music: Traditional and Modern Music of the Maninka and Mandinka of Western Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 3.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁴⁴ Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 45-46.

⁴⁵ Jerah Johnson, *Congo Square in New Orleans* (New Orleans: Louisiana Landmarks Society, 1995), 10-11.

largely outside the law, escaping official mention.⁴⁶ This practice continued under Spanish rule. In 1763 Spain took over control of the Louisiana Territory from the French and in 1769 took over the administration of New Orleans. The population grew and flourished, and with it so did the market that helped to support it.⁴⁷ In 1789, Spain enacted the *Real Cedula* which forbade enslaved people from doing any kind of work on the Sabbath, but this code had little effect on New Orleans where Spanish administrators “could not officially regulate something that did not officially exist.”⁴⁸ The administrator of New Orleans, the Baron de Carondelet, did more than just ignore the *Real Cedula*—in 1792 he issued his own code, which recognized enslaved peoples’ rights to free days on Sundays for the first time.⁴⁹

From 1763 to 1803, the Afro-Creole culture in New Orleans was “strongly re-Africanized” through the continuous arrival of new enslaved Africans.⁵⁰ Spanish records are comparatively poor, however, and estimates of the number of enslaved people to arrive in New Orleans from Africa under Spanish rule range from 15,000 to nearly 30,000, either way making New Orleans a very “African” town.⁵¹ Under Spanish rule, enslaved people continued to come from Senegambia and migration from the Bantulands increased dramatically.⁵² According to Hirsch and Logsdon, around one third of the enslaved people arriving during this time were from Senegambia, with another third coming from the Bight of Benin (including the Yoruba, Fon, Mina, Ado, and Chamba peoples), about one fourth from Central Africa, and around ten percent from the Bight of

⁴⁶ Ibid., 13.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 16.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 18.

⁵⁰ Walker, 5.

⁵¹ Sublette, *The World That Made New Orleans*, 107.

⁵² Ibid.

Biafra.⁵³ Daniel Walker gives similar representations: enslaved people from Senegambia made up 20 to 30 percent of the trade, those from the Bight of Benin grew to 40 percent, and those from the Congo and Angola ranged between 20 and 30 percent. In addition to the above listed ethnic groups, new arrivals from the Bight of Biafra, including the Igbo (Ibo), Efik and Ejagham, made up around 10 percent of the trade. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, all of these groups were well represented in New Orleans.⁵⁴

The African ethnic groups present in New Orleans were further reinforced with the arrival of refugees fleeing the Haitian revolution in Saint-Domingue. Just prior to the revolution, 45.2% of the slave trade in Saint-Domingue came from the Congo/Angola region (Bakongo), 28% from the Bight of Benin (Ewe-Fon and Yoruba), 8.5% from the Bight of Biafra (Igbo, Efik and Ejagham), 6.4% from the Gold Coast (Akan) and 5.4% from Senegambia (the Bamana,⁵⁵ Mende, and Malinke).⁵⁶ The slave cultures from the Bight of Benin were especially increased with the arrival of the refugees.⁵⁷

Caribbean interchanges, especially those resulting from the dispersing of thousands of refugees after the Haitian revolution, played just as big a role in the development of African-derived music in the New World as did shared African roots and aesthetics. These interchanges included New Orleans.

The Haitian Revolution began on August 14, 1791, with a Voodoo⁵⁸ ceremony. On August 22, enslaved people who had suffered some of the harshest practices prior to the revolution began to seize control of the northern province. One of the first mass

⁵³ Hirsh, 85-6.

⁵⁴ Walker, 5.

⁵⁵ "Bambara" was used in the original source here. See note 36.

⁵⁶ Walker, 6-7.

⁵⁷ Hirsh, 85-6.

⁵⁸ Voodoo is also spelled Vodou or Vodoun, as well as other ways. I have chosen to use the most prevalent spelling in New Orleans.

exoduses of refugees happened on June 23, 1793, when enslaved rebels forced 10,000 civilians and soldiers towards the sea where they boarded 300 ships, many of which sailed to the eastern seaboard of the United States. In the summer of 1798, another huge group fled to Jamaica, and the largest contingent, numbering around thirty thousand (any remaining whites, many free persons of color, and some enslaved people) fled to Cuba in 1803 as Napoleon's army was defeated.⁵⁹ By 1804 when Haiti declared independence, all white inhabitants had either been killed or forced to flee.⁶⁰ Often they had taken their enslaved people with them, and many of these refugees eventually made their way to New Orleans.⁶¹

On January 1, 1808, Congress banned the importation of enslaved people to the United States, but illegal importation would continue, as well as the arrival of refugees from the Haitian Revolution. Between May of 1809 and January of 1810, 2,731 whites, 3,102 free persons of color, and 3,226 enslaved people made their way to New Orleans as Cuba deported them.⁶² Fearing that the French prisoners and the enslaved people who had escaped from Saint-Domingue to Jamaica with them would start a revolution there as well, the British gave the refugees who had made it to Jamaica free passage to New Orleans via the British Navy.⁶³

⁵⁹ Ibid., 103-105.

⁶⁰ Lynne Fauley Emery, *Black Dance Today: From 1619 to Today* (Hightstown, New Jersey: Princeton Book Company, 1988), 148.

⁶¹ Hirsh, 103-105.

⁶² Thomas Fiehrer, "Saint Domingue-Haiti: Louisiana's Caribbean Connection," *Louisiana History* 30, no. 4 (1989): 431.

⁶³ Sara E. Johnson, "Cinquillo Consciousness: The Formation of a Pan-Caribbean Musical Aesthetic," chap. 2 in *Music, Writing, and Cultural Unity in the Caribbean*. Edited by Timothy J. Reiss (Trenton: Africa World Press, Inc, 2005), 39.

In total, 10,000 refugees from Saint-Domingue came to New Orleans as a result of the revolt.⁶⁴ By 1810, enslaved people comprised one third of the population of New Orleans.⁶⁵ The wave of refugees to New Orleans reinforced French language and culture, as well as the African traditions (including music, dance, and Voodoo) that had been sustained in Saint-Domingue. Some of the exiles from Saint-Domingue who came to New Orleans had been born in Africa (including possibly Gottschalk's nurse Sally). "It was no wonder, then, that so many of the black West Indian dances also became known in New Orleans."⁶⁶

The most common African ethnicities in Louisiana from 1719 to 1820, according to Gwendolyn Midlo Hall's extensive research, included the Bamana, Mandingo, Nar/Moor, Poulard/Fulbe, Senegal/Wolof, Kisi, Kanga, Aja/Fon/Arada, Chamba, Hausa, Mina, Nago/Yoruba, and Edo.⁶⁷ She lists the following inventory of African ethnicities present in Louisiana estates in the 1810's: Bamana, Chamba, Igbo (Ibo), Kongo, Mandingo, Mina, Nago/Yoruba, and Wolof, of whom slightly over half were Kongo.⁶⁸ At the time of Gottschalk's birth, blacks (both free persons of color and enslaved people) outnumbered whites in New Orleans.

Unlike other places in the United States, French culture persisted in New Orleans largely because its French-speaking population kept control of the city government until the mid-1840s. From 1836 to 1852, the city was divided approximately north to south into three municipalities, which separated the Americans from the Creoles, aiding the retention of both French and African-derived cultures. The First Municipality in the

⁶⁴ Starr, S. Frederick Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 28.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Emery, 148.

⁶⁷ Hall, *Slavery and African Ethnicities in the Americas*, 43.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 177.

middle and the Third Municipality to its immediate east were populated largely by immigrant and Creole Roman Catholics. American-born Protestants resided primarily in the Second Municipality, furthest to the west. Though divided culturally, New Orleans remained one city.

The Musical Environment and Culture of New Orleans during Gottschalk's Childhood

New Orleans has been from its inception a city of dancing. Dance was popular among the French, the Spanish, the Creoles, the free people of color, and enslaved people. This love of dancing continues to this day. Henry Kmen recognizes that:

The story of music in New Orleans must begin with dancing. This was the earliest sustained musical activity there; it was always the greatest—in terms of effort and quantity; and it was the source and support of opera, concerts, and various other endeavors in this music-mad city.⁶⁹

In 1805, New Orleans had about fifteen public ballrooms. By 1841, there were more than eighty.⁷⁰ Many held several dances a week, adding even more during carnival season.

One famed ballroom, which is still in use today, is the Orleans Ballroom that entrepreneur John Davis opened in 1817. It was here that French businessmen would meet unmarried Quadroon women, valued for their exceptional beauty. The Orleans Ballroom flourished for the next twenty years. Today it is the center of the second floor of the Bourbon Orleans Hotel where people still use it for social functions.

⁶⁹ Henry Kmen, *Music in New Orleans: The Formative Years 1791-1841* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), 3.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.



Figure 1: The Orleans Ballroom today.

Dancing was so central to New Orleans culture that following the Louisiana Purchase, hostilities between Creole natives who preferred to dance French quadrilles and the newly arriving Americans who preferred English country dances were not uncommon. Adding to the mix was the Spanish minority who preferred waltzes. The militia was needed to resolve at least one squabble, which resulted in the City Council having to set the order of dances at two French contredanses, followed by one English contredanse and one waltz so as to maintain peace.⁷¹ Gottschalk would inherit this legacy of a passion for dance music, and dance rhythms would fill many of his compositions, especially those with suggested musical links to Africa.

At the time of Gottschalk's birth, a plethora of African, European, and Caribbean immigrants populated the city. New Orleans' highly diverse population included 25,000

⁷¹ Maureen Needham, "The War of the Quadrilles: Creoles vs. Americans (1804)," chap. 8 in *I See America Dancing: Selected Readings, 1685-2000*, ed. Maureen Needham (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002).

whites and 15,000 free people of color.⁷² Members of both ethnicities could afford to and did regularly buy opera tickets. R. Randall Couch has noted that “One characteristic of New Orleans throughout its history has been a decided, and probably unique, tendency to mix together—within the city’s public culture—people from all walks of life, from all social classes, ethnic backgrounds, and races.”⁷³ This was never truer than at the time of Gottschalk’s birth, and the effect these circumstances would have on young Moreau would be profound. Of Gottschalk’s childhood in New Orleans, Jeanne Behrend writes “Here were formed the native stamp of much of his music and the attitudes that were to shape his life.”⁷⁴

New Orleans was saturated with music. While some Puritanical traditions in the North, such as Calvinism, forbade music on Sundays, in New Orleans music could be found anywhere at any time. S. Frederick Starr notes that “popular, folk, and dance music poured forth from every segment of the population, whether frontiersmen from the West, native-born Louisiana Creoles, both white and black, or new immigrants.”⁷⁵ Music in New Orleans was a living tradition. Starr refers to this as a musical “present-mindedness” adding that “The very concept of a “classic” was unknown there.”⁷⁶

Concerts brought to mind a different venue during Gottschalk’s lifetime than they do today. Solo recitals were rare and only slowly gaining popularity. It was not until Liszt gave a solo recital in London in 1840 that the term “piano recital” came into general use.⁷⁷ Concerts typically included diverse acts and performers, blending visiting artists

⁷² Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 36.

⁷³ Couch, 429.

⁷⁴ Jeanne Behrend, prelude to *Notes of a Pianist*, by Louis Moreau Gottschalk, ed. Jeanne Behrend (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), xxiv.

⁷⁵ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 35.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁷⁷ Behrend, Prelude to *Notes*, xxxiii.

with local talent. Encores were not additional pieces added to a program but a request from the audience to repeat, in its entirety, the work they had just heard. If the audience was especially enthusiastic, the performer might have to repeat a work several times.

New Orleans had a strong operatic tradition, having two permanent opera companies before any other United States city had even one. Opera in New Orleans began at the St. Peter Street Theater. The theater was founded in 1791 by Louis Tabary and a group of actors and musicians, many of whom had fled to New Orleans from Cap Francais in Saint Domingue during the Haitian revolution.⁷⁸ The earliest noted opera performance was of *Sylvain* by André Grétry on May 22, 1796.⁷⁹ As opera in New Orleans gradually expanded, New Orleanians of the time especially grew to love contemporary French and Italian lyrical operas. For Gottschalk, this meant that “In a single week in 1836—the year Moreau was first taken to the opera—New Orleanians could attend fourteen different performances of nine operas by four different companies.”⁸⁰

In the classical music world of New Orleans, the line separating whites from free people of color was even weaker than in society as a whole.⁸¹ Additionally, “both the sophisticated operatic performances and the folksier music of the dance-halls were accessible to the entire population, rich and poor, white and black.”⁸² African Americans frequently supplied the music at New Orleans’ balls in the early nineteenth century, playing dances of European origin such as waltzes and cotillions.⁸³ Prior to the Civil

⁷⁸ Kmen, *Music in New Orleans*, 57-8.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 58.

⁸⁰ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 35.

⁸¹ Ibid., 36.

⁸² Ibid., 35.

⁸³ Kmen, *Music in New Orleans*, 231.

War New Orleans also had orchestras and brass bands made up entirely of enslaved people and free people of color.

As a child, Gottschalk grew up immersed in the diverse cultures and musics in New Orleans. Here he would absorb the sounds and the attitudes of his childhood environment. He would carry them with him into adulthood as they formed the foundation of his personality, behaviors, and music. He would energize his music with dance rhythms and interact with his audiences, living out the legacy that New Orleans had gifted him.

CHAPTER IV

MUSIC BROUGHT FROM AFRICA: TRAVELERS' ACCOUNTS AND ORAL TRADITIONS

Because recordings did not yet exist, we can only envision the music of the earliest enslaved people in New Orleans through historical investigation and careful consideration of the music of their representative cultures today. Eileen Southern has shown how a solution to this dilemma is possible. She acknowledges that “It is impossible to know all of the facts about the music of the past in West Africa because of the lack of indigenous written records.”¹ This lack of records does not mean that no information survived. Southern adds that “We can learn a great deal, however, from two major sources of historical information: oral traditions of the land and the books written by European travelers and traders.”² To reconstruct what African and African-derived sounds young Louis Moreau Gottschalk might have heard in New Orleans, this study will follow a similar methodology. Its focus in Africa will include the music, people, and cultures from Senegal, across the coast of West Africa, and down through Angola—the areas from which most of the enslaved people came. It will explore contemporary musical descriptions from West and Central Africa, the African Diaspora, and New Orleans in order to examine elements of African musical, performance, and learning processes and practices present in New Orleans at the time of Gottschalk’s childhood.³

¹ Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1971), 4.

² Ibid.

³ The traditions of northern Africa will not be considered here since enslaved people did not come to New Orleans from this region.

African music did not cease for enslaved Africans the moment they left Africa. On the contrary, some Africans were forced to play their music while in route from Africa to the Diaspora. From 1693 to 1859 it was a common practice on slave ships to allow the captives onto the deck to sing and dance, sometimes with musical accompaniment, in the hopes of preserving their health.⁴

Enslaved people would play African music on other types of merchant ships as well. While sailing from St. Augustine, Florida, to the Bahamas in March and April of 1784, German traveler Johann David Schoepf described the musical entertainment provided by native Africans on board the ship:

Another sort of amusement was furnished us by several among the negroes on board, native Africans. One of them would often be entertaining his comrades with the music and songs of their country. The instrument which he used for the purpose he called Gambee; a notched bar of wood, one end of which he placed against an empty cask, or some other hollow, reverberant body, and the other against his breast. In his right hand he held a small stick of wood, split lengthwise into several clappers (something after the fashion of a harlequin's mace); in his left hand also a small thin wooden stick, unsplit. Beating and rubbing both of these, vigorously and in time, over the notches of the first stick, he produced a hollow rattling noise, accompanied by a song in the Guinea tongue. At the first, his gestures and voice were altogether quiet, soft, and slow; but gradually he raised his voice, and began to grin and make wry faces, ending in such a glowing enthusiasm that his mouth foamed and his eyes rolled wildly about.⁵

Though Schoepf probably did not realize that it was likely he was witnessing a musician going into trance, he has nevertheless shown that African traditions were continuing on ships in the Caribbean at the time.

Upon arriving in the New World, enslaved Africans were not content to discontinue their cultural practices. In one especially formal example from Buenos Aires,

⁴ Dena J. Epstein, "African Music in British and French America," *The Musical Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (January 1973): 65-7, and Dena J. Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War*, 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 7-17.

⁵ Johann David Schoepf, *Travels in the Confederation (1783-1784)*, vol.1, trans. and ed. Alfred J. Morrison (1911; reprint, New York: Bergman Publishers, 1968), 260-1.

on October 31, 1795, two chiefs from the *Nación Conga* petitioned Viceroy Pedro de Portugal y Villena for permission to celebrate his entry with African dancing, and to continue to hold such dances every Sunday and holiday to “preserve stylistic authenticity and regional purity” of the various African traditions.⁶

The Thirteen Colonies and early United States lost much of their direct African musical heritage because the British prohibited African drumming, dancing, languages, religions, and gathering in large groups among enslaved people. They feared uprisings and realized drumming could imitate spoken languages and be heard for miles. The British went to great lengths to separate Africans who came from the same villages and ethnic groups. Traditional African dances died out without the essential drummed accompaniment, and when enslaved people did gather to sing and dance in the British colonies, they did so in small numbers and to the accompaniment of quieter instruments such as the banjo and fiddle.⁷ As a result, African survivals in areas occupied by the British quickly evolved into new forms that retained the aesthetics of African musical traditions but were realized in new ways. This was not the case, however, in places in the New World that were under Spanish, French, and Portuguese rule.

As discussed in Chapter III, Louisiana was musically and culturally different from the rest of the United States. Although traveler Isaac Holmes, who traveled to Louisiana and nearby parts of Mississippi in 1821, could not fully appreciate what he saw and heard, nor predict the significance of his account, he fortunately provided the following written description:

⁶ Robert Murrell Stevenson, “The Afro-American Musical Legacy to 1800,” in *American Music: A Diversity Experience* (first published in *Musical Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (1968): 475-502; Los Angeles: Copymat, 1989), 477.

⁷ Ned Sublette, *The World That Made New Orleans: From Spanish Silver to Congo Square* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill books, 2008), 74.

In Louisiana, and the state of Mississippi, the slaves have Sunday for a day of recreation, and upon many plantations they dance for several hours during the afternoon of this day. The general movement is in what they call the Congo dance; but their music often consists of nothing more than an excavated piece of wood, at one end of which is a piece of parchment, which covers the hollow part on which they beat; this, and the singing or vociferation of those who are dancing, and of those who surround the dancers, constitute the whole of their harmony.⁸

Dance based on drumming was central to the African Kongo kingdom, founded in the thirteenth century. Their culture included dances for ancestors, the king, and the nobility; for healing; and for calling down spirits from the world of the ancestors.⁹ In his short description, Holmes shows us that Africans in Louisiana were continuing community-based drum and dance practices from Africa that still bore the name of “Congo;” and, they were doing so just eight years before Louis Moreau Gottschalk was born.

Also important regarding Louisiana’s musical links to Africa are the musical traditions African refugees from Saint-Domingue brought to New Orleans just prior to Gottschalk’s birth. Moreau de St.-Méry provides a lengthy description of their musical practices in his *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française d l’isle Saint-Domingue*, which he also summarizes in a monograph entitled *Danse*. Here again we find mention of both drumming traditions and an African lute:

Brought from all parts of Africa to our Colonies, where the climate is analogous to theirs, the blacks bring with them and conserve their penchant for dance, a penchant so powerful that even the negro most fatigued by work always finds the strength to dance and even to go to several places to satisfy that desire.

When the blacks want to dance, they set out two drums, that is, two barrels of unequal length, of which one end remains open, while the other is covered by a tightly stretched lamb skin. These drums (the shorter of which is called the *Bamboula*, because it is often made from a very large bamboo which has been dug out) resound under the fist blows and finger movements by each player

⁸ Isaac Holmes, *An Account of the United States of America* (1823; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1974), 332.

⁹ Robert Farris Thompson, *Tango: The Art History of Love* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), 63.

straddling his drum. The larger drum is struck slowly, and the other very fast. This monotonous, low-pitched sound is accompanied by a number of small calabashes, containing pebbles and pierced on their long side by a long handle which serves to shake them with.

The *Banzas*, a sort of primitive guitar with four strings, joins the concert, the movements of which are regulated by the hand-clapping of negresses in a large circle. They form a chorus that responds to one or two principal female singers whose striking voices repeat or improvise a song.

A male and female dancer, or a number of dancing couples, leap forward to the middle of the space and begin to dance, always in couples. This dance rarely varies; it consists of a single strong step in which the dancer extends successively each foot and draws it back tapping several times rapidly the heel and toe on the ground, as in the *anglaise*. The dancer moves around the female dancer, who turns about and changes place with the dancer; that's all one perceives, except for the movement of the arms, which the dancer lowers and raises with his elbows fairly near his body and his hand practically closed; the lady holds both ends of a handkerchief which she waves. One who has not seen this dance would find it hard to believe how lively and animated it is, and how rigorously the measure is followed, which makes it graceful.

The dancers replace each other endlessly, and the negroes become so intoxicated with pleasure, that it is always necessary to force them to bring these balls, called *Calendas*, to an end. They take place in the middle of a field, on a smooth piece of land, so that the movement of the feet encounters no obstacle.¹⁰

While accounts from Europeans constitute the majority of descriptions of African music from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, one written by an African does survive. In his memoir, formerly enslaved African Olaudah Equiano, born in 1745, writes of his homeland in the kingdom of Benin. The son of an Embrenché, a community elder of high regard, Equiano was kidnapped along with his sister at age eleven, and eventually sold onto a slave ship bound for Barbados. He would become enslaved to an officer of the British Navy and eventually purchase his freedom in 1766. In 1777 Equiano settled in England and wrote his autobiography, one of the first books written in English by an African. He writes of the music of his homeland:

We are almost a nation of dancers, musicians, and poets. Thus every great event, such as a triumphant return from battle, or other cause of public rejoicing, is celebrated in public dances which are accompanied with songs and music suited

¹⁰ Quote translated in Sublette, *The World That Made New Orleans*, 180.

to the occasion. The assembly is separated into four divisions, which dance either apart or in succession, and each with a character peculiar to itself. The first division contains the married men, who, in their dances frequently exhibit feats of arms, and the representation of a battle. To these succeed the married women, who dance in the second division. The young men occupy the third; and the maidens the fourth. Each represents some interesting scene of real life, such as a great achievement, domestic employment, a pathetic story, or some rural sport; and, as the subject is generally founded on some recent event, it is therefore ever new. This gives our dances a spirit and variety which I have scarcely seen elsewhere. We have many musical instruments, particularly drums of different kinds, a piece of music which resembles a guitar, and another much like a stickado.¹¹ These last are chiefly used by betrothed virgins, who play on them on all grand festivals.¹²

As we shall see, Equiano's description agrees with those of his European contemporaries, reaffirming the importance of dance, the prevalence of drums and percussion, the use of a guitar-like lute, the integral role of music and dance in all aspects of community life, and the importance of everyone's participation. Modern-day explorations of West- and Central-African oral musical traditions show that these same characteristics continue to be essential components of African musics.

Music in West and Central Africa

To reconstruct how African music sounded in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the regions from which enslaved people came, this study will begin by examining the structural characteristics and shared practices of contemporary West- and Central-African and African-derived oral musical traditions as compared to eye-witness accounts from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By looking at these oral musical traditions this study is not implying that music in Africa is static and does not change through time. Instead it is suggesting that the presence of the same musical processes and

¹¹ A stickado is an idiophone similar to a xylophone.

¹² Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or, Gustavus Vassa, the African* (New York: Modern Library, 2004), 7-8.

practices at varying points in time within an oral tradition suggests the stability of these traits and their significance to those who continue to enact them.

This approach begs the question of how to define African and African-derived musics. From one angle, these traditions are thoroughly diverse, showing great variety in the way they are realized. Anthropologist Melville J. Herskovits acknowledges that “It is impossible to speak of ‘an’ African music, just as it is impossible to speak of ‘an’ African language. There are as many musical idioms as there are dialects, and more, for each culture has various forms of song.”¹³ On a more general level though, one can just as easily speak of West- or Central-African music (not plural) that functions according to shared components and aesthetics. Ethnomusicologist Gerhard Kubik has noted that “Within the vast expanse of the African continent, extremely distant areas often display similar, even identical traits, while adjacent areas may be set apart stylistically.”¹⁴ In other words, while the general ideas behind West- and Central-African music and its underlying structure may be similar, the resulting musical product may be stylistically quite diverse because of different cultures and circumstances. Ghanaian ethnomusicologist J. H. Kwabena Nketia fully understands this inherent dichotomy:

Clearly a total view of music in Africa must take into account both similarities and differences, and it would be wrong to emphasize one more than the other. One need not over-simplify the musical situation by ignoring differences or variations in which in fact the richness of the African heritage lies. Nor should one concentrate on cataloguing differences without evaluating them from the point of view of their contextual functions. The same differentiating element may have a different value according to where it is applied.

However the recognition of common characteristics or usages that unite African musical practice does place a different complexion on points of divergence. A plural concept of African music based on the “ethnic” group as a homogeneous musical unit can be misleading, for divergencies merely represent

¹³ Melville J. Herskovits, “What has Africa Given America?” in *The New World Negro*, ed. Frances S. Herskovits (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966), 169.

¹⁴ Gerhard Kubik, *Theory of African Music*, vol. 1 (Wilhelmshaven: Florian Noetzel, 1994) 15.

areas of musical bias. They are the result of specializations or differences in emphasis on the selection and use of common musical resources, common devices, and procedures, specializations which have over the years tended to group African peoples into different 'communities of taste.'¹⁵

Regarding Gottschalk's musical link to Africa, this study will be looking at West- and Central-African musical processes and practices in terms of their shared elements. It will then attempt to show how these same elements appear in his music, as well as his learning and performance practices. Jacqui Malone summarizes this point quite eloquently, stating that black African music shares "a system of distinct but related traditions that have similar or overlapping styles and practices. These traditions share many of the same elements of context, basic procedure, and internal pattern."¹⁶ Though not black himself, evidence suggests Gottschalk absorbed characteristics of the African and African-derived music he heard during his childhood in New Orleans.

As a result of trade within Africa, ethnic groups interacted and shared cultural traditions, including music.¹⁷ This interaction led to the development of common musical structures and patterns throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Numerous ethnomusicologists and anthropologists have made similar lists of shared African musical elements found both in sub-Saharan Africa and the New World. To demonstrate just how widespread these conclusions are, and the slight variations each researcher's experiences have yielded, several examples will be presented here. Writing in 1941, Herskovits was one of the earliest scholars to voice these similarities. He wrote:

The aesthetic aspects of life in the slaving region present an underlying unity, whatever the variations of local styles. Song and dance are everywhere found to

¹⁵ J. H. Kwabena Nketia, "Unity and Diversity in African Music: A Problem of Synthesis," in *The Proceedings of the First International Congress of Africanists* (London, Wisconsin: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd., 1962), 261-2.

¹⁶ Jacqui Malone, *Steppin' on the Blues: The Visible Rhythms of African American Dance* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 10.

¹⁷ J. H. Kwabena Nketia, *The Music of Africa* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1974), 6.

play significant and similar roles in the daily round. The rattle, the drums, and the gong are always found in the battery of instruments employed, though in the Congo the sanza, the xylophone, and elsewhere certain string devices supplement the percussion units. Rhythm is invariably complex, and the convention of alternation of leader and chorus in singing likewise the rule. The more technical musicological problems in the study of similarities and differences over the area cannot be discussed for lack of data. Yet, again, enough is known to justify the conclusion that in musical style and rhythmic treatment—to say nothing of the sociological problem of the cultural setting of the music—fundamental structure is everywhere similar.¹⁸

His findings would be shared by the next generation of researchers.

Robert Farris Thompson primarily researched the culture of the Kongo, and how it spread and influenced the African Diaspora. His list of Central-African musical principles found in the New World included:

dominance of a percussive performance style (attack and vital aliveness in sound and motion); a propensity for multiple meter (competing meters sounding all at once); overlapping call and response in singing (solo/chorus, voice/instrument—“interlock systems” of performance); inner pulse control (a “metronome sense,” keeping a beat indelibly in mind as a rhythmic common denominator in a welter of different meters); suspended accentuation patterning (offbeat phrasing of melodic and choreographic accents); and . . . songs and dances of social allusion (music which, however danceable and “swinging,” remorselessly contrasts social imperfections against implied criteria for perfect living)¹⁹

Thompson also recognized the diverse ways various ethnic groups displayed these tendencies, and his writings include numerous specific examples.

John Miller Chernoff, whose research focuses on the Ewe and Dagbamba²⁰ of Ghana, gives a shorter list of shared West-African musical practices including “multiple rhythms and meters, overlapping call-and-response, off-beat accentuation of melodic and solo-percussive lines, percussive attack, [and] the unification of major pulses at the end

¹⁸ Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1941), 85.

¹⁹ Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1983), xiii.

²⁰ While Chernoff refers to this ethnic group as Dagomba, the name given them by the British, I prefer to use their African name, Dagbamba.

of rhythmic lines.”²¹ Another researcher, Christopher James, included these shared melodic and rhythmic features:

. . . achieving variety within a cyclical framework, overlapping call and response between a soloist and chorus, a speech-like melodic style, syncopation and complex rhythmic patterns, a repetitive pattern in one part creates an ostinato while another voice improvises melodic phrases, and recurring cyclical patterns.²²

Finally, ethnomusicologist Ruth M. Stone, who visited Liberia often throughout her childhood and later conducted research there, derived eleven “central themes” of West-African music using the Kpelle as an example:

1. Music links sounds to dance, instrument playing, and even speech in narration.
2. All people are expected to be minimally competent in music making, particularly singing and dancing.
3. The instruments . . . are extensions of their human performers. Instruments and humans have voices.
4. Performers in a broad range of musical events relate to one another in a part-counterpart arrangement.
5. . . . hocket, or the combining of facets, where each player or singer contributes a short pattern that interlocks with the motifs of other performers.
6. Performers value the faceting of sound into small components that are then recombined. This faceting appears in singing, dancing, and song text alike.
7. Tone color or timbre is much noticed and admired in music.
8. Musicians create rhythms that are often asymmetrical and then interlock with other performers in a very precise way.
9. Key soloists are expected to improvise against the background of a rich and layered backdrop.
10. Continuity in music performance builds through the density of many discrete parts.
11. Parallels to these central themes abound in everyday . . . life, and reinforce our conviction that these themes have some importance for conceptualization.²³

Especially significant, as Stone points out, is that West-African societies tend to be based on the same structural components as their musics are, such as community participation,

²¹ John Miller Chernoff, “The Artistic Challenge of African Music: Thoughts on the Absence of Drum Orchestras in Black American Music,” *Black Music Research Journal* 5 (1985): 4.

²² Christopher James, “Melodic and Rhythmic Aspects of African Music,” chap. 2 in *Composing the Music of Africa: Composition, Interpretation and Realisation*, ed. Malcolm Floyd (Brookfield, Vermont: Ashgate, 1999).

²³ Ruth M. Stone, *Music in West Africa: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 97-98.

individual roles that contribute to the whole, and relating to others by responding to their “call.” This connection between music and all parts of life ran so deep that it virtually guaranteed the survival of music when enslaved people were uprooted and taken to the New World. Anthropologist Alan P. Merriam noted that “In Africa, music is an integrated part of society, not easily compartmentalized as an entity unto itself.”²⁴

As Africans reestablished themselves in the Diaspora and integrated into their new cultural environments, many of their cultural and musical traits were retained. Whenever possible, African traditions continued much as they had been in Africa, but where restrictions were harsher, hybridized, disguised, and even entirely new forms emerged from traditional patterns. As Kubik points out,

It is not possible, however, to compile a comprehensive catalogue of ‘stable elements’ in African musical cultures, because nothing is by nature absolutely stable, and the danger is always that someone in the end makes a dogma out of it. There are only trends and likelihoods; even the time-line patterns can become unstable under very powerful alien influences.²⁵

Music and dance became even more essential for survival as enslaved people endured their new lives in the New World.

In sub-Saharan Africa, boundaries between the spiritual and the secular are often blurry. As John W. Blassingame reminds us, this also applies to musical performances: “In traditional African dances there was little separation of sacred and secular performances.”²⁶ Because music, and in particular drumming, traditionally links sub-Saharan Africans to the spiritual world of their ancestors, music provided a link between Africans in the New World and their ancestors and homeland in Africa. Daniel Walker

²⁴ Alan P. Merriam, “African Music,” chap. 4 in *Continuity and Change in African Cultures*, ed. William R. Bascom and Melville J. Herskovits (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 49.

²⁵ Gerhard Kubik, *Angolan Traits in Black Music, Games and Dances of Brazil: A Study of African Cultural Extensions Overseas* (Lisboa: Junta de Investigações Científicas do Ultramar, 1979), 48-9.

²⁶ John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, rev. and enlarged ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 23.

has noted that “Drums have been continually cited as an instrument of communication among West Africans.”²⁷ Sub-Saharan Africans use drums to communicate with each other by imitating the rhythms and pitches of spoken language. They also use drumming to communicate with their ancestors, something they desperately desired to do after being uprooted to the Diaspora. The dancing that accompanies the drumming can also communicate kinesthetically with participants and ancestors.²⁸ The multidimensional nature of musical and danced communication lends itself to Africans’ ability to communicate with the spirit world.²⁹ This is why, in black Africa, music that accompanies specific and ritual dance is much more prevalent than music “purely for listening pleasure.”³⁰ Music is significant and central to life itself.

Also worth mentioning here is what is referred to as an African aesthetic of coolness. Found throughout West Africa in cultures such as the Dagbamba, Ewe, and Yoruba, being “cool” is best described as doing something of considerable complexity with a look of ease, a type of “grace under pressure.”³¹ This concept would transfer to African-American and American musics.

Musical Instruments from Africa

When enslaved Africans came to the Americas, slave traders sometimes brought African musical instruments with them for use when they were “exercising” on the decks of the slave ships.³² The instruments in common use in the parts of Africa from whence enslaved people came at the time are similar to instruments still employed throughout

²⁷ Daniel E. Walker, *No More, No More: Slavery and Cultural Resistance in Havana and New Orleans* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 11.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

³⁰ Malone, 13.

³¹ Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*, 16.

³² Epstein, “African Music in British and French America,” 65-67.

these diverse African communities today. Wargee of Astrakhan, travelling in Timbuktu in 1821, observed “Their musical instruments are of a kind of rude fiddle, flutes and drums.”³³ Edward T. Bowdich, who travelled through what is today Ghana in the early nineteenth century, mentions the *sanza*. He described it as “a box, one end of which is left open; two flat bridges are fastened across the top, and five pieces of thin curved stick, scraped very smooth, are attached to them, and (their ends being raised,) are struck with some force by the thumb.”³⁴ Similar lamellophones are found in use throughout sub-Saharan Africa today.

Especially significant to Gottschalk, and to his composition of the same name, was the African-derived instrument, the banjo. The banjo evolved from African lutes with gourd resonators, a wide variety of which still exist throughout West and Central Africa today. Katrina Hazzard-Gordon describes one such example:

Throughout West Africa, among the Mandigo, Bamana,³⁵ and Fulani people we find the prototype of the gourd fiddle or “susa” as it is known among the Fulani. There it is constructed using a gourd for the body, and horsehair for strings. The bow is bamboo with horsehair. It is played held in the bend of the elbow rather than under the chin.³⁶

Plucked lutes of similar construction are also prevalent throughout western and southern Africa. In addition to instruments, African names for musical instruments would survive

³³ Ivor Wilks, “Wargee of Astrakhan,” chap. 6 in *Africa Remembered: Narratives by West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade*, ed. Philip D. Curtin (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), 184.

³⁴ Edward T. Bowdich, *Mission From Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee*, 3rd ed. (John Murray, 1819; London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1966), 361-2.

³⁵ This ethnic group was referred to as “Bambara” in the original source but is changed here to “Bamana” for the above mentioned reason. See note 36 in Chapter III.

³⁶ Katrina Hazzard-Gordon, “Dancing Under the Lash: Sociocultural Disruption, Continuity, and Synthesis.” In *African Dance: An Artistic, Historical and Philosophical Inquiry*, ed. Kariamu Welsh Asante (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, Inc., 1994), 112.

across the Atlantic as well. For example, the word “marimba” is found in several African Bantu languages, meaning either a type of xylophone or a type of lamellophone.³⁷

One of the best surviving records of African-derived music and dance is a description written by Benjamin Henry Latrobe (1764-1820) in a journal entry dated February 21, 1819, from New Orleans. Latrobe was an architect and engineer who came to the United States from England in 1796. In his journals, Latrobe included detailed drawings and descriptions of five African-derived instruments and how they were played, providing insight into the continuing African traditions in New Orleans.³⁸ Why did Latrobe take the time to sketch African instruments in his journal? In his previous travels to Philadelphia and Washington (D. C.) he had not encountered them. It was not until he arrived in New Orleans that he first experienced African music and dance to such a degree. The instruments he saw were new to him and required a mnemonic aid.

Variants of cylindrical drums, slit drums, stool-shaped square drums, long-necked lutes with animal skins stretched across calabash body resonators, and nail-studded calabashes similar to those Latrobe saw and drew can still be found throughout West and Central Africa. In the African Diaspora these lutes are often referred to as *banjer*, or *banjar*. In the Thirteen Colonies and later United States they became the banjo. While drumming was prohibited for most enslaved people in the British colonies and later United States, playing stringed instruments was not. The banjar was prominent enough that Thomas Jefferson described it in his notes, stating, “The instrument proper to them is the Banjar, which they brought hither from Africa, and which is the original of the guitar,

³⁷ Kubik, *Angolan Traits in Black Music, Games and Dances of Brazil*, 36.

³⁸ Benjamin Henry Latrobe, *The Journals of Benjamin Henry Latrobe 1799-1820 From Philadelphia to New Orleans*, vol. 3, eds. Edward C. Carter II, John C. Van Horne, and Lee W. Formwalt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 203-4.

its chords being precisely the four lower chords of the guitar.”³⁹ Johann David Schoepf would also make note of the instrument as he travelled through the South in 1783 and 1784:

Another instrument of the true negro is the *Banjah*. Over a hollow calabash (*Cucurbit lagenaria L.*) is stretched a sheepskin, the instrument lengthened with a neck, strung with 4 strings, and made accordant. It gives out a rude sound; usually there is some one besides to give an accompaniment with the drum, or an iron pan, or empty cask, whatever may be at hand. In America and on the islands they make use of this instrument greatly for the dance.⁴⁰

One African lute similar to the banjo is the *n'goni*. On March 5, 2006, Cheick Hamala Diabaté, a master musician from Mali, and accomplished American banjo player and historian Bob Carlin presented a performance on the history of the banjo. Together, they showed just how direct the connection between African gourd lutes and the American banjo still is today. During the performance, the two reenacted what had transpired the evening before when Carlin had offered Diabaté the opportunity to “try out” his American banjo for the first time. Much to their surprise, Diabaté could easily play traditional *n'goni* tunes on the banjo, the only noticeable difference being that Diabaté used a different plucking technique than Carlin. During their performance the following afternoon, Diabaté demonstrated for all of us just how comfortable he felt playing *n'goni* music on the American banjo, having only first attempted to do so the night before.⁴¹ Despite the different appearances of the two instruments, they remained similar in structure and tuning.

³⁹ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia; Written in the Year 1781, Somewhat Corrected and Enlarged in the Winter of 1782, for the Use of a Foreigner of Distinction, in Answer to Certain Queries Proposed by Him* (Paris: n.p., 1784-85), 257.

⁴⁰ Schoepf, *Travels in the Confederation*, 261-2.

⁴¹ Bob Carlin and Cheick Hamala Diabaté, *Kent State Stark Campus Artist-Lecture Series*, Main Hall Auditorium of Kent State University at Stark, North Canton, Ohio, 5 March 2006.



Figure 2: The n'goni. Photo courtesy of Priwan Nanongkham.



Figure 3: Cheick Hamala Diabaté playing the n'goni as Bob Carlin looks on. Photo courtesy of Priwan Nanongkham.

Notably, accomplished banjo player Béla Fleck recently traveled to Africa to explore the African ancestors of the banjo, including the n'goni. Early American banjos were constructed using stretched animal hide and a calabash sound body just as the n'goni is today.

Music and dance were important in Africa, and enslaved people in the New World were resourceful in continuing these practices. Enslaved people in the United States were no exception. When they did not have instruments, they improvised, making them out of whatever they could. Former slave Wash Wilson recalls, “There wasn’t no music instruments . . . [instead they used] pieces of sheep’s rib or cow’s jaw or a piece of iron, with an old kettle, or a hollow gourd and some horsehairs.”⁴² The enslaved people’s persistence in continuing their culture allowed their traditions to continue, thereby giving Gottschalk the opportunity to hear and experience music and dance directly linked to Africa. Where there are instruments, there is music, and where there is music, there is often dancing, especially in New Orleans.

African Rhythms That Traveled to the New World

Specific African rhythms have survived in the New World.⁴³ The most prominent is what became known as the *habanera* or *tango* rhythm and its variants including the *tresillo* and *cinquillo* rhythms.



Figure 4: Habanera, tresillo, and cinquillo rhythms.

These rhythms are found throughout the African Diaspora where Africans continued their musical practices. Note that the tresillo rhythm is the habanera (or tango rhythm) with the second and third notes tied, and the cinquillo rhythm is created by anticipating the

⁴² Quoted in Bill Wyman, with Richard Havers, *Bill Wyman’s Blues Odyssey* (New York: DK Publishing, Inc., 2001), 27.

⁴³ See especially the research of Fernando Ortiz, including *La Africanía de la Música folklórica Cubana*, (Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 2001).

second and third note of the tresillo rhythm with sixteenth notes. When played, the tresillo rhythm actually falls between the way it is notated in the second and third measure above, and the quarter-note triplet shown in the fourth measure. The presence of any of these rhythms alone in a composition would not denote an African-derived origin; however, when they are used in a way that parallels how they are used in West- and Central-African musics, and historical context directly connects them to Africa, little doubt of their origin remains.

The word *tango* is of African origin.⁴⁴ Robert Farris Thompson traces the tango rhythm to the Bakongo of Central Africa where it served as a “call to the dance.”⁴⁵ He points out that tango is “more than a word. It’s a semantic spectrum. It’s a semantic range. And on both sides of the Atlantic, it means a dance, a place of dance, the people who dance it, the beat of the dance, and many other things.”⁴⁶ Thompson elaborates further:

In Kongo there is a bass ngoma-drum pattern identical to the bass of the habanera. Bakongo translate its pulses into syllables: *ka, ka ka kan ka, ka ka kan*. These syllables are close to the ones that tangueros⁴⁷ use when verbally notating the beat of the habanera: *da, ka ka kan da, ka ka kan*. When people are not dancing, and a drummer on the bass or “mother” ngoma drum (the ancestor of the famous conga drum of Cuba) wants to generate action, he repeats this pattern-- *ka, ka ka kan ka, ka ka kan*—on his drum. This is the message: “Now hear this, now hear this. Everyone get out there and dance!

The name of this beat is, in fact, “the call to the dance” (*mbila a makinu*). *Mbila* puns on *bila* (to cook), meaning “dance with enthusiasm.” Other percussionists come in with their lines. A dance is soon under way.⁴⁸

In Kongo ceremonies calling upon spiritual power, dance was essential to facilitate this connection.⁴⁹ Thompson continues, “This signature call on bass drum went

⁴⁴ Nicolas Slominsky, *Music of Latin America* (London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1946), 56-7.

⁴⁵ Thompson, *Tango*, 9, 115.

⁴⁶ Interview quoted in Sublette, *The World That Made New Orleans*, 123.

⁴⁷ Tangueros are the musicians who study and play tangos, especially those who specialize in Argentine tango.

⁴⁸ Thompson, *Tango*, 115.

to Cuba. There Bakongo, the majority black musical culture of the island, reestablished the pattern.”⁵⁰ In Esteban Pichardo’s 1835 *Diccionario provincial de voces cubanas*, *tango* is defined as “a meeting of *negros bozales* [blacks born in Africa] to dance to the sound of drums.”⁵¹ The tango rhythm is also familiar to Arabic music and was likely present in Muslim Spain. Later, the tango rhythm became so associated with Havana that it became known as the *habanera*.⁵² It would become the foundation for Cuban *contradanzas*. In Brazil, the tango became the *maxixe*; Argentine tango would not emerge until the late nineteenth century. Gottschalk would utilize the tango rhythm beginning with his earliest works.

Three Significant Waves of African Cultures That Affected Gottschalk

The Mande cultures were the first from Africa to influence New Orleans. The Mali (also called Mande) Empire was situated along the upper Niger River in what is today northeastern Guinea and southwestern Mali. The Mande cultures spread throughout West Africa and today continue to contribute to the cultures of many West African countries. The Mande are known by several names including Mandinka and Maninka.⁵³ Their music and dance traditions, indigenous to the modern-day countries of Sénégal, Mali, and Guinea, spread with the Mali Empire from 1200 to 1400 A.D. and are visible today in the music and dance traditions of many parts of West Africa.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Malone, 25.

⁵⁰ Thompson, *Tango*, 115.

⁵¹ Quoted in Sublette, *The World That Made New Orleans*, 123.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Eric Charry, *Mande Music: Traditional and Modern Music of the Maninka and Mandinka of Western Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1.

⁵⁴ Mark Sunkett, *Mandiani Drum and Dance: Djimbe Performance and Black Aesthetics from Africa to the New World* (Tempe: White Cliffs Media, 1995), 11.

Ethnomusicologist Eric Charry points out that “A key part of Mande musical aesthetics is setting up two or more interdependent melodic parts that interact to create a polyrhythmic or offbeat texture (or both). This is evident no matter what the instrument . . .”⁵⁵ One *jali*, playing a chordophone, such as the *kora*, can accomplish these polyrhythms by himself. In percussion ensembles, because of the importance of this relationship, there must be at least one support drummer with the lead drummer.

The Senegambian Mandinka drum ensemble consists of two supporting drums, the *kutirindingo* and the *kutiriba*, and a lead drum, the *sabaro*. Maninka djembe ensembles have one to three double-headed bass drums collectively called *dunduns* and two or three djembes, one of which plays the lead.⁵⁶ Charry describes the structure of their musical relationships: “Typically the accompanying instruments—either the two Mandinka *kutiro* drums or Maninka jembes—set up short interlocking patterns over which the lead drummer plays phrases that interact closely with dancers.”⁵⁷ Mark Sunkett lists similar instrumentation for Mande music and dance genres such as *Mandiani*. The lowest pitched drum is the *doundoun* or *diun diun*. Traditionally carved from a single piece of wood, today it can be of metal, up to the size of a 55-gallon barrel. It provides a consistent bass pattern that may be countered by a similar but slightly higher-pitched drum, the *sangbé*. The middle range is filled in by another consistent rhythm on the smaller and higher pitched *kenkeni*. The upper register is filled with three or more of the highest-pitched drum, the djembe (or djimbe). One djembe drummer provides the improvisation and functions as the leader of the ensemble. Calabash rattles

⁵⁵ Charry, 15.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

may also be part of the ensemble, and in Guinea a small bell played with a metal stick is sometimes attached to the sangbé.⁵⁸

The structure of these ensembles is significant. First, note the importance of sets of three. There are either two accompanists and one master drummer, three bass drums of low, middle, and high voicings, or both. Furthermore, the three primary drum strokes on the djembe also have three voices—the slap (high), the open tone (middle) and the bass (low). In Mande percussion ensembles, the lowest voice(s) provides the stable foundation, often varying little throughout a piece. Instruments in the middle range fill in the rhythmic structure and the highest voice is where improvisation occurs. The resulting composite rhythm is often melodic, as opposing lines weave in and out of one another. Also, djembe players will frequently sing their rhythms, but the syllables they use vary from musician to musician.⁵⁹

The next significant group of African cultures to influence New Orleans was from the Kongo peoples, today sometimes called the Niger-Congo peoples. The Kongo kingdom arose between the mid-twelfth and early-fifteenth centuries and lasted into the twentieth century. Its center was 180 miles inland along the Zaire River when the Portuguese arrived in 1482.⁶⁰ African survivals in the Diaspora from the Kongo include words with “ng” (such as tango).⁶¹

Polyrhythmic music and dance are quintessential features of the Niger-Congo peoples. These Bantu-speaking Africans had a tremendous impact on music in the

⁵⁸ Sunkett, 32-4, 50.

⁵⁹ Charry, 221-2.

⁶⁰ Ned Sublette, *Cuba and Its Music: From the First Drums to the Mambo* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2004), 177.

⁶¹ Robert Farris Thompson, *Dancing Between Two Worlds: Kongo-Angola Culture and the Americas* (New York: The Caribbean Cultural Center, 1991), 7; Kubik, *Angolan Traits in Black Music, Games and Dances of Brazil*, 11.

Caribbean and Americas because so many of them were brought there during the slave trade.⁶² Like the Mande, the Kongo placed importance on keeping the fundamental rhythm of a genre in the bass voice. The use of the bass drum, as opposed to the treble, is deliberate: treble voicings represent our world, but bass patterns come from the spirit. “They are the sounds from beneath the horizon. They capture the deep part of what people are thinking.”⁶³ Bass brings transcendence.⁶⁴ The importance and prevalence of placing these rhythms in the bass voice continued when enslaved Africans crossed the Atlantic. For the Africans who were part of the Kongo Empire and their descendants, the tango bass line functioned as a reference point, or as Westerners call it, a timeline pattern, which coordinated not only the layers of the music but also the earthly and the spiritual worlds. For Africans displaced from their homelands, it served as a link to Africa and their ancestors. Thompson adds, “Bass notes have power. Bakongo believe they relate to the earth, the ancestral base that we stand on.”⁶⁵

In New Orleans, the Kongoleses would reinforce and complement the African-derived musical practices that were already in existence there upon their arrival. As hybridization continued, certain tendencies, such as structuring the music around three voicings, with the highest voice improvising, would solidify. These tendencies would be so strongly rooted by the time several thousand Dahomean refugees from Saint-Domingue arrived in New Orleans that the established tendencies would persist as new hybrids continued to form.

⁶² Gerhard Kubik, *Theory of African Music*, vol. 1, (Wilhelmshaven: Florian Noetzel, 1994), 9.

⁶³ Thompson, *Tango*, 115.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 172.

In Saint-Domingue, enslaved people were primarily from Dahomey. Ned Sublette describes what happened when they arrived in New Orleans after fleeing the Haitian Revolution:

The black Saint-Dominguan franceses who arrived in Louisiana via Cuba included some three thousand free people of color. As they had already done in Santiago de Cuba, they transformed the social life of New Orleans with their love of luxury and opulence. The women dressed in bright colors and danced the contredanse. It was at this time that voodoo became a visible part of New Orleans life—though likely the elements were already there with six slave ships from Ouidah and one from Angola having arrived in Louisiana some eight decades previously. Though the rank and file of voodoo believers were slaves, it was the free people of color from Saint-Domingue via Cuba who formed the core of the New Orleans voodoo priesthood. Some of those newly Louisianan free coloreds became sugar planters and slave owners themselves.⁶⁶

Voodoo is significant to this research because African-derived music is essential in ceremonies that involve contacting the divine.

Accounts from Saint-Domingue and West Africa are consistent with the musical practices that continue today in Haiti and in Ghana, Togo, Benin, and Nigeria.

Describing African music and dance in Saint-Domingue, Moreau de Saint-Méry wrote:

But what really delights the negroes, including both those who first saw the light of day in Africa and those whose cradle was America, is the dance. There is no degree of fatigue which can make them give up the thought of going even very great distances sometimes even throughout an entire night, to satisfy their passion for it.

The negro dance came from Africa with the slaves and is common to all who were born in the Colony. The latter, indeed have practiced it almost from birth. It is called the Calenda.

To dance the Calenda, the blacks use two drums, constructed, when possible, with pieces of wood made from a single hollow piece. One of the ends is open and over the other one is stretched a piece of sheepskin or goatskin. The shorter of these drums is known as the bamboula, from the fact that it is sometimes formed of a single very large piece of bamboo. On each drum, a negro

⁶⁶ Sublette, *Cuba and Its Music*, 123.

stands astride, hitting it with his wrists and his fingers, but slowly on one drum and rapidly on the other.⁶⁷

Descriptions from Africa survive as well. Traveler Richard Jobson described annual festivals in seventeenth-century Dahomey: “Both day and night, more especially all the night the people continue dauncing, until he that playes be quite tyred out . . . the standers by seeme to grace the dancer, by clapping their hands together after the manner of keeping time.”⁶⁸ Edward T. Bowdich, who in the early nineteenth century traveled through what is today Ghana, provides a more detailed description of Ashanti music in Kumasi:

The king, his tributaries, and captains, were resplendent in the distance, surrounded by attendants of every description. . . . The sun was reflected, with a glare scarcely more supportable than the heat, from the massy gold ornaments which glistened in every direction. More than a hundred bands burst at once on our arrival, the peculiar airs of their several chiefs; the horns flourished their defiances, with the beating of innumerable drums and metal instruments, and then yielded for a while to the soft breathings of their long flutes, which were truly harmonious; and a pleasing instrument, like a bagpipe without the drone, was happily blended. At least a hundred large umbrellas, or canopies, which could shelter thirty persons, were sprung up and down by the bearers with brilliant effect, being made of scarlet, yellow, and the most shewy [*sic*] cloths and silks. . .

⁶⁹

Furthermore, Bowdich noted that Ashanti drums were made of:

. . . hollow'd trunks of trees, frequently carved with much nicety, mostly open at one end, and of many sizes: those with heads of common skin (that is, of any other than Leopard skin) are beaten with sticks in the form of a crotchet rest; the largest are borne on the head of a man, and struck by one or more followers; the smaller are slung round the neck, or stand on the ground . . . The gong-gongs are made of hollow pieces of iron, and struck with the same metal. The Castanets are also of iron. The Rattles are hollow gourds, the stalks being left as handles, and

⁶⁷ Moreau de Saint-Méry, *A Civilization That Perished: The Last Years of White Colonial Rule in Haiti*, translated, abridged and edited by Ivor D. Spencer (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, Inc., 1985), 54-5.

⁶⁸ Richard Jobson, *The Golden Trade: Or A Discovery of the River Gambia, and the Golden Trade of the Aethiopians*, with a new introduction by Walter Rodney (1623; London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1968), 136.

⁶⁹ Bowdich, 34.

contain shells or pebbles, and are frequently covered with a net work of beads . .
⁷⁰
 .

Bowdich proves a reliable source in his noted attempts to transcribe melodies he heard. He notes that “To have attempted any thing like arrangement, beyond what the annexed airs naturally possess, would have altered them, and destroyed the intention of making them known in their original character. I have not even dared to insert a flat or a sharp.”⁷¹

These descriptions are consistent with contemporary practices in Haiti and West Africa. The presence of iron bells suggests their use for timeline patterns. What this shows is that Dahomean-derived music practices at the beginning of the nineteenth century are still structured the same way. The highest-pitched instruments, the iron bells, provide the rhythmic foundation, or timeline pattern, of a piece. Middle-voiced support drums fill in the structure, and the greatest improvisatory freedom occurs in the lowest-pitched and largest instrument, the master drum. This is the exact opposite voicing of the polyrhythmic percussion ensembles derived from the Mande and Kongo.

In African-derived musics of the African Diaspora, even greater variety and hybridization comes to fruition as music traditions reinvent themselves using established African musical practices and processes. In the case of Louis Moreau Gottschalk, parallels to African-derived processes and practices survived, although the resulting sound was far from what could be heard in Africa during his lifetime. A careful look at Gottschalk will reveal how extensive the parallels between his musical processes and practices and those of Africa are. As we shall see, Gottschalk spent his childhood immersed in both European and African cultural traditions.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 363-4.

⁷¹ Ibid., 365.

CHAPTER V
THE AFRICAN MUSICAL ENVIRONMENT OF NEW ORLEANS DURING
GOTTSCALK'S CHILDHOOD

Louisiana was not unique in giving enslaved people Sunday off. Throughout the South, the Sabbath was honored as a day of rest, but

What made French Louisiana different was that slaves there came early to be recognized as having the right to use their free time virtually as they saw fit, with little or no supervision. Such a conception, much less such a practice, never prevailed anywhere in the rest of the South.¹

Sunday became a day for markets, music, and dancing for enslaved people. On Sunday afternoons in the early nineteenth century they would hold public dances at Congo Square on Rampart Street in New Orleans. These performances included musicians playing Afro-Caribbean drums. Drumming would have been an essential element of such dances.

While African drums were forbidden in much of the United States because they were perceived to be un-Christian, and had the potential to be used as dangerous signaling devices, in New Orleans enslaved people and free people of color were able to continue African music traditions, including drumming, even on Sundays. As in parts of the Caribbean, where enslaved Africans were able to continue some of their musical and religious traditions, they often found it necessary to conceal the real meanings of their practices. Dan Walker notes that “Because of the repressive nature of the New World slave regimes, members of the African-descended community oftentimes concealed or

¹ Jerah Johnson, *Congo Square in New Orleans* (New Orleans: Louisiana Landmarks Society, 1995), 8.

‘masked’ their true sentiments behind socially acceptable forms of behavior and expression.”² Yet in New Orleans, such disguises seem to have been less necessary. Referring to Congo Square, Dena J. Epstein concludes “Only in Place Congo in New Orleans was the African Tradition able to continue in the open.”³ Elsewhere in the United States such traditions were forbidden, became acculturated, or simply died out.

Congo Square

“If there’s one thing everyone knows, or should know, about New Orleans music, it’s Congo Square” proclaims Ned Sublette, and considering Congo Square’s musical impact, he is right.⁴ Congo Square originated as a public market during New Orleans’ French colonial period and is located where local Native Americans traditionally held their market. The music and dancing at Congo Square were a by-product of people gathering together there.⁵ In the early eighteenth century, French settlers in New Orleans faced an overwhelming problem of food shortages, often relying on local Native Americans for help. When the settlers’ enslaved populations grew, it soon became advantageous to assign them land on which to grow their own crops. By the 1730’s, it was commonplace for enslaved people to grow their own crops and to take any surpluses to market to sell on their days off.⁶ Din and Harkins summarize the market nicely:

Slaves in Louisiana generally had Sunday for themselves, and many of those living in the vicinity went to New Orleans to sell the products of their labor, work to earn money, purchase necessities at stores that eagerly sought their business, and generally enjoy themselves. Slave-operated open-air markets were present in

² Daniel E. Walker, *No More, No More: Slavery and Cultural Resistance in Havana and New Orleans* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 14.

³ Dena J. Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War*, 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 84-5.

⁴ Ned Sublette, *The World That Made New Orleans: From Spanish Silver to Congo Square* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2008), 120.

⁵ Jerah Johnson, 5.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 5-7.

the French era, having been preceded by an Indian market located about a mile outside the city along the Bayou St. John road. With increased economic activity and a larger population, markets flourished under the Spaniards. Congo Market at the rear of the city was principally for slaves and was used by a smaller number of free blacks. The Cabildo never sought to regulate it. About 15 years after the American takeover, Benjamin Latrobe was astonished to see several hundred unsupervised blacks dancing in Congo Square. By then this custom was about three-quarters of a century old.⁷

By around 1750, the population of New Orleans had grown to nearly 2,000 and was large enough to support a regularly scheduled market.⁸

In 1786, the Spanish Governor of the Louisiana Territory, Estavan (Estaban) Rodriguez Miró, in his *Edict of Good Government*, outlawed the “dances of colored people” during Sunday vespers due to a noise complaint, but the music would continue. Beginning around 1816, Signore Gaetano seasonally held his Congo Circus in the square. Because the circus was only open to whites, the city fenced in Congo Square in 1820 but the Sunday market and African dancing continued.⁹ Congo Square received its name when enslaved people began referring to the circus as the “Congo.” Congo was also the name of one of the African dances frequently enacted there. As locals and visitors alike began referring to the railed-in field as Congo Square, the name stuck.¹⁰ Adjacent to Congo Square was the Faubourg Tremé, the neighborhood where New Orleans’ free people of color lived. At the time of the Louisiana Purchase they numbered 1,300 and by the Civil War had increased to around 19,000—more by far than in any other southern city. These free people of color, who were also French-speaking Catholic Creoles, gathered along with the enslaved people in crowds at the Sunday markets and African

⁷ Gilbert C. Din, and John E. Harkins, *The New Orleans Cabildo: Colonial Louisiana’s First City Government 1769-1803* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 12.

⁸ Jerah Johnson, 9.

⁹ Ibid., 20 and 33.

¹⁰ Ibid., 34.

dances during the circus' off-seasons.¹¹ As a result of persistence, "Only at Congo Square did slaves gather for social, cultural, economic and religious interaction in such large numbers and with such great intensity."¹²

Music and dance at Congo Square reached their height after 1817.¹³ In 1822, John Paxton, compiler of New Orleans' first city directory, would describe Congo Square as follows, even offering a solution to what he perceived as a problem:

The Circus public square is planted with trees, and inclosed [*sic*], and is very noted on account of its being the place where the Congo and other Negros dance, carouse and debauch on the Sabbath, to the great injury of the morals of the rising generation; it is a foolish custom that elicits the ridicule of most respectable persons who visit the city; but if it is not considered good policy to abolish the practice entirely, surely they could be ordered to assemble at some place more distant from the houses.¹⁴

His suggestion was not heeded.

European and American visitors to New Orleans were astonished to see music and dance transplanted from Africa regularly being performed.¹⁵ Visitors from the Caribbean were already familiar with such amusements. Written mentions of African-derived music and dance date back to the early eighteenth century. Often visitors to New Orleans filled their documentation of these practices with prejudicial terms, indicating their own misunderstandings. Frenchman Le Page Du Pratz, who was in Louisiana from 1718 to 1734, included advice to slave masters in his *History of Louisiana* revealing that dancing (and therefore music) was already part of the Sunday markets. He advises the masters that it is in "your own interest to give your negroes a small piece of waste ground

¹¹ Ibid., 35-6.

¹² Gary A. Donaldson, "A Window on Slave Culture: Dances at Congo Square in New Orleans, 1800-1862," *The Journal of Negro History* 69, no. 2 (spring 1984): 63.

¹³ Ibid., 64.

¹⁴ Henry Kmen, "The Roots of Jazz and the Dance in Place Congo: A Re-Appraisal," *Anuario Interamericano de Investigacion Musical* 8 (1972): 10.

¹⁵ Jerah Johnson, 36-7.

. . . and to engage them to cultivate it for their own profit, that they may be able to dress a little better, by selling the produce.”¹⁶ He goes on to warn that the Sunday dances could be a place for plotting rebellions:

In a word, nothing is more to be dreaded than to see the negroes assemble together on Sundays, since, under pretence of Calinda or the dance, they sometimes get together to the number of three or four hundred, and make a kind of Sabbath, which it is always prudent to avoid; for it is in those tumultuous meetings that they sell what they have stolen to one another, and commit many crimes. In these likewise they plot their rebellions.¹⁷

Traveler Christian Schultz would also witness the dances in Congo Square. In a letter dated May 1, 1808, he described what he saw:

In the afternoon, a walk in the rear of town will still more astonish their bewildered imaginations with the sight of twenty different dancing groups of the wretched Africans, collected together to perform their *worship* after the manner of their country. They have their own national music, consisting for the most part of a long kind of narrow drum of various sizes, from two to eight feet in length, three or four of which makes a band. The principal dancers or leaders are dressed in a variety of wild and savage fashions, always ornamented with a number of tails of the smaller wild beasts, and those who appeared most horrible always attracted the largest circle of company. These amusements continue until sunset, when one or two of the city patrol show themselves with their cutlasses, and the crowds immediately disperse.¹⁸

Perhaps the longest and best-known account of the African-derived music and dance in Congo Square is that of travelling architect and engineer Benjamin Henry Latrobe (1764-1820), whose drawings and descriptions of African instruments in New Orleans were discussed in Chapter IV. Latrobe went to New Orleans in January of 1819. Following the Louisiana Purchase he had been asked to design the city’s new waterworks and was travelling there to oversee their construction. Despite his extensive travels in

¹⁶ Le Page du Pratz, *The History of Louisiana*, ed. Joseph G. Tregle, Jr., reproduction of the 1774 edition (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), 387.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Christian Schultz, *Travels on an Island Voyage Through the States of New-York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee, and Through the Territories of Indiana, Louisiana, Mississippi and New-Orleans; Performed in the Years 1807 and 1808; Including a Tour of Nearly Six Thousand Miles*, vol. 2 (Ridgewood, New Jersey: The Gregg Press, 1810), 197.

Europe and the United States, and his considerable experiences with music of European descent, Latrobe was not prepared for his first exposure to African music, singing, and dancing. Latrobe found himself caught off guard not only by the fact that what he happened upon by chance during a leisurely walk with an acquaintance was happening on the Sabbath day, but also by how completely foreign it seemed despite his previous travels in the states. Especially new and foreign to him were the dances he saw at Congo Square, to which he responded that he had “never seen anything more brutally savage.”¹⁹ He concluded that the Sunday activities he witnessed there “have . . . perpetuated here those of Africa among its inhabitants.”²⁰ In a journal entry dated February 21, 1819, he writes of what he observed at Congo Square while in New Orleans:

This long dissertation has been suggested by my accidentally stumbling upon the Assembly of Negroes which I am told every Sunday afternoon meets on the Common in the rear of the city. . . In going up St. Peters Street and approaching the common I heard a most extraordinary noise, which I supposed to proceed from some horse Mill, the horses trampling on a wooden floor. I found however on emerging from the houses, onto the common, that it proceeded from a croud [*sic*] of 5 or 600 persons assembled in an open space or public square. I went to the spot and crouded [*sic*] near enough to see the performance. All those who were engaged in the business seemed to be *blacks*. I did not observe a dozen yellow faces.²¹ They were formed into circular groups in the midst of four of which, which I examined (but there were more of them) was a ring, the largest not 10 feet in diameter. In the first were two women dancing. They held each a coarse handkerchief extended by the corners in their hands, and *set* to each other in a miserably dull and slow figure, hardly moving their feet or bodies. The music consisted of two drums and a stringed instrument. An old man sat astride of a Cylindrical drum about a foot in diameter, and beat it with incredible quickness with the edge of his hand and fingers. His other drum was an open staved thing held between the knees and beaten in the same manner. They made an incredible noise. The most curious instrument however was a stringed instrument which no doubt was imported from Africa. On the top of the finger board was the rude figure of a Man in a sitting posture, and two pegs behind him to which the strings were fastened. The body was a Calabash. It was played upon

¹⁹ Benjamin Henry Latrobe, *Impressions Respecting New Orleans Diary and Sketches: 1818-1820*, ed. Samuel Wilson, Jr. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951), 49-51.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Here Latrobe is referring to mulattos, people of mixed African and European descent.

by a very little old man, apparently 80 or 90 Years old. The women squalled out a burthen to the playing, at intervals, consisting of two notes, as the Negroes working in our cities respond to the Song of their leader. Most of the circles contained the same sort of dancers. One was larger, in which a ring of a dozen women walked, by way of dancing, round the music in the Center. But the instruments were of different construction. One, which from the color of the wood seemed new, consisted of a block cut into something of the form of a cricket bat with a long and deep mortice [*sic*] down the Center. This thing made a considerable noise, being beaten lustily on the side by a short stick. In the same Orchestra was a square drum looking like a stool, which made an abominably loud noise; also a Calabash with a round hole in it, the hole studded with brass nails which was beaten by a women with two short sticks.

A Man sung an uncouth song to the dancing which I suppose was in some African language, for it was not french [*sic*], and the Women screamed a detestable burthen on one single note. The allowed amusements of Sunday, have, it seems, perpetuated here, those of Africa among its inhabitants. I have never seen any thing more brutally savage, and at the same time dull and stupid than this whole exhibition. Continuing my walk about a mile along the Canal, and returning after Sunset near the same spot, the noise was still heard. There was not the least disorder among the croud, [*sic*] nor do I learn, on enquire, that these weekly meetings of the negroes have ever produced any mischief.²²

Latrobe also included music notation that suggests he heard syncopation, as well as his sketches of the African-derived instruments he described.

Colonel James Creecy, who came to New Orleans in October of 1834 and stayed until his death in 1860, provides another lengthy description of the activities in Congo Square.²³ While his account cannot be specifically dated within his time in New Orleans, he still provides considerable insight. Creecy writes:

North of Rampart Street, about its center, is the celebrated Congo Square, well enclosed, containing five or six or perhaps more acres, well shaded, with graveled walks and beautiful grass plats, devoted on Sunday afternoons to negro dances and amusements. The creoles of Louisiana—Spanish, French and negroes—are Catholics, with but few exceptions, and on Sabbath mornings the females and a few elderly males are punctual in attending their religious duties. The holy mass is not neglected by those two classes, but the afternoons and

²² Benjamin Henry Latrobe, *The Journals of Benjamin Henry Latrobe 1799-1820 From Philadelphia to New Orleans*, vol. 3, eds. Edward C. Carter II, John C. Van Horne, and Lee W. Formwalt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 203-4.

²³ Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals*, 133-4.

evenings of the Lord's day are spent in amusements, fun, and frolic of every description—always with an eye to much sport for a little expense.

The “haut ton” attend operas, theaters, masquerades, &c. The quadroons have their dashing fancy balls, dances, &c.; and the lower order of colored people and negroes, bond and free, assemble in great numbers in Congo Square, on every Sunday afternoon in good weather, to enjoy themselves in their own peculiar manner. Groups of fifties and hundreds may be seen in different sections of the square, with banjos, tom-toms, violins, jaw-bones, triangles, and various other instruments from which harsh or dulcet sounds may be extracted; and a variety, indeed, of queer, grotesque, fantastic, strange, and merry dancers are to be seen, to amuse and astonish, interest and excite, the risible and wonder of “outside barbarians,” unskilled in Creole or African manners and customs.

Sometimes much grace and often surprising activity and long-continued rapid motions are seen. The dancers are most fancifully dressed, with fringes, ribbons, little bells, and shells and balls, jingling and flirting about the performers' legs and arms, who sing a second or counter to the music most sweetly; for all Africans have melody in their souls; and in all their movements, gyrations and attitudinizing exhibitions, the most perfect time is kept, making the beats with the feet, heads, or hands, or all, as correctly as a well-regulated metronome! Young and old join in the sport and dances. One will continue the rapid *jig* till nature is exhausted; then a fresh disciple leaps before him or her and “cuts out” the fatigued one, who sinks down gracefully on the grass, out of the way, and is fanned by an associate with one hand, while water or refreshments are tendered by the other.

When a dancer or danseuse surpasses expectation, or is particularly brilliant in the execution of “flings” and “flourishing” of limb and body, shouts, huzzas, and clapping of hands follow, and numerous *picallions* are thrown in the ring to the performers by (*strange*) spectators. All is hilarity, fun, and frolic. To witness such a scene is a certain cure for ennui, blue-devils, mopes, horrors, and dyspepsia. Hundreds of nurses, with children of all ages, attend, and many fathers and mothers, beaux and belles, are there to be found; there, where no cares or sorrows intrude; where pains and heart-aches are forgotten; where duns are unknown, and all earthly troubles cease to torment, *pro tem*. Every stranger should visit Congo Square when in its glory, once at least, and, my word for it, no one will ever regret or forget it. It is human nature to love to look on happy, joyous, smiling faces, and there no others are to be seen. The gaieties continue till sunset; and at the “gun-fire” the whole crowd disperse, disappear, and “the noise and confusion” in Congo Square is heard and seen no more until the next blessed Dimanche.²⁴

Adding to the confusion of when dances were held in Congo Square, is a series of articles on Creole music by novelist George Washington Cable for *Century Magazine* in

²⁴ James R. Creecy, *Scenes in the South, and Other Miscellaneous Pieces* (Washington: Thomas McGill, 1860), 19-23.

the early 1880's, in particular, "Dance in Place Congo," and "Creole Slave Songs."

Cable imagined Congo Square to be like accounts of Saint-Domingue. Unable to derive specific information about the music and dance of Congo Square from aging members of the New Orleans populace, Cable turned to two earlier works by Médéric Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Déscription topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue* (published in Philadelphia in 1787-88) and *De la danse* (published in Parme, France in 1801).²⁵ Although Cable's sources come from accounts of music and dance in Saint-Domingue, the enslaved culture there shared their ethnic heritage and a history of French rule with the African population of New Orleans. Cable includes descriptions of African-derived Voodoo ceremonies where music and dance played a central role. Voodoo would also survive in New Orleans.²⁶ Cable also relied on Gottschalk's sister Clara for information and specific Creole melodies she knew. Unfortunately for this current research, although Cable made an effort to locate Creole songs, he did not mention where or how his informant Clara had learned them.²⁷

Cable imagines the drumming at Congo Square:

The drums were very long, hollowed, often from a single piece of wood, open at one end and having a sheep or goat skin stretched across the other. One was large, the other much smaller. The tight skin heads were not held up to be struck; the drums were laid along on the turf and the drummers bestrode them, and beat them on the head madly with fingers fists, and feet,--with slow vehemence on the great drum, and fiercely and rapidly on the small one. Sometimes an extra performer sat on the ground behind the larger drum, at its open end, and 'beat upon the wooden sides of it with two sticks.' The smaller drum was often made from a joint or two of very large bamboo, in the West Indies where such could be got, and this is said to be the origin of its name; for it was called the *Bamboula*.²⁸

²⁵ Arlin Turner, *George W. Cable: A Biography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), 228-9.

²⁶ Jerah Johnson, 40.

²⁷ S. Frederick Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 40-41.

²⁸ George Cable, "The Dance in Place Congo," *The Century Magazine* 31 (February 1886): 519.

Although Cable's sources describe activities in Saint-Domingue, his descriptions are consistent with eye-witness accounts of Congo Square.

Another factor was Lafcadio Hearn (1850-1904), Gottschalk fanatic and associate editor of the *New Orleans Item*. Hearn had attempted to find direct African holdovers in New Orleans culture and music but instead concluded that their exotic flavor derived from the West Indies. Hearn insisted that Cable use Gottschalk as a primary source of material for his articles on Creole music.²⁹

Former New Orleans resident, Hélène Allain, was also aware of African survivals in New Orleans. In her work *Souvenirs d'Amérique et de France, Par une Créole*, Allain included a lengthy quote from Moreau de Saint-Méry's book on Saint-Domingue because it fit her recollections of New Orleans; however, she was recalling what she heard from others and not what she actually experienced first hand. Allain writes:

I myself have heard a great deal in New Orleans of Negro dance. . . . At the time that we lived on the corner of Rue du Quartier and Rue Conde [1836-55] . . . the Negroes danced again at Place Congo. It was a holiday for them every Sunday evening, and whites and blacks, slaves and masters, pressed themselves against the heavy gate that separated the dancers from the crowd. I never saw them myself, nor knew anyone who had seen them, but I believe . . . that these dances were identical with those one reads about in the description [i.e., Moreau de Saint-Méry]. Our Louisiana Negroes yield nothing to the Negroes of the older colonies: dances, songs, proverbs—they have inherited all.³⁰

Allain had not witnessed the dances in Congo Square but she knew of them. The fact that she included proverbs with her mention of African music and dance in her last sentence shows a high awareness of African cultures.

²⁹ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 42.

³⁰ Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals*, 33.

African Music in Other Parts of New Orleans

African music and dance in New Orleans were not limited to Congo Square but were likely to occur any time enslaved people gathered together on their days off. They also congregated on the green in front of the St. Louis Cathedral known then as Place d'Armes (French) or Plaza de Armas (Spanish) and since 1851 called Jackson Square. Just as they did at Congo Square, enslaved people held markets and dances here. There were shops along two sides of the square and along the levee in front of the square.³¹ In 1799, F. Cuming, a visitor to New Orleans, witnessed and wrote about "vast numbers of negro slaves, men, women, and children assembled together on the levee, drumming, fifing and dancing in large rings."³² Like Cuming's account, many other reports of African music and dance in New Orleans do not specifically locate where in the city they observed what they described.

Traveler Johann Buechler, from St. Gall, Switzerland, who was in New Orleans from May 15 to June 13, 1817, wrote:

Now I want to tell my readers a little about the comical shows the Negroes present behind the city each Sunday if the weather is good at 4 o'clock in the evening at large open places at various different locations, where they have a good time and anyone can look on without being hindered. The males clothe themselves in oriental and Indian dress, with a Turkish turban of various colors, red, blue, yellow, green and brown, with a sash of the same sort around the body to cover themselves; except for that they go naked. The women clothe themselves, each according to her means, in the newest fashions of silk, gauze, muslin, percale dresses. . . . They dance in the most wonderful way, form a circle and make on all sides the most wonderful bending gestures with their bodies and knees . . . this routine . . . lasts from 4 to 6:30, for their own amusement.³³

³¹ Kimberly S. Hanger, *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places: Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans, 1769-1803* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 144-5.

³² Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Early Western Travels: 1748-1846*, vol. 4, of *Cuming's Tour to the Western Country (1807-1809)* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1904), 363.

³³ Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals*, 95.

In a letter published by Henry C. Knight in 1824, Arthur Singleton wrote that “On Sabbath evening, the African slaves meet on the green, by the swamp, and rock the city with their Congo dances.”³⁴

It seems that the Congo dances not only ‘rocked’ the city of New Orleans but also the surrounding area. In 1826, Timothy Flint from Massachusetts published a description of an African dance he witnessed while travelling along the Mississippi to New Orleans:

The great Congo-dance is performed. Every thing [sic] is license and revelry. Some hundreds of negroes, male and female, follow the king of the wake, who is conspicuous for his youth, size, the whiteness of his eyes, and the blackness of his visage. For a crown he has a series of oblong, gilt-paper boxes on his head, tapering upwards, like a pyramid. From the ends of those boxes hang two huge tassels, like those on epaulets. He wags his head and makes grimaces. By his thousand mountebank tricks, and contortions of countenance and form, he produces an irresistible effect on the multitude. All the characters that follow him, of leading estimation, have their own peculiar dress, and their own contortions. They dance, and their streamers fly, and the bells that they have hung about them tinkle.³⁵

His description brings to mind a West-African funeral or a New Orleans jazz funeral.

Another visitor to New Orleans in 1831, George J. Joyaux, writes:

Every Sunday the negroes of the city and of the surroundings meet in a place called *The Camp*. It is a huge green field on the bank of a lake about three leagues from New Orleans. It takes only a few minutes to get there by railroad. . . . At The Camp . . . negroes . . . are gathered in a large number of distinct groups; each has its own flag floating atop a very tall mast, used as a rallying point for the group . . . [for the] dance. . . . They make their music by beating and rolling their sticks on their drums.³⁶

What all of these accounts make clear is that African and African-derived music saturated the soundscape of New Orleans and its surrounding area, and they did so since the first enslaved Africans arrived around the beginning of the eighteenth century. Traditions

³⁴ Sublette, *The World That Made New Orleans*, 3.

³⁵ Joseph Roach, “Deep Skin: Reconstructing Congo Square,” chap. 5 in *African American Performance and Theater History*, ed. Harry J. Elam, Jr. and Davie Krasner (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 109-10.

³⁶ Dena J. Epstein, “African Music in British and French America,” *The Musical Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (January 1973): 87.

from Africa persisted while new styles began to evolve through acculturation. So, how did the African traditions survive for so long, allowing for such a rich acculturation process?

The history of New Orleans provided ample opportunities for African survivals. As stated already, both French and Spanish rule were more relaxed and accommodating than their British counterpart. Though still cruel, the French and the Spanish were less concerned with what the enslaved people did on their days off.³⁷ New Orleans was also isolated during French rule, far from other major centers in the United States; and later during Spanish rule it maintained close ties with similar cultures in the Caribbean.³⁸ From 1760 to 1840 the African-descended population in New Orleans outnumbered the city's European population. Both the African people and the French Creole people of New Orleans had an immense affinity for dance and dance music. James R. Creecy, who provided one of the earlier-mentioned descriptions of Congo Square, also gives insight while writing about Mardi Gras as to why and how the French Creoles allowed both Mardi Gras and the Congo Square dances to continue. He writes:

This carnival is permitted by the city authorities, sometimes rather reluctantly, and has been more than once forbidden, as well as the Congo Square dances; but the Creole propensity for those amusements is so strong that their friends are soon placed in power again, and the wild frolics are hailed by acclamation, as the masquers and fun and mischief-loving revelers make their appearance.³⁹

As for the Africans and their descendants, “To play a hand drum in 1819 in the United States, where overt manifestation of Africanness had elsewhere been so thoroughly, deliberately erased, was a tremendous act of will, memory, and resistance.”⁴⁰

³⁷ Marshall W. Stearns, *The Story of Jazz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 19.

³⁸ Jerah Johnson, 42.

³⁹ Creecy, 45.

⁴⁰ Sublette, *The World That Made New Orleans*, 282.

Music provided (and still does provide) a direct link to the spirit world and the ancestors, and dancing allowed participants to experience this link directly. As Dan Walker has pointed out,

Dance was the most prevalent and widespread means whereby participants in . . . Congo Square achieved spiritual union with their friends and loved ones in Africa. . . . West and Central African music and dance, especially when produced in a festival setting, have great spiritual potentialities.⁴¹

Music and dance facilitated trance, “for the African a very real connection to the land of the ancestors,” and an “effort to re-create a time and space in which the African community was whole.”⁴² Walker continues, “Ethnic groups enslaved in the Americas believed that possession was the ultimate form of communication between humankind and the spirit world or the ancestors.”⁴³

The various spiritual practices in Africa had (and still have) specific music for contacting specific deities and ancestors. Not just any music would do for a specific purpose. As Jerah Johnson has pointed out, the authenticity with which African music and dance traditions were perpetuated in Congo Square is shown by how enslaved Africans grouped themselves according to their ethnic groups for music and dancing. For them each tradition was unique and not easily blended with another. What they wore was also significant. Some recreated traditional attire, and dancers attached bells and jingling metal disks to their legs and arms, as they continued practices from Africa.⁴⁴ This fact suggests that enslaved people were continuing African spiritual practices in New Orleans. The correct music and other ceremonial elements were essential for contacting the spirit world and inviting trance. The survival of African spiritual practices ensured the survival

⁴¹ Walker, 45.

⁴² Ibid., 48.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Jerah Johnson, 39.

of African musics because while other daily activities and social organizations had changed drastically from the motherland, religion survived.⁴⁵ Ceremonies were only successful if a deity arrived through possession. The spirits possess members of the community and communicate through them. Music was essential in African spiritual practices for inviting the deities to a ceremony and continued to be essential in the African Diaspora. Likewise, because African music and spirituality are so intertwined, the presence and persistence of African music solidified the continuation of African spiritual practices.

Robert Tallant has suggested that Voodoo was eradicated in New Orleans under French rule because of laws against gatherings of enslaved people, and that it was not until formerly enslaved people from Saint-Domingue arrived following their successful revolt that Voodoo was reintroduced.⁴⁶ This may not have been the case because what the laws permitted and what actually happened in practice were two very different things. It is clear that enslaved people did gather together on their days off and that the French paid little attention to what they did with their free time. Although Tallant suggests that the treatment of enslaved people and the restrictions placed upon them relaxed under American rule following the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, other sources suggest the opposite was true. The French overlooked gatherings of enslaved people despite what the laws said, and while the influx of enslaved Africans from Saint-Domingue may have enhanced the African-derived spiritual practices they encountered upon arrival in New Orleans, African survivals in New Orleans were already prevalent prior to their arrival.

⁴⁵ Herbert S. Klein, *African Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 179-80.

⁴⁶ Robert Tallant, *Voodoo in New Orleans* (Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing Company, 1994), 10-14.

Gaps in time between reports of African music and dance in Congo Square have led to assumptions that such practices were suspended. One uncertainty between James R. Creecy's writing (from an unknown date somewhere between 1834 and 1860), and a reporter's account in the *New Orleans Picayune* from June 24, 1845, led Henry Kmen to believe that the dances at Congo Square ended around 1835.⁴⁷ Ned Sublette similarly concluded that the music in Congo Square stopped in 1835, and then restarted, until finally being shut down by 1851.⁴⁸ Creecy was in New Orleans from 1834 until his death in 1860. His description of what he saw at Congo Square cannot be dated specifically within these twenty-six years. It is illogical to assume he must have witnessed music and dance in Congo Square only in the first of his twenty-six years in New Orleans. Furthermore, laws forbidding gatherings of enslaved people in New Orleans were historically not enforced, and gaps in written descriptions of the music and dance at Congo Square do not mean the music there stopped. In fact, in one law in 1837 the city council officially authorized "free negroes and slaves to give balls on the Circus Square"⁴⁹ from 12 o'clock until sunset under surveillance of the police."⁵⁰

Jerah Johnson makes a convincing case contrary to the argument that the music at Congo Square stopped around 1835. The market at Congo Square (the original context for the music and dancing) continued until the city opened its Tremé Market two blocks away in 1839-40.⁵¹ This date is just prior to when Gottschalk left for France. African and African-American dancing continued through the 1830's and 1840's at Congo Square. According to Johnson, with the relocation of the market, African music and dance at

⁴⁷ Kmen, "The Roots of Jazz and the Dance in Place Congo," 11.

⁴⁸ Sublette, *The World That Made New Orleans*, 286.

⁴⁹ Circus Square was another name for Congo Square.

⁵⁰ Jerah Johnson, 44.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

Congo Square was never suspended but gradually transformed due to increasing American influences.⁵² By the 1840s, fewer and fewer African-born members of the enslaved population were left, and younger generations were beginning to incorporate new elements, including European dances. African and European cultural elements had been gradually combining since the beginnings of New Orleans. In 1808, one witness would report seeing a circle of African-descended dancers performing an African *Bamboula* beside a similar circle performing a French *contre-danse*.⁵³ The early nineteenth century in New Orleans saw a gradual dying out of African practices as they were transformed into blended African-American practices.⁵⁴ Referring to the continuation of music and dance from Africa Jerah Johnson writes, “The real significance of the survival lies in the fact that it lasted long enough for an assimilation process, one peculiar to New Orleans, to take place.”⁵⁵ Although Louisiana had been a state in the United States since 1812, Anglo-Americans did not gain control of the state government from the French Creoles until 1845.⁵⁶ Jerah Johnson concludes that it was not until 1856, and after considerable harassment by police, that the dancing at Congo Square ceased.⁵⁷

Even if the music had been forced to stop earlier in Congo Square, it would not have simply disappeared—it was too deeply ingrained in the African cultures and their descendents. Take for example the tradition of “patting Juba,” where complex rhythms are made with the hands and feet to accompany dance when no instruments are available. Writing around 1880, Sidney Lanier mentions:

⁵² Ibid., 44.

⁵³ Ibid., 41.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 42.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 43.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 45.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 47.

I have heard a Southern plantation “hand,” in “patting Juba” for a comrade to dance by, venture upon quite complex successions of rhythm, not hesitating to syncopate, to change the rhythmic accent for a moment, or to indulge in other highly-specialized variations of the current rhythmus. Here music . . . is in its rudest form, consisting of rhythm alone: for the patting is done with hands and feet, and of course no change of pitch or of tone-color is possible.⁵⁸

Lanier’s transcription of what he heard shows that even in patting Juba, the rhythmic emphasis is on the upbeats, as is often the case in Africa. The tradition of patting Juba suggests that African music would have found a way to survive in New Orleans even if enslaved people had not been able to continue their traditions at Congo Square.

Transculturation

Like the continuation of African musics in New Orleans, the combining of various African and European traditions began from the earliest days. Early Afro-Louisianan musical culture had thirty-five years of near isolation from Africa to develop since between 1731 and 1766 only two ships arrived from Africa, one from Senegal in 1743 and one from Angola in 1758.⁵⁹ During this time, the Senegambian traditions would form the foundation of the transculturation process. At Congo Square, the great variety of African musics, dances, and traditions eventually intermixed, and furthermore, began mixing with French, Spanish, and Anglo-American practices. Dena Epstein points out that:

As the eighteenth century progressed, an increasing number of slaves learned to play Western instruments and to dance European dances, not necessarily as a substitute for their native recreations, but as a supplement to them. The descriptions of African and European music and dancing co-existing side by side give incontrovertible evidence of the process by which acculturation proceeded.⁶⁰

She later adds:

⁵⁸ Sidney Lanier, *The Science of English Verse* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1923), 186-7, 189.

⁵⁹ Sublette, *The World That Made New Orleans*, 62.

⁶⁰ Epstein, “African Music in British and French America,” 83.

African musics were transplanted to the New World with the first Africans to arrive there. These musics sustained themselves and persisted, not unchanged, but unquestionably distinctive and recognizable for over 150 years in the West Indies and for a lesser time on the mainland. Where deliberate efforts were made to convert the Africans to Christianity and to “civilize,” i. e., Europeanize, them, the African culture patterns declined or were driven underground. There is considerable evidence that they did not completely disappear . . . ⁶¹

African rhythms were transformed as percussion elements were added into melodies.

Musicians of color “camouflaged” percussive elements and created new, creolized music and dance which the elite found to be acceptable. ⁶² Sara Johnson notes that “In problematic situations of encounters between migrants of diverse languages, music and dance came before the first speech.” ⁶³ According to sociologist Angel Quintero Rivera, this led to the development of a “*música mulata*” based on shared aesthetics. ⁶⁴

The banjo and fiddle quickly became popular among enslaved people, and Michael Coolen notes similar instruments in traditional Senegambian culture. Such instruments were advantageous because they were portable, required only one player, and were quiet in comparison to other instruments, such as drums, which were banned in many places. ⁶⁵ Coolen adds that “The retention of Senegambian musical styles, however, does not rely on the retention of African musical instruments.” ⁶⁶

Change happened in New Orleans because of the relocation of peoples, the breaking up and reforming of communities of the same and different ethnic groups, and the mixing of African ethnic groups with each other and with the European peoples they

⁶¹ Ibid., 91.

⁶² Sara E. Johnson, “Cinquillo Consciousness: The Formation of a Pan-Caribbean Musical Aesthetic,” chap. 2 in *Music, Writing, and Cultural Unity in the Caribbean*. Edited by Timothy J. Reiss (Trenton: Africa World Press, Inc, 2005), 45.

⁶³ Ibid., 53.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Michael T. Coolen, “Senegambian Influences on Afro-American Culture,” *Black Music Research Journal* 11, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 13-14.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 16.

encountered. Patterns of syncretization already present in African-derived religions also facilitated the blending with Christian beliefs, which then often served to disguise African practices.⁶⁷ The Catholic Church in New Orleans was more tolerant than Protestant churches, and this, combined with the city being under French and then Spanish rule, led to greater survival of Africanisms there than anywhere else in the United States.⁶⁸

As Lawrence Levine has pointed out, culture is involved in a process, evolving as it responds to new circumstances. It is:

. . . the product of interaction between the past and present. Its toughness and resiliency are determined not by a culture's ability to withstand change, which indeed may be a sign of stagnation not life, but by its ability to react creatively and responsively to the realities of a new situation.⁶⁹

The Africans who came to New Orleans and the Europeans with whom they interacted did just that: they reacted creatively to their new realities. Ethnomusicologists J. H. Kwabena Nketia and Portia K. Maultsby agree. Africanisms in African-American music are more than characteristics and traits. They "must be viewed in terms of creative processes which allow for continuity and change."⁷⁰ Nketia elaborates on how the acculturation process happens:

limitations are necessary in music oriented towards popular audiences and which bridges the traditions of Africa and the West because of the unique experience of its practitioners . . . The range of traditional vocabulary is similarly limited. There is a tendency to use only the simpler forms of rhythm, to select and emphasize only certain syncopated patterns, to lay greater emphasis on duple rhythms which are simpler rather than the complex triple rhythms that characterize a lot of African music. Exceptions to this occur in Latin America . . . Certain alterations in the traditional African idiom also become inevitable when verbal texts in non-

⁶⁷ Klein, 181-2.

⁶⁸ Lynne Fauley Emery, *Black Dance Today: From 1619 to Today* (Hightstown, New Jersey: Princeton Book Company, 1988), 148.

⁶⁹ Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 5.

⁷⁰ Nketia in Maultsby, "Africanisms in African-American Music," 187.

African languages are used, particularly where their phonetic structures do not provide the same kind of syllabic values or orders of syllable sequences. Even though the general principle of following speech forms in music may be observed, differences in the language patterns (both in respect of rhythm and intonation and ways of making statements) result in entirely different melodic forms.⁷¹

One dance genre in particular accommodated the acculturation process, creating a legacy that endures to this day.

The *contredanse* (French) and its descendant the *contradanza* (Spanish) were favorite dances in Madrid, Paris, Cap François (Saint-Domingue), Havana, and New Orleans. By adding African-derived rhythms to the contredanse after they fled to Cuba from Saint-Domingue, black musicians in Cuba created new styles that became the *habanera* (or *tango*), the *danza*, the *danzón*, the *mambo*, and the *cha cha*.⁷² Gottschalk would become familiar with the habanera rhythm (originally from Africa) as well as the contredanse, and use both in his compositions.

As the African music and dance in Congo Square faded and evolved into new traditions, it is important to remember that it did not end entirely; it just dispersed and resurfaced in new ways. In 1880 or 1881, Lafcadio Hearn witnessed African drumming, singing, and dancing, pointing out that only the old men and women knew the styles and guessing that such traditions would soon be “completely forgotten in Louisiana.”⁷³ Hearn reported seeing African music and dance still surviving in a back yard on Dumaine Street:

A dry goods box and an old pork barrel formed the orchestra. These were beaten with sticks or bones, used like drum sticks so as to keep up a continuous rattle

⁷¹ J. H. Kwabena Nketia, “African Roots of Music in the Americas: An African View,” chap. 13 in *Ethnomusicology and African Music (Collected Papers)* (Accra, Ghana: Afram Publications (Ghana) Ltd., 2005), 329-30.

⁷² Sublette, *The World That Made New Orleans*, 104; Peter Manuel, “Introduction: Contradance and Quadrille Culture in the Caribbean,” chap. 1 in *Creolizing Contradance in the Caribbean*, ed. Peter Manuel (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 2009), 17-23.

⁷³ Hearn quoted in Jerah Johnson, 48.

while some old men and women chanted a song that appeared to me to be purely African in its many vowelled [*sic*] syllabification . . . Owing to the noise I could not even attempt to catch the words. I asked several old women to recite them to me, but they only laughed and shook their heads. In their patois they told me—‘no use, you could never understand it. C’est le Congo!’ The dance was certainly peculiar, and I observed that only a few old persons, who had probably all been slaves, knew how to dance it.⁷⁴

Though riveted with his prejudices and lack of cultural appreciation, Hearn would later remind us just how much from Africa survived in New Orleans, also acknowledging Gottschalk’s use of one Creole melody. In a letter to H. E. Krehbiel from New Orleans dated January 1885, Hearn writes:

I fear I know nothing about Creole music of Creole negroes. Yes, I have seen them dance; but they danced the Congo, and sang a purely African song to the accompaniment of a dry-goods box beaten with sticks or bones and a drum made by stretching skin over a flour barrel. That sort of accompaniment and that sort of music, you know all about: it is precisely similar to what a score of travelers have described. There are no harmonies—only a furious contretemps. As for the dance,—in which the women do not take their feet off the ground,—it is as lascivious as is possible. The men dance very differently, like savages, leaping in the air. I spoke of this spectacle in my short article in the *Century*. One must visit the Creole parishes to discover the characteristics of the real Creole music, I suspect. I would refer the *Century* to Harris’s book: he says the Southern darkies don’t use the banjo. I have never seen any play it here but Virginians or “upper country” darkies. The slave-songs you refer to are infinitely more interesting than anything Cable’s got; but still, I fancy his material could be worked over into something really pretty. Gottschalk found the theme for his *Bamboula* in Louisiana—*Quand patate est chinte*, etc., and made a miracle out of it.

Now if you want any further detailed account of the Congo dance, I can send it: but I doubt whether you need it. The Creole songs, which I have heard sung in the city, are Frenchy in construction, but possess a few African characteristics of method. The darker the singer the more marked the oddities of intonation. Unfortunately most of those I have heard were quadroons or mulattoes. One black woman sang me a Voodoo song, which I got Cable to write—but I could not sing it as she sang it, so that the music is faulty.⁷⁵

Though Hearn doubts his knowledge of black Creole music and dance, his observances demonstrate that what he experienced still had African elements. From the

⁷⁴ Kmen “The Roots of Jazz,” 6.

⁷⁵ Elizabeth Bisland, *The Life and Letters of Lafcadio Hearn* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Company, 1906), 336-7.

instrumentation and dance styles, to the use of African language and intonation, Hearn unknowingly shows an awareness of African retentions in New Orleans near the end of the nineteenth century. Henry C. Castellanos likewise offers a description of the drums signaling the dancing amongst a group of Congo dancers: “They inaugurated the universal hubbub by a signal given to the *tam-tam* beaters.” Dancers took turns dancing in the center of the circle formed by the participants and to the accompaniment of empty barrels covered with sheepskin, rattling jawbones, wooden horns, and sometimes a tambourine.⁷⁶

What all these accounts make clear is that during Gottschalk’s childhood in New Orleans, African and African-derived music and dance were thriving, so much so that their impact would extend long beyond his lifetime. Enslaved people were able to gather on their days off throughout the city and continue musical practices from Africa. These occurrences were not isolated, but rather so commonplace that visitors quickly took notice, and even residents like Hélène Allain, who had not experienced one of the gatherings first-hand, knew of them and knew what they were like from others. Also of importance is how surprising and new the gatherings of enslaved people seemed to foreigners from Europe and other parts of the United States because what was happening in New Orleans was unique in the United States. The African traditions in New Orleans permeated the city and persisted even as they evolved into new traditions like jazz.

Congo Square has had many names through the years including: Place des Negres, Place du Cirque, Place Congo, Congo Circus, La Place Publique, Circus Public

⁷⁶ Henry C. Castellanos, *New Orleans as It Was: Episodes of Louisiana Life*, with a forward by Charles L. Dufour, (New Orleans: L. Graham & Son, Ltd., 1895; Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing Company, Inc, 1990), 297-8.

Square, Congo Plains, Place d'Armes, and P. G. T. Beauregard Park.⁷⁷ Louis Armstrong Park now sits on the former site of Congo Square. Though still closed due to the damages of Hurricane Katrina and decorated with graffiti, efforts are underway to clean up and reopen the park.



Figure 5: Louis Armstrong Park still under reconstruction three years after Hurricane Katrina.



Figure 6: The locked gates to Louis Armstrong Park, rusting and decorated with graffiti three years after Hurricane Katrina.

⁷⁷ Roach, 107.

CHAPTER VI

AFRICAN MUSICS' IMPACT ON GOTTSCHALK

What Gottschalk Experienced

Some researchers immediately accept the significance of Gottschalk's exposure to African music in New Orleans as fact. For ragtime and jazz researcher Rudi Blesh, and co-author Harriet Janis the proof was in the music, both Gottschalk's compositions and his successors' ragtime and jazz. They never question Gottschalk's musical link to Africa:

The first seventy-five years of American rule after the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 produced only a fractional alteration of the New Orleans Latin character, and even then the African revels went on in Congo Square. What Louis Moreau Gottschalk heard as a boy in 1840 was still to be heard by the casual bystander of 1880.¹

Blesh and Janis were convinced by the music.

Recreations of the influence of African music and Congo Square on young Louis Moreau Gottschalk's life range from Vernon Loggins' visualization where Gottschalk marches as a child to sounds of music floating into his home from down the street, to the poetic imaginings of early Gottschalk biographer Henry Didimus.

In his biography of Gottschalk written in 1856, Didimus describes the music and dance of Congo Square in reference to Gottschalk's *Bamboula*:

In order to appreciate the full merit of this popular composition, one should have seen something of the dance upon which it is founded. Let a stranger to New Orleans visit, on an afternoon of one of its holydays, the public squares in the lower portions of the city, and he will find them filled with its African population, tricked out with every variety of a showy costume, joyous, wild, and in the full exercise of a real saturnalia. As he approaches the scene of an infinite mirth, his ear first catches a quick, low, continuous, dead sound, which dominates over the laughter, hallo, and roar of a thousand voices, while the listener marvels at what it can be doing there. . . .

¹ Rudi Blesh, and Harriet Janis, *They All Played Ragtime*, 4th ed. (New York: Oak Publications, 1971), 166.

Upon entering the square, the visitor finds the multitude packed in groups of close, narrow circles, of a central area of only a few feet; and there, in the centre of each circle, sits the musician, astride a barrel, strong-headed, which he beats with two sticks, to a strange measure incessantly, like mad, for hours together, while the perspiration literally rolls in streams and wets the ground; and there, too, labor the dancers, male and female, under an inspiration or a possession, which takes from their limbs all sense of weariness, and gives to them a rapidity and a durability of motion that will hardly be found elsewhere outside of mere machinery. The head rests upon the breast, or is thrown back upon the shoulders, the eyes closed, or glaring, while the arms, amid cries, and shouts, and sharp ejaculations, float upon the air, or keep time, with the hands patting upon the thighs, to a music which is seemingly eternal.

The feet scarce tread wider space than their own length; but rise and fall, turn in and out, touch first the heel and then the toe, rapidly and more rapidly, till they twinkle to the eye, which finds its sight too slow a follower of their movements. Ah! The *abandon* of the Bamboula; the transformations of the Bamboula; no wilder scene, no more exciting exhibition of the dominancy of sheer passion, uncultivated, savage, is to be found in the tales of travelers.²

But is Didimus writing fact or poetry? Despite Didimus' transparent prejudices, his descriptions are consistent with historical accounts from New Orleans as well as contemporary practices in Africa. It is no accident that Gottschalk chose to name one of his first compositions *Bamboula: Danse de Negres*, op. 2. His choice of title suggests that he was clearly aware of the dance, and that it was of African origin.

Gottschalk's exposure to both Creole and African music began in his home. As a child Gottschalk was primarily cared for by his maternal grandmother Bruslé and his nurse named Sally, who was enslaved to his grandmother. Gottschalk learned the cultures of Saint-Domingue and New Orleans in his home as a child listening to the stories they told. Furthermore, his mother Aimée would engender in him a love of music, opera, and dance. This combination would prove to be extraordinary.

Gottschalk's primary source of Creole melodies for his music was his childhood home. His grandmother Bruslé and his African-American nurse Sally passed along the

² Henry Didimus, *Biography of Louis Moreau Gottschalk, the American Pianist and Composer* (Philadelphia: Deacon & Peterson, 1853), 7.

melodies they knew from Saint-Domingue to Gottschalk and his siblings. The children were immersed in them from an early age and his sister Clara would later publish a collection of them for piano. In her French draft of Louis Moreau Gottschalk's *Notes of a Pianist*,³ Clara Gottschalk notes that her brother, Louis Moreau, described Sally as "la Nègresse Congo," but as Frederick Starr has pointed out, we do not know if this can be interpreted to mean that Sally was of Congolese descent or that she was born in Africa.⁴ Either scenario is possible considering the history of the Bruslé family and Saint-Domingue. Sally was only ten years old when the Bruslés brought her with them from Saint-Domingue to New Orleans.⁵

Researcher John Edward Philips has noted that "The important role blacks played in raising the children of the slave owners constitutes another possible avenue for the introduction of African culture to whites."⁶ In Gottschalk's case, this avenue was not only possible but well documented. S. Frederick Starr writes, "By far the most important musical legacy that Moreau Gottschalk received from his New Orleans childhood was Creole melodies."⁷ What he received from learning these melodies likely went far beyond just their words and tunes. It is also probable that in hearing these melodies as a child he began to hear and internalize African musical structure. Lafcadio Hearn, writing a letter to H. E. Krehbiel from New Orleans in January of 1885, noted that: "The Creole slaves sang usually with the clapping of hands."⁸ Are we to assume that Gottschalk's nurse Sally was any different? It would have been a rarity had she not clapped while

³ This manuscript is housed today at the New York Public Library.

⁴ S. Frederick Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 30.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ John Edward Philips, "The African Heritage of White America," in *Africanisms in American Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 235.

⁷ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 39.

⁸ Elizabeth Bisland, *The Life and Letters of Lafcadio Hearn* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Company, 1906), 338.

singing, as handclapping is a fundamental part of learning vocal music in Africa, and continues to be a central element of many African-American music traditions today (for example, the music of gospel choirs). Should we expect that she would have clapped on the beats, as a European might, or would she have clapped the upbeat or a familiar syncopated pattern? The latter seems probable, and had she done so, Gottschalk would have become accustomed from his earliest days to hearing two juxtaposed musical lines, one melodic and one strictly rhythmic.

Nowhere is the closeness Gottschalk felt towards both the French and African cultural aspects of his childhood more apparent than in his travel diaries. Sailing from Cuba to Haiti (Saint-Domingue) for the first time, as he caught his first glimpse of land, Gottschalk's mind drifted to memories of hearing of his family's history while still a child:

My recollections, drawn toward them by a mysterious affinity, rose one by one in a striking and lucid manner from the long-forgotten past. I again found myself before the large fireplace of our dwelling on the Rue des Remparts at New Orleans, where squatting on the matting in the evening, the Negroes, myself, and the children of the house formed a circle around my grandmother. We would listen, by the trembling fire on the hearth, under the coals of which Sally, the old Negress, baked her sweet potatoes to the recital of this terrible Negro insurrection. She was the same old Sally who, while listening all the time, spoke in a low voice to a portrait of Napoleon hung above the fireplace, which she obstinately believed was bewitched because it seemed to look at her in every corner of the room, wherever she might be. I was without any doubt Sally's favorite, to judge by the stories with which she filled my head. I was not tired of listening for the hundredth time to the marvelous adventures of Compé Bouqui (the clown of the Negroes) and the knavery of Compé Lapin, whose type represents the Punchinello [*sic*] of Europe. We listened to Sally so well that we knew all of her stories by heart—with an interest that has lasted till today and still makes me find an inexpressible charm in all these naïve legends of our old Negroes. I should like to relate, in their picturesque language and their exquisite originality, some of those Creole ballads whose simple and touching melody goes right to the heart and makes you dream of unknown worlds.⁹

⁹ Louis Moreau Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist*, ed. Jeanne Behrend, with a forward by Frederick Starr (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 10-11.

While Gottschalk scholars agree that young Louis Moreau learned Creole melodies in his home, their sole focus on melody has caused them to overlook the significance of the rhythms of Congo Square on the young musician and composer.

With regard to Gottschalk's knowledge of Creole melodies, Starr points out that "No other musician seems to have had a more thorough knowledge of these songs, and none was more deeply influenced by them."¹⁰ Starr's conclusion reflects the significance these songs held for the family, as well as the intimacy with which they were handed down, as indicated in Gottschalk's travel journals.

How great Gottschalk's memory was is also well documented. John Doyle has identified both French and black Creole melodies in Gottschalk's early piano works.¹¹ If his ability to absorb these melodies is any indication, we can certainly assume he was retaining considerable amounts of what he heard. His younger sister Clara likewise remembered a number of the same melodies well enough to set them to piano accompaniment.¹²

Gottschalk scholars have already focused on the proximity of the earliest known Gottschalk family residence to Congo Square. The Gottschalks lived at 88 Rampart Street, between Canal Street and Toulouse Street, but only from April 1831 to March 1833. Congo Square was less than half a mile to the north on the opposite side of the street. Additionally, in 1832 the family spent time in Pass Christian avoiding the cholera epidemic. S. Frederick Starr claims that young Gottschalk was only in close proximity to

¹⁰ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 43.

¹¹ John Doyle, "The Piano Music of Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829-1869)," (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1960).

¹² Clara Gottschalk Peterson, *Creole Songs From New Orleans* (New Orleans, 1902).

the Square for six to eight months between the ages of two and four.¹³ While Starr is quick to point out that song melodies would not have carried this far, he neglects to mention that drummed rhythms would easily have been audible from this distance.¹⁴ Also overlooked is the likelihood that these drummed rhythms would have been audible from Gottschalk's two other childhood residences in New Orleans as well.

After returning from Pass Christian, Gottschalk lived from 1833 to 1834 at the corner of Royale Street and Esplanade Avenue, still within half a mile of Congo Square.



Figure 7: The Gottschalk's home at the corner of Royale Street and Esplanade Avenue, October, 2008.

Then from 1834 until he left for Paris in 1841, he lived at 518 Conti Street, again approximately half a mile away from Congo Square.

¹³ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 40.

¹⁴ Ibid.



Figure 8: The Gottschalk's home at 518 Conti Street, where Louis Moreau lived from 1834 to 1841. The Historic New Orleans Collection.

While it has been suggested that Gottschalk could have heard music coming from Congo Square only at his first home on Rampart Street, this is simply not true. African and African-derived musics continued at Congo Square beyond the time when Gottschalk left for Paris; without modern electrical noises and traffic, the drumming would have been audible in all three of his childhood homes in New Orleans, each being approximately half a mile from Congo Square. Today in the rainforests of Africa it is not uncommon to hear drumming from several miles away.

In 1786, in response to a noise complaint by local Auxiliary Bishop Cyrillo Sieni (also known as Cyril of Barcelona), then Spanish Governor of the Louisiana Territory,

Estavan (Estaban) Rodriguez Miró, in his *Edict of Good Government*, ordered that “*los tangos, o bailes de negros*” [the tangos, or black’s dances] begin after vespers.¹⁵ Bishop Cyrillo’s complaint was specifically against “the wicked custom of the negros, who, at the hour of Vespers assemble in a green expanse called *Place Congo* to dance the bamboula and perform hideous gyrations.”¹⁶ Bishop Cyrillo’s church, the St. Louis Cathedral, is five blocks from Congo Square, yet the drumming was loud enough at this distance to be a disturbance to his church services. Gottschalk’s childhood home from 1834 to 1841 was just six blocks down and three blocks over from Congo Square, not much further from the Square than the Cathedral. We do not know if Gottschalk visited Congo Square as a child, but he certainly would have heard the African drumming there from his childhood residences. It is also important to note that the Bishop’s complaint, in combination with Governor Miro’s edict, refers to the bamboula as one of the tangos, or African-derived dances. As noted above, Gottschalk was well aware of the bamboula and its origins. Furthermore, it is significant that the first written record of the word *tango* is from June 2, 1786, in New Orleans (in Governor Miró’s *Edict of Good Government*).¹⁷

New Orleans boasted many talented African-American musicians during the time of Gottschalk’s childhood. One early musical influence on Gottschalk was free African-American pianist, Lucien Lambert (c. 1828-1896) who also studied piano in Paris. Lambert knew Gottschalk as a young boy when they shared a friendly rivalry. They

¹⁵ Ned Sublette, *The World That Made New Orleans: From Spanish Silver to Congo Square* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2008), 122.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 120.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 123.

would meet again years later in Brazil where Lambert assisted in some of Gottschalk's concerts.¹⁸

Gottschalk found himself in the company of both French and African New Orleanians when he first arrived in Paris as well. The wife of Charles Hallé, Gottschalk's first piano teacher in Paris, was from New Orleans. All of the servants in their apartment were formerly enslaved people who were also from New Orleans.¹⁹ As a child Gottschalk was clearly familiar with and comfortable around people of both French and African cultures and traditions.

The same refugees from Saint-Domingue who settled in New Orleans also settled in the mountainous regions of eastern Cuba; these included the *Sociedades de Tumba Francesa* (French Tumba Societies).²⁰ Culturally, they were Bantu in origin, and their instruments still have Bantu names today.²¹ As Olavo Alén Rodríguez points out, "The historical development of the music of the *Sociedades de Tumba Francesa* in Cuba reveals that this music was not brought over from Africa, but generated within the Cuban context."²² In Saint-Domingue, its practitioners retained a mixture of African elements while incorporating elements of the French elite, later adding new material of their own.²³ These musicians are the same ones who reminded Gottschalk of "home" and whom he went to great lengths to search out and bring to Havana to include in his performance of his first symphony, *La Nuit des Tropiques*. Today in Cuba, the folkloric

¹⁸ Ibid., 36.

¹⁹ Ibid., 50.

²⁰ Olavo Alén Rodríguez, "The Afro-French Settlement and the Legacy of Its Music to the Cuban People," in *Music and Black Ethnicity: The Caribbean and South America*, ed. Gerard Béhague (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1994), 111.

²¹ Ibid., 115.

²² Ibid., 117.

²³ Ibid.; Peter Manuel, "Cuba: From Contradanza to Danzón," chap. 2 in *Creolizing Contradance in the Caribbean*, ed. Peter Manuel (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 2009), 100-101.

group *Tumba Francesa* continues the musical traditions brought to Cuba from Saint-Domingue following the revolution. Their music is saturated with the habanera (tango) rhythm. While some Cubans credit the exiles from Saint-Domingue with introducing the rhythm to the Cuban contradanza, the rhythm may have already been in Cuba.²⁴

Gottschalk's music shows us that it was also in New Orleans.

Gottschalk could relate to Caribbean and South American cultures because of their shared European and African roots, and their hybrid music and shared love of opera. He also displayed an understanding of the humanity of Africans. Contemplating the successful slave rebellion in Haiti, Gottschalk wrote in his travel journal:

Can anyone, however, be astonished at the retaliation exercised by the Negroes on their old master? What cause, moreover, more legitimate than that of this people, rising in their agony in one grand effort to reconquer their unacknowledged rights and their rank in humanity?²⁵

When the Civil War broke out in the United States, Gottschalk would side with the North despite his love of New Orleans.

As a child, Gottschalk was surrounded by African music and cultures. The strong presence of both African and European musics in his home was mirrored by the surrounding city. The African tendencies Gottschalk would come to embody were those of New Orleans. Despite the number of African refugees from Saint-Domingue and their presence in his childhood homes, what Gottschalk and his music embody and reflect is the hybridized African Creole culture of New Orleans.

²⁴ Sublette, *The World That Made New Orleans*, 123-4.

²⁵ Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist*, 12.

CHAPTER VII

EVIDENCE OF AFRICAN MUSICAL PARALLELS IN GOTTSCHALK'S WORKS

In total, Gottschalk's known compositions number nearly three hundred, not counting multiple versions of the same work or countless improvised pieces which, if written down, did not survive. Robert Offergeld lists 298 works in his *The Centennial Catalogue of the Published and Unpublished Compositions of Louis Moreau Gottschalk*.¹ The vast majority of these pieces are works for solo piano, of which Vera Brodsky Lawrence has assembled 112 in five volumes of *The Piano Works of Louis Moreau Gottschalk*.² Gottschalk also wrote several works for multiple pianos including *El Sitio de Zaragoza* for ten pianos, only part of which survives today. In addition, Gottschalk composed several songs for piano and voice, a number of operatic fantasies, two symphonies, and several other works for large ensembles including orchestras and military bands. His orchestral compositions were all composed in the Caribbean and South America and include *La Nuit des tropiques* (his first symphony), *A Montevideo* (his second symphony), *Escenas campestres*, *Marcha triunfal y final de opera*, *Grande Tarantelle*, *Marche solennelle*, and *Variations de concert sur l'hymne portugais*. Gottschalk also tried his hand at operas, which he planned to write more of in the future had he lived to return to Europe after his time in Rio de Janeiro.

In the 2001 *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Irving Lowens and S. Frederick Starr divide Gottschalk's works chronologically into six periods:

1. 1844-51 in Paris

¹ Robert Offergeld, *The Centennial Catalogue of the Published and Unpublished Compositions of Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (New York: Stereo Review, 1970).

² Vera Brodsky Lawrence, ed., *The Piano Works of Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 5 volumes, with a biographical essay by Robert Offergeld (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969).

2. 1851-2 in Switzerland and Spain
3. 1853-6 in the USA
4. 1857-61 in the Antilles
5. 1862-5 again in the USA
6. 1865-9 in South America³

Starr has also grouped Gottschalk's compositions into five categories by type and style:

1. Classical pieces such as etudes, gallops, waltzes, and operatic transcriptions
2. The Louisiana pieces and Caribbean works with similar characteristics
3. Spanish and Latin American flavored works
4. Patriotic works of the United States
5. Sentimental works⁴

Critical to this dissertation are Gottschalk's earliest compositions written in Europe, pieces written at a time when the composer's only exposure to African-derived musics had been during his childhood in New Orleans. Of particular interest are his four early musical "genre paintings" where he reminisces of home. These works, referred to as the "Louisiana Quartet" by S. Frederick Starr, are *Bamboula*, op. 2, written in 1844 or 1845;⁵ *La Savane*, op. 3, written in 1845 or 1846;⁶ *Le Bananier*, op. 5, written in 1845 or 1846;⁷ and *Le Mancenillier*, op. 11, written in 1848 or 1849.⁸ Gottschalk began the first three of these compositions when he was suffering from typhoid fever and homesickness.⁹ According to his sister Clara,

The composition of 'Bamboula' was written under the following circumstances. After his mother's arrival, Moreau was stricken down with typhoid fever. During the delirium which accompanies this fever he was seen to wave his hands, which those around him supposed to be symptoms of the delirium; but during his convalescence, which was very slow, he one day got up and wrote out

³ Irving Lowens, and S. Frederick Starr, "Gottschalk, Louis Moreau," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed. vol. 10, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 2001).

⁴ S. Frederick Starr, "Louis Moreau Gottschalk: Almost Forgotten Celebrity," *The Instrumentalist* 53 no. 56 (September 1998): 66, 68, 70.

⁵ Offergeld, *Centennial Catalogue*, 15.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁹ William Arms Fisher, "Louis Moreau Gottschalk: The First American Pianist and Composer," *The Musician* 13, no. 10 (October 1908): 437.

‘Bamboula,’ which he said had been running in his brain during his illness. It is composed upon four bars of a negro [*sic*] melody, well known in Louisiana, and is considered one of the most remarkable, as it is one of the most difficult of execution, of all his compositions.¹⁰

The four early works of the Louisiana Quartet are significant because they show Gottschalk was exhibiting African influence prior to encountering African-derived musics in the Caribbean and South America.

The Louisiana Quartet

Gottschalk’s title and subtitle for *Bamboula, danse de nègres*, op. 2, leaves no doubt as to what he was trying to capture in this “genre painting.” The bamboula was a well-known African dance in New Orleans at the time of Gottschalk’s childhood. Though no exact date is given for his entries, New Orleans attorney and judge Henry C. Catellanos wrote of nineteenth-century New Orleans as he had known it for seventy years. While describing Congo dances he saw in the early nineteenth century, he specifically mentions bamboula as one of the dances.¹¹ According to Karl Laman’s French-Kikongo dictionary, *bamboula* means “to remember,” and *bula* means “town or village” as well as “to strike,”¹² and, according to Kikongo-speaking musician Ricardo Lemvo, *bamboula* means “to remind.”¹³ Drumming bamboula in New Orleans was a way for enslaved people and formerly enslaved people to remember their homeland in

¹⁰ Clara Gottschalk Peterson, “Biographical Sketch,” in *Notes of a Pianist* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1881), 36.

¹¹ Henry C. Castellanos, *New Orleans as It Was: Episodes of Louisiana Life*, with a forward by Charles L. Dufour, (New Orleans: L. Graham & Son, Ltd., 1895; Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing Company, Inc, 1990), 296-7.

¹² Karl E. Laman, *Dictionnaire kikongo-français avec une étude phonétique décrivant les dialectes les plus importants de la langue dite kikongo*, 2 vols. (Brussels: n.p., 1936; reprint, Ridgewood, New Jersey: Gregg Press, 1964). In Laman’s dictionary, bamboula is spelled “bambula,” as it is spelled in Kikongo.

¹³ Ned Sublette, *The World That Made New Orleans: From Spanish Silver to Congo Square* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill books, 2008), 180-1.

Africa. Gottschalk's choice of title suggests he knew of their drumming. As we will see in this chapter, he incorporated African-derived elements into his work of the same name.

The Spanish may also have played a role in the continuation of the bamboula in New Orleans. In 1722, French monk Jean-Baptiste Labat described a popular Spanish dance, the *calenda*. Translated, it reads:

The Spaniards took it from the Negroes, and dance it everywhere in the Americas after the true Negro fashion. Two drums of different sizes, both open at one end and covered with sheepskin or scraped goatskin at the other, serve as accompaniment. The larger drum, two to four feet long and 15 to 16 inches in diameter is called *baboula*. Inserted between his legs or placed on the ground before the seated player, the drums are struck with four flat fingers of each hand. The larger drum keeps a steady dance beat, but the smaller runs along much faster, in unsynchronized beats.¹⁴

It is impossible to know just how similar the Spanish calenda sounded to the African bamboula; however, as we will see, the structure of much of Gottschalk's work of the same name is consistent with what Labat described—a steady beat in the bass beneath a more rhythmically dense and syncopated upper voice.

Musicologist Gilbert Chase has noted that Gottschalk used two well-known Creole melodies in *Bamboula: Musieu banjo* and *Quand patate la cuite*.¹⁵ According to Chase, another Creole song states that “black and white both danced the bamboula.”¹⁶ Did Gottschalk ever dance the bamboula as a child? We will never know, but, a careful look at his composition of the same name will show that he included more than just African-derived melodies from what he experienced in his childhood in the work. These similarities suggest he at least heard the bamboula or similar drummed dances.

¹⁴ Robert Murrell Stevenson, “The Afro-American Musical Legacy to 1800,” in *American Music: A Diversity Experience* (first published in *Musical Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (1968): 475-502; Los Angeles: Copymat, 1989), 488-9.

¹⁵ Gilbert Chase, *America's Music: From the Pilgrims to the Present*, rev. 3rd ed. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 290.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 290.

Like the title *Bamboula*, the subtitle of Gottschalk's next composition, *La Savane, ballade créole*, op. 3, immediately shows young Gottschalk making a direct link to the Creole music of his home in New Orleans. *La Savane* contains a melody linked to the West Indian song *Le Belle Lolotte*,¹⁷ similar to *Skip to My Lou*, only in minor.¹⁸ Though more lyrical than *Bamboula*, *La Savane* still contains complex rhythmic layers.

In his next work with African-derived associations, *Le Bananier, chanson nègre*, op. 5, Gottschalk's subtitle again makes it clear that he intends to invoke the sounds of African-derived music. In the program from Gottschalk's premier concert in New York City on February 11, 1853, *Le Bananier* is listed as *The Bananier, Negro Dance*.¹⁹ Again Gottschalk includes a familiar Creole melody, *En avan' Grenadie*.²⁰ As in *Bamboula*, Gottschalk relies heavily on rhythmical structures that parallel those of West and Central Africa.

The fourth work in the Louisiana Quartet is *Le Mancenillier, sérénade*, op. 11, which Gottschalk originally subtitled *Marche nègre*.²¹ Once more, Gottschalk linked this composition directly to his memory of African-derived musics of his childhood. *Le Mancenillier* is based on a poem by French romantic Charles-Hubert Millevoye (1782-1816).²² The title references a tropical tree with highly poisonous, apple-like fruit. In his work, Gottschalk quotes three folk songs, as uncovered by John G. Doyle: *Chanson de Lizette*, an eight-bar melody from Saint-Domingue; *Ou som souroucou*, ("What's the

¹⁷ S. Frederick Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 39.

¹⁸ Richard Crawford, *America's Musical Life: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2001), 334.

¹⁹ Jeanne Behrend, Prelude to *Notes of a Pianist*, by Louis Moreau Gottschalk, ed. Jeanne Behrend (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), xxxvi.

²⁰ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 39.

²¹ Clyde W. Brockett, "Gottschalk in Madrid: A Tale of Ten Pianos," *The Musical Quarterly* 75, no.3 (autumn 1991): 291.

²² Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 58.

matter that you drink so much water?") an African-derived Creole melody documented later in New Orleans; and *Ma mourri* from Louisiana or *Tant sirop est doux*, a related tune from Martinique.²³ In *Le Mancenillier*, the first theme may be from Saint-Domingue, and the second is similar to *Ou som souroucou* from *Banqui et Lapin*, an African-American version of Br'er Rabbit.²⁴ In *Le Mancenillier* we will also see uses of rhythm and structure that suggest African-derived musical influence.

Gottschalk borrowed a number of Creole melodies, both black and white, from his childhood when composing *Bamboula*, *La Savane*, *Le Bananier*, and *Le Mancenillier*. His sister, Clara Gottschalk Peterson, readily admitted that many of the melodies he chose to incorporate were from people of color including *En avan' Grenadie* (the theme for *Le Bananier*), *Quan' patate la cuite* (the main theme of *Bamboula*), and *Po'pitie mamzé ziti* (in *La Savane*²⁵).²⁶

Gottschalk, however, would draw more from New Orleans' African-derived culture than just these tunes. While examining the Creole melodies in *Bamboula*, researcher John Doyle was quick to realize this:

The melody of *Bamboula* ("Quan' patate la cuite") may be of Caribbean origin, and was probably brought to New Orleans with the influx of refugees from the slave rebellions in the West Indies. The composition is a vivid evocation of the dancing of the slaves in the Place Congo. In these dances, drums made from hollow logs, open at one end and covered with skin at the other, were the principal accompanying instruments. The drummers straddled them, using hands, feet, and fingers. Smaller drums, made of bamboo and called bamboula, were also used; hence Gottschalk's title. *Bamboula* is a remarkably mature piece, and shows the young composer at his near best. He seldom surpasses the brilliance and spontaneity of this work. One is immediately aware of Gottschalk the

²³ Ibid., 75-6.

²⁴ John Doyle, "Gottschalk: Nationalist Composer, Native Virtuoso," *Music Educators Journal* 56, no. 4 (December 1969): 27.

²⁵ Clara actually claims her brother used this melody in *Le Mancenillier*; however, comparing it to Gottschalk's works makes it clear that he used it in *La Savane*, not *Le Mancenillier*, and that his sister may have accidentally mixed up the two works.

²⁶ Clara Gottschalk Peterson, *Creole Songs from New Orleans* (New Orleans, 1902).

complete pianist: his mannerisms, his exploitation of all seven octaves, his penchant for extreme registers of the keyboard, his skillful use of the pedal, are all in evidence. But it was not the melody alone that accounted for *Bamboula*'s success. Its Caribbean rhythm made it irresistible.²⁷

Gottschalk used more than the title of *Bamboula* to suggest the African drumming and dancing after which he named the piece. Doyle recognizes the imagery Gottschalk is evoking with his choice of title, as well as the African-derived "Caribbean" rhythms that drive the piece. What Doyle does not point out, and what will become apparent upon examining Gottschalk's music, is that Gottschalk's use of rhythm and repetition, his use of voicing and all registers of the keyboard, the structure of his music, the spontaneous improvisatory character of his compositions, and many of the things that make Gottschalk sound like Gottschalk, parallel shared West- and Central-African musical practices. These central characteristics of Gottschalk's music were already well established in his four early works of the Louisiana Quartet.

Musical Processes and Practices

Rhythm and Repetition

Gottschalk's Creole- and Caribbean-themed compositions are saturated with parallels to the components and practices of many West- and Central-African musics, especially in the way they use rhythm. Likewise, any discussion of the elements of sub-Saharan African music must begin with rhythm. African scholar A. M. Jones states "Rhythm is to the African what harmony is to the Europeans, and it is in the complex interweaving of contrasting rhythmic patterns that he finds his greatest aesthetic

²⁷ Doyle, "Gottschalk: Nationalist Composer, Native Virtuoso," 25, 27.

satisfaction.”²⁸ The all-enveloping emphasis on rhythm in sub-Saharan African music is strengthened further by the prevalence of drums in many African societies.

The dominance of rhythm in African music has sometimes led to the fallacy that African music is primarily drumming. In actuality, sub-Saharan African music consists of rhythmic processes and practices that can and do apply to a variety of instrumentations including vocal song. Alan P. Merriam realized this early on:

Surely one of the characteristics of African music lies in its complicated fusions of various rhythms, and surely these rhythms are expressed percussively, but to see them in terms of drums alone is but to scratch the surface of a complex musical expression. For song itself, sung by voices, or instrumental songs, played perhaps on a harp, is expressed percussively and rhythmically as well; and there are, further, large areas of music and even great geographic extents in Africa in which drums play a minor part indeed. Taking all Africa as a subject for generalization, it is probably far more accurate to cite handclapping as the major percussive instrument, with striking sticks or other idiophones a close second, and drums third. There is no attempt here to minimize the importance of drums in much African music; rather, it is to point out that such a preoccupation is by no means exclusive, and that the percussive and rhythmic characteristics of African music are displayed throughout the entire musical system in terms of vocal expression, melodic shapes, intonation patterns, instrumental techniques and other means, as well as through drums and drumming.²⁹

The emphasis on rhythm applies to non-percussive instruments as well as percussion. As John Miller Chernoff has pointed out, “a Shona mbira player or a Malinke kora player orients himself to rhythms in much the same way as an Ewe or Akan drummer.”³⁰

In West and Central Africa and the African Diaspora, rhythm permeates vocal song as well as instrumental music. Ward noted that “Almost all African music is intended to be accompanied by some percussion, if only by hand-clap; and usually there

²⁸ A. M. Jones, “African Rhythm,” *Africa* 24, no. 1 (January 1954): 26.

²⁹ Alan P. Merriam, *African Music in Perspective*, (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1982), 63-4.

³⁰ John Miller Chernoff, “The Artistic Challenge of African Music: Thoughts on the Absence of Drum Orchestras in Black American Music,” *Black Music Research Journal* 5 (1985): 8.

are at least two percussion parts giving with the melody three possible rhythms.”³¹

Likewise, when traditional songs from West Africa and the African Diaspora are taught, teachers typically insist that students do not know a song until they can sing it in correct relationship to its rhythmic counterpart. Vocal music is therefore usually taught to cultural outsiders with a clapped or tapped rhythm. Mungo Park, who explored the Niger River area of Africa (present day Guinea, Mali, Niger, Benin, and Nigeria) from 1795 to 1797, noted that clapped rhythms were essential for vocal song. He gives names and descriptions of musical instruments similar to those still found in the same region of Africa today, establishing that what he was experiencing is related to contemporary practices. He writes:

Of their music and dances, some account has accidentally been given in different parts of my Journal. On the first of these heads, I have now to add a list of their musical instruments, the principal of which are—the *koonting*, a sort of guitar with three strings; the *korro*, a large harp, with eighteen strings; the *simbing*, a small harp, with seven strings; the *balafou*, an instrument composed of twenty pieces of hard wood of different lengths, with the shells of gourds hung underneath to increase the sound; the *tangtang*, a drum, open at the lower end; and lastly, the *tabala*, a large drum, commonly used to spread an alarm through the country. Besides these they make use of small flutes, bowstrings, elephants’ teeth, and bells; and, at all their dances and concerts, *clapping of hands* appear to constitute a necessary part of the chorus.³² (Park’s italics)

It is rare for African vocal music not to have a corresponding interlocking rhythmic pattern (what a Westerner might perceive as accompaniment), even if this pattern is not always sounded and may only be felt internally by the performer. Chernoff recognizes this as well, noting “We begin to ‘understand’ African music by being able to maintain, in our minds or our bodies, an *additional* rhythm to the ones we hear

³¹ W. E. Ward, “Music in the Gold Coast,” *The Gold Coast Review* 3, no. 2 (July-December, 1927): 216.

³² Mungo Park, *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1816), 278.

[Chernoff's italics].”³³ He adds, “In short, musicians must keep their time steady by perceiving rhythmic relationships rather than by following a stressed beat.”³⁴

The dominating position of rhythm would continue wherever African musical traditions evolved in the New World. In “The Camouflaged Drum,” Angel G. Quintero-Rivera describes the significance of the rhythm and the drum in the New World:

One of the most vivid cultural expressions of plantation society was its music, characterized by the importance given to rhythm, to the simultaneous combination of rhythms (or polyrhythm), and to some particular types of rhythms which the European musical tradition denominates *syncopated*. This character was reinforced with the protagonistic role of percussion instruments, mainly drums. Plantation music became so identified with drums that in many different places of the Americas—as distant as Paraguay, Ecuador, Santo Domingo, and Puerto Rico—it was called “bomba” (or words with similar sounds) after an African word for drum.³⁵ (Quintero-Rivera's italics)

Rhythm would continue to be prevalent in the African and African-derived musics of New Orleans, the Caribbean, Central and South America, and subsequently, Gottschalk's compositions.

Perhaps the assumption that African music is primarily drumming is one of the reasons that the influence African rhythms had on Gottschalk has been underestimated and in some ways overlooked entirely. Without a thorough understanding of how rhythm in Africa works, it is easy to see how African rhythmical structure in one of Gottschalk's piano works could go unnoticed, especially when the resulting sound of the piece is so entirely different from an African percussion ensemble. For Gottschalk, rhythm was something he absorbed by living where he did in his childhood. Scholar Rudyard

Alcocer, who specializes in Caribbean and Afro-Hispanic literature, sums this up when

³³ John Miller Chernoff, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility: Aesthetics and Social Action in African Musical Idioms* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 49.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

³⁵ Angel G. Quintero-Rivera, “The Camouflaged Drum: Melodization of Rhythms and Maroonage Ethnicity in Caribbean Peasant Music,” in *Music and Black Ethnicity: The Caribbean and South America*, ed. Gerard Béhague (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1994), 48.

describing how rhythm permeates the Caribbean as well. He believes rhythm in the Caribbean is a way of experiencing life that precedes music and dance. He writes:

. . . rhythm, in the codes of the Caribbean precedes music, including percussion itself. It is something that was *already there*, amid the noise; something very ancient and dark to which the drummer's hand and the drumhead connect on a given moment; a kind of scapegoat, offered in sacrifice, which can be glimpsed in the air when one lets himself be carried away by a battery of *batá* drums (secret drums to whose beats the *orishas*, the living and the dead, all dance). It would, however, be a mistake to think that the Caribbean rhythm connects only to percussion. The Caribbean rhythm is in fact a metarhythm which can be arrived at through any system of signs, whether it be dance, music, language, text, or body language, etc.³⁶ (Alcocer's italics)

Gottschalk's early compositions suggest that he first absorbed such African-derived rhythmic codes in New Orleans.

Gottschalk insisted that his works be played with rhythmic exactness. He had a specific sound in mind when he composed, and he wanted the relationships among the rhythmic layers preserved. In his later works he became especially insistent about this point. Publications of *O ma charmante*, *épargnez-moi*, op. 44 and *Suis-moi!*, op. 45, include the following "Note by the Author:"

I must suggest this little piece should be played exactly as it is written, as the license occasionally indulged in by pupils, of substituting their own thoughts for those of the composer, must inevitably interfere with the general effect. The characteristics of mingled sadness and restless passion which distinguish the piece would be utterly lost were not the accuracy of each changing rhythm fully sustained. The melody should stand out in bold relief from the agitated but symmetrical background of the bass with the singing sonorousness and passionate languor which are the peculiar traits of Creole music. To give entire scope to the "Ad Libitum" and "Tempo Rubato" and at the same time not to transcend the extreme limits of the time, is the principal difficulty as well as the great charm of the music of the Antilles, from which I have borrowed the outline of this Composition, the Theme and Arrangement being exclusively my own. I intend hereafter, as a prelude to my pieces, to make a few observations on the proper method of playing them, hoping that those who like my music, may accept the

³⁶ Rudyard Alcocer, "The Ties that Bind? Rhythm, Writing, and the Question of Heredity in the Caribbean," Chap. 5 in *Music, Writing, and Cultural Unity in the Caribbean*, ed. Timothy J. Reiss (Trenton: Africa World Press, Inc, 2005), 92.

fervent desire to facilitate its execution, as an acknowledgement of their kindly appreciation.³⁷

In addition, the publisher adds:

The author of this morceau (which is entirely original) has endeavored to convey an idea of the singular rhythm and charming character, of the music which exists among the Creoles of the Spanish Antilles. Chopin it is well known transferred the national traits of Poland, to his Mazurkas and Polonaises, and Mr. Gottschalk has endeavored to reproduce in works of an appropriate character, the characteristic traits of the Dances of the West Indias [*sic*].³⁸

Gottschalk's insistence here on rhythmic exactness was nothing new. He was already keenly aware of rhythm in his earliest works, especially in those of the Louisiana Quartet. Friend of Gottschalk and fellow pianist and composer William Mason also commented on the importance of rhythm in Gottschalk's early works:

They were well defined rhythmically, and he played them with absolute rhythmic accuracy. This clear definition in his interpretation contributed more than anything else to the fascination which he always exerted over his audience.³⁹

Rhythm was central to Gottschalk's compositional style and the structure of his African-influenced pieces.

Gottschalk's use of repetitive rhythmic patterns is already clearly apparent in his Louisiana Quartet. *Bamboula, Danse des nègres*, op. 2, in particular, makes use of repeating motives. From the beginning the work is built on overlapping and layered rhythmic units. The main rhythmic structure is established in the fifth measure. Gottschalk juxtaposes three rhythmic ideas: the octave on the downbeat in the bass followed by straight eighth notes, the asymmetrical habanera rhythm in the treble beginning with a dotted-eighth and sixteenth note, and the sixteenth notes that fill in the

³⁷ Louis Moreau Gottschalk, *Piano Music of Louis Moreau Gottschalk: 26 Complete Pieces from Original Editions*, ed. Richard Jackson, (New York: Dover Publications, 1973), 146, 188.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 147, 181.

³⁹ William Mason, *Memories of a Musical Life* (Original ed., The Century Co., 1901; New York: AMS Press, 1970), 206.

space left by the dotted-eighth and sixteenth note. While Gottschalk could have extracted the habanera rhythm from *Quan' patate la cuite*, the black Creole melody he used in this work, his treatment of the habanera rhythm suggests he knew how it was used in African percussion ensembles.

Figure 9: *Bamboula*, mm. 1-15.

Two of Gottschalk's initial rhythmic patterns, the habanera rhythm, and the octaves in the bass line (that fall primarily on the downbeat) followed by eighth notes, reoccur in more developmental sections of the piece as reminders of the initial pulse as in Figure 10.



Figure 10: *Bamboula*, mm. 134-146.

Although Gottschalk did not repeat the habanera rhythm continuously throughout *Bamboula*, he nevertheless used it and the octaves in the bass line to link his later variations to the rhythmic motion he established in the opening measures of the piece.

Also adding to the repetitive sound of the habanera rhythm in *Bamboula*, is Gottschalk's reiteration of it throughout the piece using the same narrow range of pitches (A-flat to E-flat to G-flat to F). The habanera rhythm is also registrally fixed in the opening section (Figure 9), and within multiple subsequent passages (such as in Figure 10 where it recurs an octave higher). Likewise, if this rhythm were played on a single African drum using various open and muted tones, the pitches of the drum strokes would be identical and relatively close in range.

In *Le Bananier*, Gottschalk introduces a rhythmic pattern in the bass line that he develops later in the piece, just as he did in *Bamboula*. Again, Gottschalk emphasized rhythm by not changing pitches.



Figure 11: *Le Bananier*, mm. 1-3.

Gottschalk treated the bass line in a similar manner in *Le Mancenillier* and *La Savane*, as well. In *Le Mancenillier*, Gottschalk waits until the final beat of measure 21, the beginning of a passage marked *très rythmé*, to introduce the rhythmic pattern that will underlie and drive much of the work.

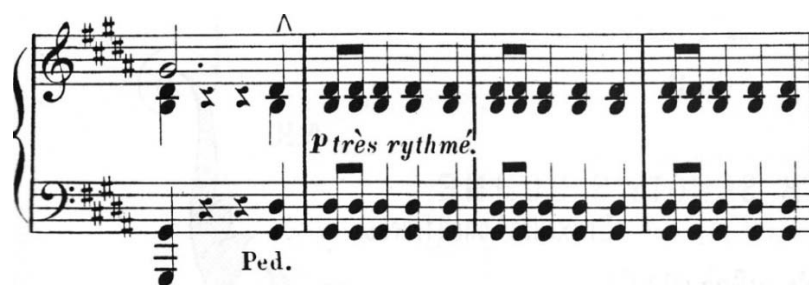


Figure 12: *Le Mancenillier*, mm. 21-24.

In *La Savane*, the repeating bass line is simpler and subtler. It is most dense in its first variation, entering in measure 21 following the introduction.



Figure 13: *La Savane*, mm. 21-22.

In subsequent sections of the piece, the bass line becomes more rhythmically sparse as the complexity and density of the upper voices increase. Furthermore, Gottschalk frequently repeats melodic themes in a somewhat strophic way, with new ornamentation and stylistic changes each time, over bass lines that retain similar rhythmic structure with each repetition.

Adding to the repetitive sound of some of Gottschalk's African-influenced works is his tendency not to change tonal centers when introducing new sections of a piece. *Le Bananier* is composed entirely in c minor. *La Savane* is likewise in e-flat minor throughout. In *Le Mancenillier* Gottschalk alternates modes between g-sharp minor and its parallel A-flat major. *Bamboula* is the only piece in the *Louisiana Quartet* where Gottschalk briefly explores changes in the tonal center. Gottschalk begins the work in D-flat major, and modulates from the tonic to the subdominant F-sharp major (G-flat major written enharmonically perhaps to make the change more obvious) for three 19-20 measure passages of the work's 356 measures (beginning in measures 65, 116, and 317 respectively).

Gottschalk's reluctance to modulate continues in some of his later African-influenced works. Both versions of *The Banjo* remain in the same key: op. 25 in F-sharp major, and op. 82 in G-flat major. Likewise, Gottschalk's contradanzas *La Gallina* and *Ojos Criollos* are in E-flat major throughout. *Souvenir de la Havane* begins in e-flat minor and switches only mode but not tonal center to E-flat major in measure 67 where it remains for the rest of the piece. In other contradanzas Gottschalk does modulate slightly such as in *Souvenir de Puerto Rico* which alternates between e-flat minor and its relative

F-sharp major (again spelled enharmonically perhaps to emphasize the change), as does *El Cocoyé* following a very chromatic opening section centered around C sharp.

When Gottschalk composed in European-derived dance forms, he tended to modulate more than in his works which exhibit African influence. For example, his earliest surviving composition, *Polka de salon*, op. 1, begins in A-flat major, moves from the tonic to the dominant E-flat major in measure 42, and returns to A-flat major for measures 106-130. Gottschalk also tended to move further from his beginning tonal center when composing in European-derived dance forms. For example, in *Marguerite*, also titled *Grande Valse brillante*, he began the piece in F major, modulated to D-flat major in measure 98, to A major in measure 116, back to D-flat major in measure 150, and back to F major for measures 166-219, moving in augmented fifths between unrelated tonal centers. As this piece clearly shows, Gottschalk was able to be highly adventurous in changing tonal centers when he desired to be. Gottschalk's tendency to avoid or limit changes in tonal center in his compositions that were rhythmically connected to Africa suggests that he may have been doing so only to heighten the repetitive sound of these works.

Specific African-derived Rhythms

African and African-derived musics frequently share specific rhythms. Due to much overlapping and cross-cultural influence between African cultures in Africa and in the New World, it is not always possible to trace particular rhythms to specific cultures. As enslaved people re-established their musical traditions in the New World, these shared rhythms provided a common resource for creating new traditions.

Where enslaved people remained with others from their ethnic group, they were able to preserve more of the uniqueness of their specific traditions. Where individuals from the same community were separated and people from diverse backgrounds came together, they drew upon similar rhythmic structures and common rhythmic patterns to evolve new musics. Chernoff points out that the same thing occurred in the evolution of popular musics, those not specific to any particular ethnic group. He notes that when a great variety of African beat possibilities exist, only the most basic, what he calls more “generic” beats, could serve as common ground. He notes that this was true not only in the blending of African rhythms into American popular music, but also in the popular musics of Africa such as Highlife and Soukous.⁴⁰ In New Orleans specific traditions survived for a time and new hybrids grew out of common elements.

The habanera, tresillo, and cinquillo rhythms mentioned earlier were just some of the shared, African-derived rhythms to survive in New Orleans (see Figure 4 in Chapter IV). The transcription below of the basic rhythms of Gahu, a drumming and dance genre from contemporary Ghana, shows what became known as the habanera rhythm as well as its tresillo and cinquillo variants.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Chernoff, “The Artistic Challenge of African Music,” 8.

⁴¹ While Gahu is a relatively recent African music and dance genre (it developed as commentary on modernization, “Gahu” meaning “iron bird” and referring to an airplane), the rhythms on which it is based have been part of African musics at least since the time of the slave trade. As mentioned in Chapter IV, the presence of these rhythms in Africa, and as a result in the African Diaspora, has already been well documented.

Figure 14 shows six staves of musical notation for the Gahu genre. The staves are labeled G., A., Kagan, Kidi, Sogo, and M. D. Each staff contains a rhythmic notation with notes and rests. Below the notes are syllables and drum tones. The G. staff has a bell pattern. The A. staff has a beaded rattle pattern. The Kagan staff has a gankogui pattern. The Kidi staff has a master drum pattern. The Sogo staff has a habanera pattern. The M. D. staff has a habanera pattern. The syllables are: G. (pa, pa - ti, pa, pa - ti, pa, pa - ti, pa, pa - ti), A. (ka - gan, ka - gan, ka - gan, ka - gan), Kidi (ki - di, ki - di, ki, ki - di, ki - di, ki), Sogo (go, so, go, go, so, go), M. D. (ja, ja, ja, ja). The drum tones are: G. (O, P, O, P, O, P, O, P), A. (O, P, O, P, O, P, O, P), Kagan (O, P, O, P, O, P, O, P), Kidi (O, P, O, P, O, P, O, P), Sogo (O, P, O, P, O, P, O, P), M. D. (O, P, O, P, O, P, O, P).

Figure 14: Basic drum rhythms for Gahu, a drumming and dance genre from the Ewe of Ghana.⁴²

Note that the tresillo rhythm is included in the bell pattern (top line). The master drum part (bottom line) includes the habanera rhythm. The *sogo* also plays the habanera rhythm and the *kidi* plays the cinquillo rhythm). We know Gottschalk was familiar with the habanera rhythm from his childhood because the rhythmic structure of *Bamboula* is largely based on it. As in *Bamboula*, the African-derived melodies Gottschalk used in *Le*

⁴² For the instrumentation, “G” indicates the gankogui, or bell, “A” indicates the axatse, or beaded rattle, and “M. D.” indicates the master drum. The text beneath the notes indicates the syllables used to teach the parts as well as the drum tones. Below the syllables, “O” indicates an open stroke, “P” indicates a pressed or muted stroke, “B” indicates a bass tone, and “X” indicates that the musician strikes the side of the drum with a stick. The transcription is mine as taught by Habib Iddrisu.

Mancenillier and *La Savane* also include the habanera rhythm. In these two works (which are not named for African-derived drumming and dancing), Gottschalk does not use the habanera rhythm as part of the rhythmic foundation.



Figure 15: *Le Mancenillier*, mm. 1-4.

The central melody for *La Savane*, *Po'pitie mamzé ziti*, begins with the habanera rhythm in Clara Gottschalk Peterson's notation.

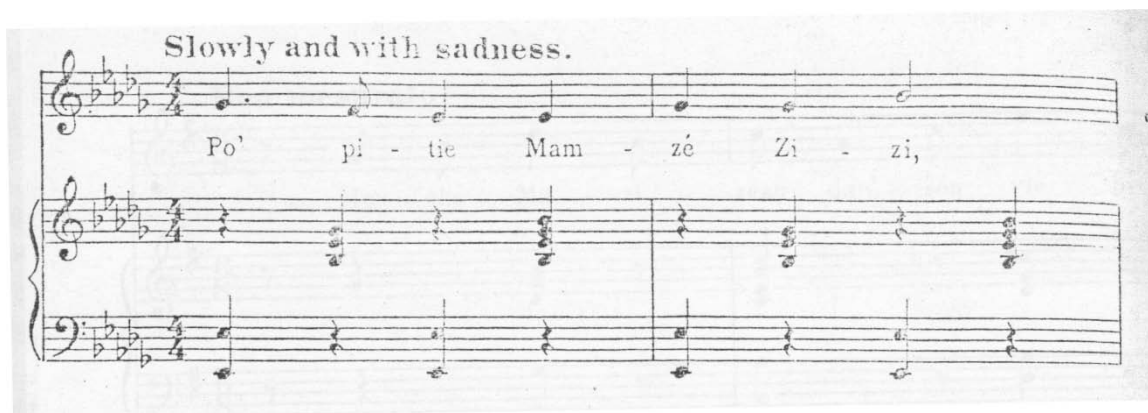


Figure 16: *Po'pitie mamzé ziti* as notated by Gottschalk's sister Clara Gottschalk Peterson, mm. 1-

2.⁴³

Gottschalk notated it with a slightly different rhythm, using a double-dotted quarter note followed by a sixteenth note rather than a dotted quarter note to an eighth note.

⁴³ Peterson, *Creole Songs from New Orleans*, 6.



Figure 17: *La Savane*, mm. 21-32.

It should be noted here that Gottschalk was not the only Western composer to use the habanera rhythm. One especially well-known example is Georges Bizet (1838-1875) who used the rhythm in his opera *Carmen*. While Bizet was not directly influenced by African musics, he was probably influenced by Gottschalk. Bizet owned copies of three Gottschalk works, *Le Bananier*, *La Moissonneuse*, and *Le Mancenillier*, in his personal library.⁴⁴ As mentioned above, the melody of *Le Mancenillier* contains the habanera rhythm. Furthermore, Bizet's possession of these Gottschalk pieces suggests he was familiar with Gottschalk and may have also known works like *Bamboula* where the habanera rhythm provides the central rhythmic motive. Russian composer Alexander Porfiryevich Borodin (1833-1887) would also borrow rhythmic motives from Gottschalk's works, specifically borrowing from *Le Bananier* in his *Polovetsian*

⁴⁴ Mina Curtiss, *Bizet and His World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958), 472.

Dances.⁴⁵ Borodin even had a copy of *Le Bananier*, copied in his own hand, in his library.⁴⁶

Polyrhythm

A central feature of rhythm in sub-Saharan Africa is that it is plural. It is quite rare for a performance to have only one characteristic rhythm. Ward noted this in 1927 as well: “Broadly speaking, the difference between African and European rhythms its [sic] that whereas any piece of European music has at any one moment one rhythm in command, a piece of African music has always two or three, sometimes as many as four.”⁴⁷ Jones also noticed the multiplicity of rhythms in West-African music:

Drumming is the very heart of African music. In it are exhibited all those features of rhythmic interplay wherein African music differs fundamentally from the music of the West. . . . African drum technique requires a minimum of two drums: there will almost certainly be three, for that is the minimum number required for the full performance of the master drum. There may be and often are more than three. There will also be hand-clapping and a song. All this is the accompaniment to the dance itself for which drumming really exists. . . . Drumming is built up . . . of a combination of rhythm-patterns played by the several drums . . . In drumming . . . *the main beats never coincide*. . . . the rhythm patterns of the master drum are continually changing.⁴⁸ (Jones’ italics)

In European-derived music traditions, rhythm was not generally utilized with such complexity, with several different but simultaneous interlocking pulses, making it difficult for Westerners to make sense of African music upon first hearing. Chernoff elaborates:

In Western music, then, rhythm is most definitely secondary in emphasis and complexity to harmony and melody. It is the progression of sound through a series of chords or tones that we recognize as beautiful. In African music this

⁴⁵ Serge Dianin, *Borodin*, trans. Robert Lord (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 310.

⁴⁶ Robert Offergeld, “The Gottschalk Legend: Grand Fantasy for a Great Many Pianos,” in *The Piano Works of Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 5 volumes, Vera Brodsky Lawrence, ed. (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), xviii.

⁴⁷ Ward, 214.

⁴⁸ Jones, 39.

sensibility is almost reversed. African melodies are clear enough, even if African conceptions of tonal relationships are sometimes strange to us, but more important is the fact that in African music *there are always at least two rhythms going on*. We consider the rhythms complex because often we simply do not know what “the” rhythm of a piece is. There seems to be no unifying or main beat. The situation is uncomfortable because if the basic meter is not evident, we cannot understand how two or more people can play together or, even more uncomfortably, how anyone can play at all.⁴⁹ (Chernoff’s italics)

As the multiple rhythms of African music combine, they form layers, or something Westerners denote as polyrhythm. Multiple rhythmic lines can be played by a single musician or be divided among several performers in a group.⁵⁰ Percussion ensembles provide a clear example of how polyrhythmic layers work. In Ghanaian ensembles there are typically three layers. A cyclical, ostinato pattern often played on a bell or various rattles forms the foundational layer or aural reference point. Western scholars have called this a “timeline pattern” although African musicians typically do not call it that. Sometimes the timeline is implied and not played. The timeline pattern is the most important rhythmic layer in sub-Saharan African music because it provides the structure upon which all other pulses and rhythmical layers are based. Nketia provides a thorough explanation of how this occurs:

Because of the difficulty of keeping subjective metronomic time in this manner, African traditions facilitate this process by externalizing the basic pulse. As already noted, this may be shown through hand clapping or through the beats of a simple idiophone. The guideline which is related to the time span in this manner has come to be described as a *time line*.

Because the time line is sounded as part of the music, it is regarded as an accompanying rhythm and a means by which rhythmic motion is sustained. Hence, instead of a time line that represents simple regular beats reflecting the basic pulse, a more complex form may be used. It may be designed as a rhythmic pattern in additive or divisive form, embodying the basic pulse or regulative beat as well as the density referent. Instead of a regular group of four notes, groups of five, six, and seven notes may be used in duple or triple rhythmic patterns.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Chernoff, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility*, 42.

⁵⁰ J. H. Kwabena Nketia, *The Music of Africa* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1974), 135.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 131-2.

The timeline pattern is essential for performing many African and African-derived musics, so much so that its prevalence and significance reinforce its longevity. Gerhard Kubik elaborates:

Time-line patterns are so important structurally in those types of African music based on them that we can confidently call them the metric back-bone of these musics. They are orientation patterns, steering and holding together the motional process, with participating musicians and dancers depending on them. In this quality the removal or even slight modification of a time-line pattern immediately leads to the disintegration of the music concerned.

Consequently, time-line patterns must have been a rather stable element in African music history. Though West African music has changed considerably during the past three centuries and has produced in the last hundred years high-life, juju music and many other new types, the time-line patterns are still there. It is certain that they were not “invented” in some recent historical period. They were present in West Africa in the 16th century and much, much earlier.⁵²

Not only are timeline patterns found throughout sub-Saharan Africa, but specific timeline rhythms, and their slight variations are shared by multiple cultures. While the mnemonic syllables used to “speak” timeline patterns vary from place to place, the function of the patterns is consistent. Ruth Stone summarizes:

This pattern, whether found in Liberia, Nigeria, or Ghana, fits, of course, with other patterns played at the same time. . . . it has a role in keeping everything appropriately linked. Players use it as a reference point to synchronize the drum, bell, and vocal parts. The timeline is one of multiple reference points upon which musicians rely. . . . Significantly, the pattern is played in Africa without any reference to the counting or the quantitative means that Western art music might employ. People in the West frequently favor a quantitative approach, while . . . peoples in Africa . . . employ the syllables that are spoken in qualitative relationship to one another.⁵³

⁵² Gerhard Kubik, *Angolan Traits in Black Music, Games and Dances of Brazil: A Study of African Cultural Extensions Overseas* (Lisboa: Junta de Investigações Científicas do Ultramar, 1979), 18-19.

⁵³ Ruth M. Stone, *Music in West Africa: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 81.

A quick look at how a timeline pattern, such as the bell rhythm from Ghana shown here, can facilitate interlocking rhythmic layers is evident in where dancers may place the beat with their steps.

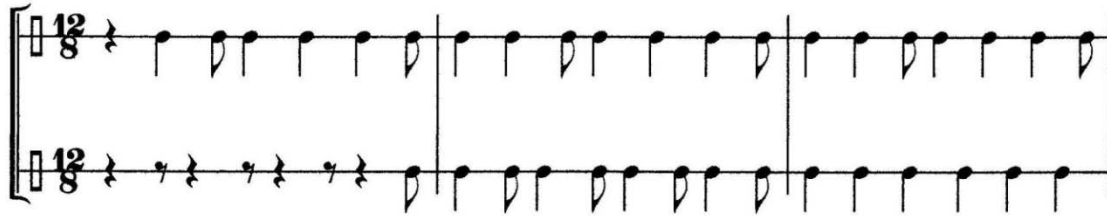


Figure 18: Ewe Adzogbo bell pattern and placement of dance steps.⁵⁴

Here the bell pattern is notated on the top line in 12/8 although the concept of a time signature would not apply in this genre's original context in Ghana. The bottom line shows two interchangeable rhythms that dancers step according to the choreography. The second measure indicates how they may divide the bell pattern into four pulses per cycle; the third measure indicates how they also can dance six pulses per bell cycle. Each step pattern interlocks differently against the bell.

The second layer of a Ghanaian percussion ensemble includes a variety of supporting drums, sometimes of different sizes and tuned to different pitches, which play ostinato patterns that interlock with each other and the "timeline" pattern. The support drum rhythms can change according to what the lead drummer plays. They add to the consistency of the sound and provide stability to which the lead drummer will play contrasting patterns.

The third layer is provided by the lead drummer, whose patterns can vary considerably and whose role includes signaling the other participants to make changes in the music and dancing. The lead drummer can also play proverbs by imitating the pitches

⁵⁴ My transcription as taught by Godwin Agbeli.

and rhythms of tonal spoken languages. The lead drummer creatively improvises variations over the established musical foundation. Yet another rhythmic line emerges when the overlapping rhythmic lines with their contrasting tones combine into a whole as the listener hears them.⁵⁵

In the conclusion of *Bamboula*, Gottschalk uses three repeating rhythmic layers just as he did at the beginning: a reinforced downbeat in the bass, the repeating habanera rhythm (this time in the middle layer), and a repeating cross-rhythmic variation on top. These layers parallel the rhythmic layers of a sub-Saharan percussion ensemble.



Figure 19: *Bamboula*, mm. 336-337.

Gottschalk is doing more than imagining how bamboula drumming sounded. He is using a specific African-derived rhythm, the habanera, and creative variations based on it throughout the work. As he nears the piece's conclusion, he continues to link subsequent variations to the beginning by repeating the habanera rhythm on its initial pitches, as in measure 336. Gottschalk uses this rhythmic motive in a similar manner to a timeline pattern, implying its pulse throughout by its reappearance on these same pitches (see Figure 9). In measure 337 (Figure 19) he changes the rhythm's pitches to fortississimo chords, and then repeats the solidified rhythm almost incessantly to the

⁵⁵ Nketia, *The Music of Africa*, 134.

conclusion of the work. The octaves in the bass line continue as well. By reapplying the pedal concurrently with the lowest note in each measure, he creates a timbre similar to the ringing of a deep bass drum. He is repeating and layering rhythms in much the same way they are treated in parts of Africa, especially in percussion ensembles. Gottschalk is showing listeners how the drumming he heard in his childhood sounded. Though he based the work on an African-derived melody, his treatment of the melody is fundamentally rhythmic.

In *Le Bananier*, Gottschalk also composes rhythmic layers that incorporate the melody and include repeating foundations in the bass, as well as additional rhythmic layers in the middle. In *Le Bananier*, the melody is introduced in measure 4.

mm. 1 (♩ = 96) 2 3 4 *Lourdement.* 5 6

p *mf* *Semplice.*

mm. 7 8 9 10 11 12 13

Dimin. *Perdendosi.*

Figure 20: *Le Bananier*, mm. 1-13.

It forms a rhythmic, as well as melodic, layer in the treble. Note that Gottschalk begins the melody on beat three, a weaker beat, thereby allowing the longer half-notes to occur on beat one. The quarter notes on beats three and four propel the melody forward to the half notes on the downbeats. By accenting the half notes in measures 7 and 8, he propels the rhythmic drive established in the bass line forward to the downbeat as well. Then he shifts the rhythmic effect of the passage by adding two “extra” quarter notes to the

original melody on beats three and four of measure 8, allowing the melody to repeat beginning on the downbeat in measure 9. When this melody recurs later in the work, it enters on beat three, as it first did in measure 4, preserving the more off-center of the two placement options Gottschalk introduced in the beginning passage.

Gottschalk could have learned this technique from the African and African-derived musics which saturated his childhood environment or from his European training as Baroque composers used similar staggered entrance points as well. The ideas were present in both traditions and could have reinforced each other. Gottschalk's choice to use the more off-center placement of the melody for the majority of *Le Bananier* suggests a more African feel. As stated above, the melody, *En avan' Grenadie*, is of black Creole origin and Gottschalk and his sister learned it as children. Because Gottschalk learned this melody in the context he did (within the very "African" city of New Orleans) it is likely he learned to hear it (as well as others) in relation to a repeating rhythmic cycle. It would also not be surprising if he had learned how to shift a melody so that it began in a different place against the "downbeat," thereby changing its relationship to the "accompaniment," a technique parallel to common improvisational practices of West-African master drummers.

It should be noted here that Gottschalk's European contemporaries were also writing piano compositions that resulted in polyrhythmic layers. For example, in the following passage, Frédéric Chopin creates complex polyrhythms. Chopin juxtaposes a dotted eighth-note and sixteenth note rhythm in the upper voice against eighth notes and quarter notes in the bass line. These two layers alone create a typical nineteenth-century cross rhythm. In measure 26, Chopin adds a third middle layer to them, thereby creating

highly-complex rhythmic interplay. Furthermore, two of the layers are assymetrical, thereby facilitating the intricacy of this passage.



Figure 21: Frédéric Chopin's Nocturne in F-sharp Major, op. 15, no. 2, mm. 26-28.

Gottschalk and Chopin composed using similar cross-rhythmic layers. Unlike Gottschalk's, Chopin's polyrhythms are not based on African-derived rhythms and their variations, nor are they historically linked to Africa. Rather, Chopin's are the result of his musical background and ingenuity in musical layering. Both men drew upon music they absorbed in their childhood to compose, creating structurally similar compositions but arriving at them from different perspectives. Chopin's musical perspective was European while Gottschalk's reflects common practices found in both African and European musics.

Cross Rhythms and Interlocking Parts

The supporting parts, which can be played on drums or other instruments, add and interlock additional layers of rhythms to the established timeline pattern. These layers balance each other by filling in gaps left by other parts. This structure is so important that theorist Jay Rahn has even suggested analyzing African music by looking at where the notes of independent lines coincide with each other or the underlying pulse and where

notes occur in between or fill in the gaps of other parts.⁵⁶ This analytical process is also useful in looking for African-derived elements in Gottschalk's works.

In his Louisiana Quartet works, Gottschalk frequently creates interlocking layers by adding rhythmic layers on the off-beats or the weak beats of the measure. Following the opening section of *Le Bananier*, Gottschalk repeats the melody over a countermelody in the bass, but he soon returns, sixteen measures later, to a rhythmic bass line in measure 41.



Figure 22: *Le Bananier*, mm. 40-46.

Beginning in measure 41, Gottschalk augments the note values of the bass line from the one he established at the beginning of the work (see Figure 20), leaving gaps for a middle rhythmic layer to fill (the “g’s” in the treble clef). The juxtaposition of a solid and forward-moving bass-line, the quarter-note g’s on beat three leading to the half-note “c’s” on beat one in the bass, against an equally consistent middle rhythmic layer (or counter rhythm) sounding only on beats two and four, gives renewed vitality to the original melody, now played an octave higher to allow vertical space for the added middle layer. To interlock a melody against a percussive piano section as Gottschalk did here is to allow the accompaniment to replicate the timeline and support patterns of an African ensemble.

⁵⁶ Jay Rahn, “Turning the Analysis Around: Africa-Derived Rhythms and Europe-Derived Music Theory,” *Black Music Research Journal* 16, no. 1 (spring 1996): 81-84.

In *La Savane*, he uses a similar technique beginning in measure 53. Here he adds eighth-notes, beginning with b-flat and g-flat, in the middle layer on the second half of each beat. Note also that the different layers also overlap on the staff, showing the interlocking of the rhythmic layers.



Figure 23: *La Savane*, mm. 53-56.

The pattern is repeated in diminution beginning in measure 114, where Gottschalk begins interlocking sixteenth notes.



Figure 24: *La Savane*, mm. 113-115.

In *Bamboula*, the interlocking layers of the main motive also overlap one another on the staff (see Figure 9).

Gottschalk also overlaps the left and right hand while each fills in the open beats left by the other in a playful section of *Le Mancenillier* marked *bien rythmé*.



Figure 25: *Le Mancenillier*, mm. 147-151.

This example is typical of nineteenth-century classical cross-hand piano writing as well as cross-rhythmic support drums in an African ensemble.

Gottschalk's rhythmic choices were not accidental or coincidental. Like any composer, he strove to create the sound he wanted, and that sound was based on rhythm. His works are filled with frequent stylistic indications of *bien rythmé*, *toujours bien rythmé*, and *très rythmé*. His note to performers of one of his later works, *Pastorella e Cavaliere*, demonstrates just how specific Gottschalk's thoughts on rhythm were:

The performer of this piece should endeavor to emphasize the iterated design of the accompaniment, so as invariably to convey to the listener the idea of the ternary rhythm, i.e. of $\frac{3}{4}$ time in which it is written. This observation is particularly essential, inasmuch as the melody, in some passages, would seem to indicate the binary rhythm, or $\frac{6}{8}$ time. The effect which this piece is capable of producing, if well played, arises in a great measure from the antagonism of these two conflicting rhythms, one of which, as I have already observed, must be subordinate to the other.⁵⁷

At other times, Gottschalk would distinguish between the melody and accompaniment stylistically in his compositions. Sometimes Gottschalk wanted the melody played in a singing and sustained manner while the accompaniment is played totally *staccato*, as indicated in a sketch for *Polka* (in A-flat major).⁵⁸ Gottschalk could clearly play two

⁵⁷ Louis Moreau Gottschalk, *The Piano Works of Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 5 volumes, ed. by Vera Brodsky Lawrence with a biographical essay by Robert Offergeld (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), vol. 4, p. 194.

⁵⁸ Louis Moreau Gottschalk, *The Little Book of Louis Moreau Gottschalk: Seven Previously Unpublished Piano Pieces*, notes by Richard Jackson and Neil Ratliff (New York: The New York Public Library and Continuo Music Press, 1976), 19.

independent lines of music simultaneously. For example during a concert in Fort-de-France, Martinique, he played *God Save the Queen* for an English major in the audience while simultaneously playing the French national march *Partant pour la Syrie* for others in attendance.⁵⁹

Perhaps what shows Gottschalk's mastery of rhythms and simultaneous but independent lines best is that he would take his creativity as far as he could without going too far for his audiences. Composer and musician Hector Berlioz, in his *Feuilleton du journal des débats* on April 13, 1850 wrote of Gottschalk:

Mr. Gottschalk is one of the very small number of those who possess all the different elements of the sovereign power of the pianist, all the attributes which environ him with an irresistible prestige. He is an accomplished musician. He knows how far one may carry fancy in expression, he knows the limit beyond which the liberties taken with rhythm lead only to disorder and confusion, and this limit he never transcends.⁶⁰

Nowhere was this ability more essential than when Gottschalk composed and improvised his own works. It enabled him to successfully combine the metrical structure and tonal harmony of European classical traditions with likely African-derived elements such as repetitive rhythmical layering and the juxtaposition of multiple rhythms.

In Gottschalk's music, such repeating bass lines and rhythmically layered accompaniments provide the same rhythmic drive and stability that timeline and support drum patterns do in Africa. Gottschalk synchronizes rhythmic layers on the piano, using repetition to establish stability for the listener. This is not to suggest that European composers were not doing something similar, only that Gottschalk had two possible sources for his inspiration. When he used this structure concurrent with the use of

⁵⁹ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 287.

⁶⁰ William Smythe Babcock Mathews, "Gottschalk.—A Successful American Composer," *Music* (June 1892): 122-123.

African-derived rhythms and melodies from the music of his childhood, it suggests that African influence could have played a role.

Like Gottschalk, Franz Schubert (1797-1828), was known for using considerable repetition in his works. In Figure 26 we see that Schubert introduces and repeats a rhythmic passage in both the bass and treble that he will repeat throughout the first movement of the work.



Figure 26: Franz Schubert, Sonata in G Major, op. 78, I, mm. 1-8.

In this passage, the bass and treble are homorhythmic, not polyrhythmic. While both Gottschalk and Schubert make use of repeating rhythms to unify their compositions, the ideology behind Schubert's works was Western. Gottschalk was exposed to both African and European musics, and could have been influenced by the former as well as the latter.

When rhythmic layers and interlocking passages occur in Schubert's sonatas, they are not the result of exposure to African polyrhythms. For example, in Figure 27 Schubert has placed arpeggiated chord triplets in the bass line while including dotted-eighth notes to sixteenth notes or thirty-second notes in the treble voice.



Figure 27: Franz Schubert, Sonata in A Major, op. 120, II, mm. 35-39.

Schubert's cross rhythms resulted from combinations of musical layers created within an established meter of 9/8, and a solely European-derived framework. Likewise, Gottschalk's polyrhythms sometimes paralleled the rhythmic layering processes of European composers contemporary to him. At other times Gottschalk's cross rhythms resulted from his use of African-derived rhythms, or occurred when he filled in gaps left in other rhythmic layers of his compositions, a process similar to what African master drummers are known to do.

Gottschalk's European-derived musical background afforded him considerable liberty when he inserted established African-derived rhythms into a framework of Western metrical structure. He introduced variations and developments into his works as they progressed in a manner that only a lead drummer would have the musical freedom to do in Africa. Like a master drummer, Gottschalk also returned to the stable foundation, the fundamental rhythmic idea he has established for a work.

In West and Central Africa, rhythms and counter-rhythms form stable relationships and provide a base over which the lead musician can improvise. Chernoff explains:

Once a responsive relationship of one rhythm to a counter-rhythm has been established, the leader may extend his phrases over one or more responses until he ends up on the beat again, and the music will show a particular complexity when the soloist's rhythm overlaps the response. While the responsive rhythm is basically stable, the soloist is free to place his variations on not only his phrasing but also his entrance. All that is important is that he come out on time. In

Western music, the lead singer or instrumentalist starts on the main beat; in African music the situation is reversed; *the musician unifies his time with the last beat he plays rather than the first one*. . . . Part of the power and drive of African music derives from the way that African musicians play *forward* toward the beat.⁶¹ (Chernoff's italics)

This freedom in improvisation should not suggest that the lead musician or master drummer can play whatever he wants. With added freedom comes increased responsibility. Chernoff describes how this applies to a Dagbamba⁶² Takai ensemble:

The kinds of rhythmic relationships in the Takai ensemble, once established in a piece of music, both suggest the possibilities and define the limits of improvisation. A drummer will cut across the other rhythms, but at the same time he cannot step too far outside a responsive relationship without destroying the basic character of the beat; since drummers depend on each other to stay on the beat, he might even get everybody so confused that they would have to stop playing and start again. If a drummer strays too far from his rhythm, he will misaccentuate or overemphasize the beat and thus ruin the intriguing balance and if he moves into too close a synchrony with another drum, he negates the potential effect of both rhythms. The rhythms must be clearly distinguishable from each other because one rhythm determines the way we can apprehend another rhythm. Changing the part of one drum in a composition, therefore, would alter the effect of the total rhythmic fabric.⁶³

Chernoff adds that, "A rhythm which cuts and defines another rhythm must leave room for the other rhythm to be heard clearly, and *the African drummer concerns himself as much with the notes he does not play as with the accents he delivers* [Chernoff's italics]." ⁶⁴ Note Chernoff's emphasis on a successful master drummer's use of the spaces between the notes. When this process happens "correctly," elaborate cross rhythms result.

Cross rhythms or crossing the beat occurs when the starting points and main accents of simultaneously repeating patterns do not align or occur at the same time. The

⁶¹ Chernoff, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility*, 56.

⁶² I have substituted the African name of Dagbamba for the British name Dagomba that Chernoff uses. See Chapter IV.

⁶³ Chernoff, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility*, 58.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

entry points of different rhythms may be staggered, creating an “interplay of polyrhythms,” and the same pattern can be placed in different positions along the time line.⁶⁵ Cross rhythms, such as two against three, also occur when rhythmic patterns based on different regular pulses are juxtaposed. Divisive and additive rhythms may also be juxtaposed.⁶⁶ Ruth Stone shows how polyrhythmic cross rhythms interlock:

A larger process of layering rhythm can be discerned in West Africa. Songs, events, and musical pieces all begin with staggered entrances. . . . The parts perform together as they “tune in” to one another, shifting and adjusting their musical concepts to mesh into a tight unit. They search to find the best fit until, like a three-dimensional jigsaw puzzle, the pieces neatly align with one another.⁶⁷

This is quite different from how a conductor of an orchestra or choir assumes this role for everyone. For example, in *Bamboula*, the interlocking layers provide rhythmic drive for the piece.

In Figure 28, Gottschalk maintains the rhythmic momentum that he established earlier in the piece.



Figure 28: *Bamboula*, mm. 153-158.

Gottschalk continues to emphasize the downbeat with low octaves in the bass and the use of pedal, while filling out the left-hand line with a slight variation of the habanera rhythm. When he doubles the second note of the habanera rhythm in the left hand he indicates that he still wishes to keep the habanera rhythm’s feel by accenting the sixteenth

⁶⁵ Nketia, *The Music of Africa*, 135-6.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 134-5.

⁶⁷ Stone, 91.

note immediately following the added note with a slight crescendo. Against this pattern Gottschalk juxtaposes a syncopated treble line, thereby creating cross rhythms. Notice how in the treble voice Gottschalk accents notes on the off-beats while simultaneously weakening notes that fall on the beats through the use of ties. This example, again, looks similar to what some of Gottschalk's European contemporaries were writing.

Brahms, for example, frequently creates interlocking rhythms that are similar to Gottschalk's when he writes over the bar-line as in Figure 29.



Figure 29: Johannes Brahms, Piano Sonata No. 2, F-sharp Minor, op. 2, IV, mm. 67-71.

Brahms' creative variations, however, did not come from African-derived rhythms as some of Gottschalk's did. Brahms was creating within a European framework while Gottschalk again was creating from both African-derived and European-derived practices (see Figure 28). Gottschalk was different from his European contemporaries because even when his compositions appear similar to theirs, he was arriving at them from a hybridized and augmented perspective.

Timing

In sub-Saharan African musics in general, timing can extend beyond how musicians build rhythmic and polyrhythmic patterns, and cross rhythms and interlocking parts as well. Here, timing can take on an almost mystical synchronistic sense. Ruth Stone explains:

Once an ensemble synchronizes all the parts, and listeners or dancers become completely involved in the music they are making, another kind of time becomes important. . . . This is really the soul of time and that place where people experience a “flow” or a “high.” . . . Ethnomusicologists, among other scholars, call this area of music “inner time” and in the arena a very special awareness is experienced by performers and audience alike. . . . The performers and audience then perform together in a tight synchrony that sets the stage for inner time to emerge. . . . Here the participant, in a kind of stream of consciousness, gains new awareness of the event. . . . The listener, now tuned in with the forward motion of music can move into flights of experience that are free from the constraints of outer, chronometric time.⁶⁸

This feeling is closely linked to the emotional connection participants feel with the spiritual world and their ancestors. In the New World, this meant a spiritual connection back to Africa.

This difference in the approach to rhythm was noted early on by Western African music scholars. Writing in 1927, W. E. Ward noted that “The basis of African rhythm seems to be so completely different from that of European rhythm that the European system of bar-lines is foreign to African music.”⁶⁹ Ghanaian ethnomusicologist J. H. Kwabena Nketia describes at length in his book, *The Music of Africa*, just how rhythm is used to provide structure in several types of African musics.⁷⁰ He notes that, “The use of additive rhythms in duple, triple, and hemiola patterns is the hallmark of rhythmic organization in African music, which finds its highest expression in percussion music.”⁷¹ The layering of divisive and additive rhythms creates syncopation, polyrhythm, the juxtaposition of units of two notes against three (both linearly through hemiola and vertically through polyrhythm), cross rhythms, and interlocking parts. The overall effect

⁶⁸ Stone, 89.

⁶⁹ Ward, 203-4.

⁷⁰ Nketia, *The Music of Africa*, 125-38.

⁷¹ Ibid., 131.

of such processes is one of tension and release that culminates in a cyclical rhythmic drive.

Rather than view the music as structured over a timeline pattern, West-African musicians conceive of the music as “the idea of parallel pulses within an overall time frame” as the Dagbamba⁷² people of northern Ghana do, for example.⁷³ African musicians typically consider how all of the parts interrelate, not just how they relate to the timeline pattern. This makes the spacing within each rhythmic layer especially important because it allows parts to be organized so that they interlock. As Nketia has shown, the element of space is another central characteristic of many African and African-derived musics.⁷⁴ Nketia notes, “the interlocking parts may be exactly the same rhythm spaced differently, thereby creating a greater density of sounds.”⁷⁵ Gottschalk uses a similar approach with the interlocking parts he uses in the Louisiana Quartet (see figures 22-24 above). Sometimes he shifts a rhythmic layer to or adds an additional layer on the off-beats, increasing the overall rhythmic density. This is why it was essential that performers play his pieces with rhythmic accuracy and why he insisted that they do so. Any variation would change the rhythmic interaction of the piece.

In his music, Gottschalk created almost hypnotic rhythmic patterns that would draw in the listener and gradually build with intensity to the end of a composition. The result of interlocking parts and cross rhythms within a given piece of African music is an overall flow that occurs when musicians play their parts with a precision and exactness

⁷² This source also uses the British name of Dagomba for this ethnic group. I have changed it to the African name of Dagbamba.

⁷³ Trevor Wiggins, “Drumming in Ghana,” chap. 5 in *Composing the Music of Africa: Composition, Interpretation and Realisation*, ed. Malcolm Floyd (Brookfield, Vermont: Ashgate, 1999), 53.

⁷⁴ Nketia, *The Music of Africa*, 134.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

often foreign to Western musics, and their combined efforts create a composite rhythm which is signature of that piece.

Gottschalk's African-influenced compositions are rhythmically plural and driven by an underlying pulse. In *Bamboula*, a repeating octave in the bass on the downbeat of every measure underlies the rhythmic layers in the middle and upper ranges of the piano. The resulting combination of these layered rhythms forms the work's overall rhythmic drive, with the downbeat as the focal point. In West- and Central-African musics, the strongest point in a musical cycle often occurs at the culmination of the phrase, not the beginning. This feel is end-accented and much more African than Western. In contrast, in Western music the strongest pulse is usually the downbeat occurring at the beginning of the measure. Because of Gottschalk's exposure to African and African-derived musics in his childhood home and community, and the rhythmic structure he used in pieces like *Bamboula*, it is highly likely that Gottschalk could have played some of his compositions in such a way as to establish an end-accented feel. In *Bamboula*, the way Gottschalk used the habanera rhythm, and repeatedly emphasized the downbeat with very low notes in the bass and pedal, allows for this possibility.

Gottschalk's friend, pianist and composer William Mason (1829-1908), also wrote piano works that included considerable repetition and interlocking rhythmic layers. In sections of his *Novelette*, op. 31, no. 2, written in 1870, Mason includes three interlocking layers: the melody in the treble, a repeating rhythm of an eight note followed by two sixteenth notes in the bass, and a middle layer of three sixteenth notes followed by a sixteenth rest on each beat. While Mason's rhythms repeat, his pitches vary. Mason juxtaposes the middle layer that is densest on the beat, against the bass line that is densest

on the off-beats. He uses ties to show that the sixteenth notes in the bass line lead to the subsequent beat.



Figure 30: William Mason, *Novelette*, op. 31, no. 2, mm. 1-4.

Mason was born in Boston, studied under Franz Liszt in Europe as a young man, and settled in New York upon his return to the United States. While Mason did not grow up immersed in African-derived musics as Gottschalk did, Mason was very familiar with Gottschalk's compositions and performance style. Mason was also known for "patiently analyzing and imitating the playing styles of different concert pianists."⁷⁶

Typically in African musics, once a basic pulse is established, musicians create a dichotomy of tension and relaxation within the established rhythmic network, but neither the pulse nor the dichotomy of tension and relaxation is governed by an inherent meter. Instead, by staggering accents in different places of the rhythmic cycle, each musician's part emphasizes a different place in the overall pattern. John Rublowsky explains how this works:

At the heart of African rhythmic systems is the concept of tension. In contrast to European music, where the accents of a melody generally coincide with time beats, indicated by a baton or a handclap, the melodic accents in African music are generally in free rhythm. Although the melody itself may be tied to an underlying metronomic beat, this meter does not determine the rhythm. Musical tension is attained by deliberately staggering the main accented beats. In this manner, if two drums were to beat in triple time, the main emphasis of the second

⁷⁶ John Gillespie, ed., *Nineteenth-Century American Piano Music* (New York: Dover Publications, 1978), xiii.

drum would fall on the second or third beat of the first drum's bar, never on its first beat. In practice, however, it is more common for the two drums to be playing in different meters, further staggering the main beats. When three drums are used, one performer beats out a simple triple or dual pattern while the lead drummer, utilizing any number of traditional metric patterns, creates spontaneous variations upon these patterns with great virtuosity, modifying them to suit the individual style of a dancer or singer. Meanwhile, the middle drum gives standard "replies" to the lead drum, the accents of which also cross those of the small drum. The performance, then, becomes a complex interweaving of melodic and rhythmic patterns, the inherent accents of which are in a constant state of tension.⁷⁷

This concept of tension is apparent in the repeating cycles of the bell and support drum parts for Adzogbo, a war dance of the Ewe of Ghana (Figure 31). The cycle below is notated in 12/8 to allow for how the music can be felt in four or six pulses per cycle (refer to Figure 18). The bell (*gankogui*) notated on the top line is filled in by the rattle (*axatse*) on the second line.⁷⁸ The *kagan* support drum plays evenly accented tones. The *kidi* and *sogo* support drums alternate their open tones (indicated by an "O" beneath a note) and pressed or muted tones (indicated by a "P" below a note). Depending on whether one is feeling this cycle in four or six pulses, the points where one feels stability when a rhythm coincides with a beat, or tension when it does not, can vary (refer to Figure 18 here as well).

⁷⁷ John Rublowky, *Black Music in America* (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1971), 50.

⁷⁸ "Pa" beneath an *axatse* note indicates an open strike against the player's leg while "ti" indicates a more muted strike against the hand.

Figure 31 shows the Adzogbo bell and support rhythms. The score is written for six instruments: Gankogui, Axatse, Kagan, Kidi, Sogo, and Atsimevu. Each instrument has a staff with a 12/8 time signature. The Gankogui part is a steady eighth-note pattern. The Axatse part has a vocal-like melody with syllables 'pa', 'ti', 'pa', 'ti', 'pa', 'ti', 'pa'. The Kagan part has a pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. The Kidi and Sogo parts have a pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes with 'P' and 'O' markings. The Atsimevu part is a single eighth note.

Figure 31: Adzogbo bell and support rhythms.⁷⁹

Gottschalk creates tension and release between the rhythmic layers of his early works through syncopation and emphasis on weaker beats. In *Le Bananier*, for example, the open fifths and octaves that begin the piece carry more or less the same weight (see figure 11). But as the work progresses, Gottschalk shifts the emphasis onto the weaker beats, two and four. Beginning in the second half of measure 41, Gottschalk adds a middle rhythmic layer, a repeating quarter-note “g” on beats two and four (see figure 22). This middle layer pulls against the bass line, which emphasizes beats one and three. This idea then erupts in measure 57 as Gottschalk adds chords on beats two and four in the bass line, which are reinforced in the middle voice. Furthermore, Gottschalk uses vertical distance between the bass, middle, and treble lines of the piece to create clarity. He shows the listener how to hear the separate lines by separating them vertically on the keyboard. He also creates tension between the layers by juxtaposing a very straight and

⁷⁹ This is my transcription, as taught by Ewe master musician Godwin Agbeli.

on-beat melody in the treble against the emphasized off-beats in the middle and bass voices.



Figure 32: *Le Bananier*, mm. 56-59.

Note also that Gottschalk places the accent on beat one in the treble voice that begins on beat three in measure 57, while using chords to emphasize beats two and four in the middle voices and bass line.

Gottschalk also creates tension and release in his early and later works by juxtaposing duple and triple pulses as is common in Africa. This 2:3 ratio happens both concurrently between voices and in succession within one voice. Gottschalk does not use this ratio throughout *Bamboula* and *Le Mancenillier* as it would likely occur in Africa but instead prefers to build up to it near the end of the works.

Early in *Bamboula*, Gottschalk begins adding rhythmic units of three, in the form of sixteenth-note triplets, to the duple context established by the straight eighth and sixteenth note patterns from the beginning. Here he begins doing so in measure 50.

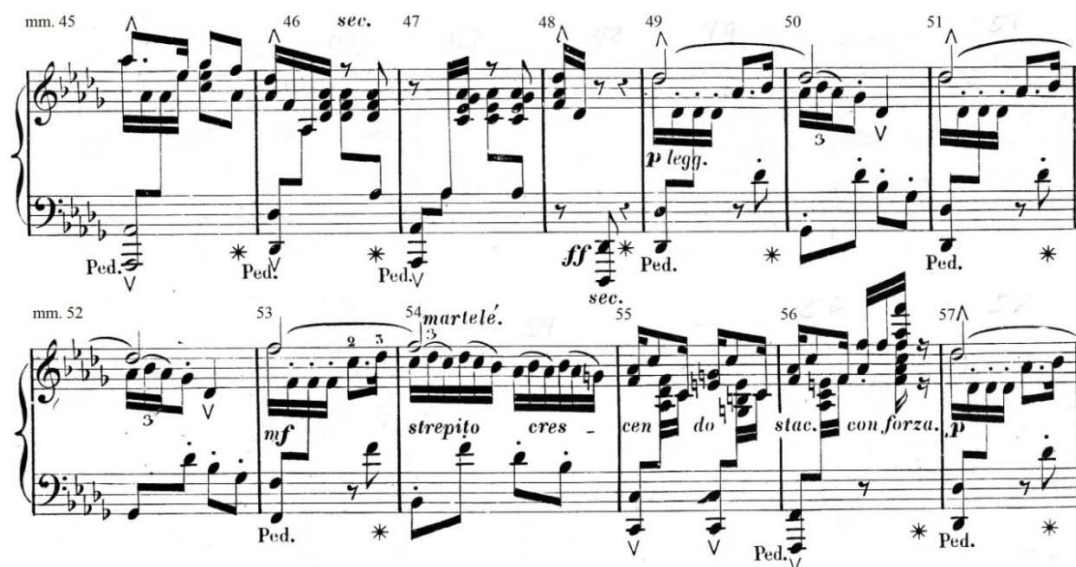


Figure 33: *Bamboula*, mm. 45-57.

Here, though, the triplets are somewhat decorative and not yet vertically juxtaposed against straight sixteenth notes. After several varying sections, sixteenth-note triplets appear again, coming into direct juxtaposition against the straight sixteenths, creating tension through interlocking layers beginning in measure 317.



Figure 34: *Bamboula*, mm. 316-319.

As in the earlier examples of Brahms and Schubert (see Figures 27 and 29), at first glance this passage looks like a typical Western cross rhythm. The sixteenth-note triplets in the right hand are in independent opposition to the straight sixteenth notes in the left hand. What makes Gottschalk's example different is that he creates a variation of the habanera rhythm. He goes one step further by retaining the sixteenth-note triplets in the

treble and juxtaposing them against the return of the habanera rhythm, this time in octaves in the middle voice. After just one measure, Gottschalk fills out the habanera rhythm into full chords, further emphasizing the push toward the end of the piece (Figure 35). The bass line continues to drive forward, with repeating octaves on beat one, occasionally anticipated by an additional octave on the final eighth-note of the preceding measure. By building the highest voice in this way, Gottschalk makes it clear that the motive containing the triplet is intended as a decorative and interlocking variation on the habanera rhythm. When his European contemporaries were juxtaposing 2:3, they were not building layered rhythmic variations from an African-derived rhythm as Gottschalk was.



Figure 35: *Bamboula*, mm. 338-342.

Gottschalk also utilizes the 2:3 ratio, this time linearly, as he builds towards the end of *Le Mancenillier*. He begins by occasionally introducing straight eighth-notes in the left hand against established triplets in the right, as in measure one-hundred eighty-three.

times with the bass line of *Bamboula*. He uses this idea repeatedly in measures 186 through the downbeat of 208.



Figure 39: *Bamboula*, mm. 184-188.

In measure 186, the phrase culminates as both the right and left hand descend to the bass octave on beat one of measure 187 where the tension is released.

Gottschalk stretches the bass-line phrase in a similar manner in measures 241-244, where he repeats a two-measure phrase twice. In this case the treble and bass realign at the beginning of the third and final thirty-second-note figure in the treble on beat three.



Figure 40: *Bamboula*, mm. 241-242.

This passage could be seen as an elastic phrase length similar to those found in Brahms' compositions; however, this concept has parallels in Africa and African-derived music as well. In both of these instances, Gottschalk is playing around with the established meter in much the same way an African master drummer will vary from the established time

cycle, returning to it by aligning the final note of an improvised phrase. Not only is Gottschalk's use of elasticity to create tension similar to how a master drummer plays with the beat while improvising, but elasticity is also found in Caribbean *danzas* and *contradanzas* which, like some of Gottschalk's works, are African-European hybrids. Especially debated in this music is the *tresillo* variation of the *habanera* rhythm. For example, questions arise as to how to play *tresillos elasticos* (elastic triplets). As in the *tresillo* rhythms notated in Chapter IV (Figure 4), a written eighth-note triplet may indicate it should be "stretched" into the more syncopated *tresillo* rhythm of dotted-eighth note, dotted-eighth note, eighth note.⁸⁰

Although Gottschalk's composite rhythms adhere to an underlying metrical structure more clearly than typical additive rhythms in Africa do, he is simultaneously utilizing the rhythmic processes of both European and African-derived rhythmic systems. *La France musicale*'s description of Gottschalk performing *Bamboula* gives us insight into how he viewed its structure:

The pianist vigorously attacks the Creole song. Then follows a second motif. . . . The accompaniment he makes very *staccato*. The middle theme, played languidly, contrasts in a strange, but deliciously poetic way, with the bass, which continues energetically to make the rhythm.

On the third melody, in B flat, comes a variation with a *crescendo fortissimo*, and directly afterwards the same motif in B flat reappears and disappears. Hardly is it finished when the *rentrée* is made by a dazzling run, which I can only compare to a cascade of pearls. . . . After this follow variations in triplets, made with wonderful lightness.⁸¹

Note especially that Gottschalk keeps the rhythmic drive in the bass while playing clearly distinguishable independent lines in the other voices.

⁸⁰ Joseph Smith, ed, *Tangos, Milongas and Other Latin-American Dances for Solo Piano*, (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2003), ix.

⁸¹ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 77.

Voicing

Throughout the process of layering, interlocking, and overlapping rhythms, pitch is used to provide clarity. In the case of drums, each voice is tuned to a different range, allowing it room to “speak” and be heard. This is not to suggest that melody is not important, just that “In Africa, pitch is unthinkable without a correspondingly strong impulse in rhythm.”⁸²

Gottschalk used voicings comparable to those of the Senegambian and Kongo cultures in his African-influenced compositions. In these traditions, the bass line typically provides the timeline pattern. More rhythmic layers are added in the middle voices, and the master drum or improvisatory line typically occurs in the highest register. This structure parallels that of Gottschalk’s compositions that make up the Louisiana Quartet.

Gottschalk used vertical distance between the rhythmic layers in his piano works to provide clarity. As John Doyle has pointed out, typical of Gottschalk’s piano works is his use of a “jumping bass” where he puts “considerable separation between the lowest bass tones and the following chordal harmonies.”⁸³ Researchers have likewise noted the rhythmic pulse of the bass-line of *Le Bananier*. Eric Thacker called it “an African drone bass,” and Kent Dicus referred to it as a “132-measure rhythmic crescendo.”⁸⁴ In *Bamboula*, the pedal on the downbeats provides a ringing “drum-like” sound in the bass. Gottschalk also frequently used octaves to emphasize the bass line. He used the upper registers to quote the rhythms and melodies people know just as a master drummer from

⁸² Robert Farris Thompson, *African Art in Motion: Icon and Act* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), 7.

⁸³ Doyle, “The Piano Music of Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829-1869),” 110.

⁸⁴ Eric Thacker, “Gottschalk and a Prelude to Jazz,” *Jazz & Blues* (March 12, 1973): 12; Kent Timothy Dicus, “A Stylistic Analysis of Selected Piano Works of Louis Moreau Gottschalk” (master’s thesis, University of Arizona, 1988), 184.

African plays a tonal language proverb on the drum. In the extreme high ranges of the keyboard Gottschalk placed rhythmically dense and improvisational flourishes, as did some of his contemporaries. Liszt, for example, also wrote virtuosic passages in the upper registers of the keyboard. In case of Liszt, this technique is clearly one of European origin; however, in Gottschalk's compositions based on African-derived rhythms, it would appear to be both an African- and European-derived parallel.

The structure Gottschalk uses requires vertical distance between lines to provide clarity to the listener. It also results in numerous virtuosic passages, some so much so that publications of Gottschalk's works frequently contain simplified options for more difficult sections. As John Doyle has noted, Gottschalk's piano music is highly virtuosic because of his use of octaves, doubled notes, interlocking figures and considerable emphasis on the extreme upper register of the keyboard.⁸⁵ Gottschalk could have learned this structure from both African- and European-derived musics.

Later Works

Gottschalk would continue composing using the same musical structures found in *Bamboula*, *La Savane*, *Le Bananier*, and *Le Mancenillier* when he evoked African-derived sounds of the United States, the Caribbean, and Latin America. The way Gottschalk used rhythm in these pieces was as much a part of him as his classical training and love of opera. He could not have composed a piece like *Bamboula*, with a structure that so closely parallels that of an African percussion ensemble, if he had not been familiar with how one sounded. We will never know if he went to Congo Square as a child or witnessed bamboula drumming first-hand. What is certain is that he understood

⁸⁵ Doyle, "The Piano Music of Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829-1869)," abstract.

how to utilize repetition and motivic rhythmic layers in building African-like polyrhythms.

Two Banjos

Another work which shows the degree to which Gottschalk was able to reproduce African-American musical sounds in his compositions is *The Banjo, Grotesque Fantasie, American Sketch*, op. 15. There are actually two versions of the piece, causing some uncertainty as to whether Gottschalk wrote the work before returning from Europe on December 27, 1852, or if he had written it after returning to New Orleans prior to his first public performance of the work in New Orleans in March 13, 1855.⁸⁶ The earlier version of the piece was not published until after Gottschalk's death and is cataloged as op. 82 even though it was likely written in 1852 or 1853, before op. 15, which was written in 1854 or 1855.⁸⁷

In his article "Gottschalk's 'The Banjo,' op. 15, and the Banjo in the Nineteenth Century," Paul Ely Smith not only shows that Gottschalk had to be intimately familiar with African-American banjo playing in New Orleans in the early 1850's, but also that "Gottschalk's op. 15 is not only a remarkably accurate representation of this banjo tradition, but also the most detailed and complete surviving contemporaneous record of mid-nineteenth-century African-American banjo music."⁸⁸ Smith shows that if Gottschalk's piano work were to be played on a banjo, certain playing techniques he captured such as the sextuplet "forward-backward roll" that first appears in measure 25

⁸⁶ Robert Offergeld, *The Centennial Catalogue of the Published and Unpublished Compositions of Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (New York: Stereo Review, 1970), 15-16.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Paul Ely Smith, "Gottschalk's 'The Banjo,' op. 15, and the Banjo in the Nineteenth Century," *Current Musicology* 50 (1992): 47-61.

indicate an African-derived playing style. In order to play this figure, the banjo player would have to use both downstroking and up-picking, a technique common among West-African lute players, but not among white minstrel show performers.⁸⁹



Figure 41: *The Banjo*, op. 15, m. 25.

Lutes in West Africa are frequently made of calabashes, as were early African-American banjos. Also, in West Africa both bowed and plucked lutes are frequently part of ensembles that include percussion. As Smith notes, white minstrel show performers are often given credit for creating the banjo, fiddle, and percussion ensemble but African evidence suggests Africa is the source.⁹⁰

If Gottschalk wrote *The Banjo*, op. 82, in 1852, as it is dated in Oliver Ditson's posthumous publication, then he composed it before he returned to the United States from Europe. This would mean that an accurate representation of African-American banjo playing in this work, as in the second, *The Banjo, Grotesque Fantasia, American Sketch*, op. 15., would suggest that Gottschalk was familiar enough with the African-American banjo tradition from his childhood to accurately reproduce its sound before returning to New Orleans from his stay in Europe. Although missing the melodic introduction of *The Banjo*, op. 15, Gottschalk's *The Banjo*, op. 82, has many of the same interlocking rhythmic patterns present in the later work. It also contains sextuplet figures similar to

⁸⁹ Ibid., 53.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 53-54.

those Smith has identified in the later work as an imitation of the “forward-backward roll” technique used by African-American banjo players.

Smith suggests that *Bamboula* may contain imitations of banjo playing as well, and shows how measures 17-20 of *Bamboula* could be played on a banjo.⁹¹ Two key considerations are not mentioned in his observation. First, the melody containing the habanera rhythm that is central to the drive of *Bamboula* is lost when the rhythmic layers are reduced. Second, the ringing pedal-tone octave in the bass that suggests the bass-drum foundation of an African percussion ensemble (not a calabash, rattle, or tambourine, which might accompany lutes in a West-African-derived mixed ensemble) cannot be reproduced on the banjo because it does not have the proper range. Furthermore, the vertical distance Gottschalk places between the rhythmic layers of *Bamboula* as he builds towards the end of the work could only be seen as depictions of the pitch range of a variety of different-sized drums. In *The Banjo*, op. 15, Gottschalk also uses octaves in the bass; however, he does so without the use of the pedal (which could suggest a ringing bass drum) and for much of the work keeps the right and left hands closer together vertically than he does in *Bamboula* (a banjo has a narrower pitch range than a West-or Central-African percussion ensemble).

The Banjo, op. 15’s similarities to *Bamboula* lie in their shared African roots, not in shared connections to the banjo. Both interlock rhythms in a similar way. Beginning in measure 9 of *The Banjo*, op. 15, after a brief introduction, Gottschalk introduces the main rhythmic pulse of the piece alternating the left and right hands between the downbeats and upbeats, and interlocking both eighth-note and sixteenth-note patterns.

⁹¹ Ibid., 56.



Figure 42: *The Banjo*, op. 15, mm. 9-12.

Throughout the work there are only two rhythmic layers, divided here between the left and right hands. *Bamboula*, on the other hand, has three rhythmic layers throughout most of the work. This is indicative of the structure of an African percussion ensemble. In *Bamboula*, Gottschalk was invoking the African percussion sounds he heard in his childhood, as the title suggests. He likely waited until writing *The Banjo* to imitate the banjo.

Regardless of whether or not Gottschalk composed *The Banjo*, op. 82 before returning to the United States from Europe, it is clear that he was continuing to develop the African-derived techniques he used in *Bamboula*, *La Savane*, *Le Bananier*, and *Le Mancenillier* in his later works composed in the Caribbean. African musical structure became part of who Gottschalk was as a musician during his childhood. As his early works written in Europe show, he could combine and hear rhythms in ways quite similar to West- and Central-African musicians even though the end product, a piano composition, has a very different sound.

Contradanzas

When Gottschalk travelled in the Caribbean and Central and South America, many things reminded him of New Orleans. Gottschalk encountered tunes he had heard

in his childhood, including some that had since gone out of style back home. For example, in Martinique, Gottschalk not only encountered the familiar Creole dialect, French architecture, food, and dress of New Orleans, but he also wrote home about witnessing “traditional mulatto women dance and sing to the accompaniment of the *bamboule*.”⁹² In other words, the bamboula was among those things Gottschalk found to be familiar from his childhood in New Orleans.

In his works written in the Caribbean and Latin America, Gottschalk sometimes quotes Creole melodies such as *Fais dodo*, *Colas*, a lullaby he used in *Berceuse*. He expands his compositional style, however, and begins creating his own melodic material. As John Doyle discovered, for his Caribbean and Latin American compositions Gottschalk frequently relies upon African-derived rhythms but creates his own melodies and thematic material.⁹³ The African-derived musical structure that Gottschalk incorporated into the Louisiana Quartet would provide a foundation for Gottschalk to expand upon in his later works inspired by similar blended African and European traditions.

Rhythm, and rhythmic layers, remained a fundamental element in Gottschalk’s Caribbean works. As John Doyle has already noted, many of Gottschalk’s piano compositions composed in the Caribbean contain the habanera rhythm, as well as other rhythms that Fernando Ortiz has identified as Afro-Cuban.⁹⁴ *El Cocoyé*, *Dernier amour*, *Ojos criollos*, *Souvenir de la Havane*, *Souvenir de Porto Rico*, and *Vamos a la Azotea* all contain variants of the tresillo and habanera rhythms. *Danza*, *O ma charmante*, *épargnez-moi*, *Ojos criollos*, *Souvenir de la Havane*, and *Souvenir de Porto Rico* contain

⁹² Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 275.

⁹³ Doyle, “The Piano Music of Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829-1869),” 154.

⁹⁴ Ibid; Ortiz, *La Africanía de la Música folklórica Cubana*, 238-239.

variants of the cinquillo rhythm as well as the habanera rhythm. *La Gallina*, *Pasquinade*, and *Réponds-moi* also have the habanera rhythm. These rhythms provide the rhythmic drive for these works, just as the habanera rhythm did for *Bamboula*. For example, in *Danza*, op. 33, written in 1857, Gottschalk uses the habanera, tresillo, and cinquillo rhythms each at different points in the work to drive the bass line. Here his variations are almost entirely based on African-derived rhythms, including the habanera and tresillo.



Figure 43: *Danza*, mm. 22-27.

Gottschalk incorporated polyrhythm and interlocking parts into these later works as well. Gottschalk is building on African-derived concepts he first expressed in *Bamboula*.

Souvenir de la Havane, written in 1859, is saturated with the habanera rhythm, which provides a solid and consistent rhythm in the bass at the beginning.



Figure 44: *Souvenir de la Havane*, mm. 1-8.

Gottschalk again uses the pedal on the downbeats to provide a ringing bass sound, and doubles the bass line on the final eighth notes and downbeats of the measure, using the lowest register to propel the piece forward. While it is true that Gottschalk's use of the pedal sustains the harmony, his use of it on the strongest beat and in the lowest register of a work built on the African-derived habanera rhythm suggests he may also have intended to replicate the effect of the lowest drum of an African percussion ensemble. Gottschalk also juxtaposes triplets against duple figures. This same passage returns, adding a middle line that fills in between the upper treble and bass lines and creates cross rhythms.



Figure 45: *Souvenir de la Havane*, mm. 9-16.

Later Gottschalk juxtaposes the tresillo rhythm (a reduction of the habanera) in the bass against the cinquillo (a more filled-in version of the habanera) in the treble.



Figure 46: *Souvenir de la Havane*, mm. 67-74.

Again in *La Gallina (The Hen)*, *Danse cubaine*, op. 53, written in either 1863 or 1865, Gottschalk uses a consistent and rhythmically driving bass built on the habanera rhythm and variations of it, with ringing pedal on the downbeats. To this he adds additional rhythmic layers and juxtaposes duple and triple pulses. Note that the sixteenth-note triplets are similar to variations on the habanera rhythm he used earlier in *Bamboula* (see Figures 34 and 35).



Figure 47: *La Gallina (The Hen)*, *danse cubaine*, mm. 1-7.

In his later works Gottschalk continues to create complex rhythmic juxtapositions and insist his works be played with rhythmic exactness, as his before-mentioned instructions preceding *O ma charmante, épargnez-moi*, op. 44 and *Suis-moi!*, op. 45 indicate. It is noteworthy that both works contain horizontal and vertical juxtaposition of duple and triple pulses. When ideas such as juxtaposing 3 against 4 or 2 against 3 reappear in Gottschalk's later works that clearly are not predominantly European in structure, it suggests Gottschalk understood how these ratios worked in African-influenced idioms as well as in Western music.

In *Ojos criollos, danse cubaine*, op. 37, written in 1859, another work filled with repeating habanera rhythms, he juxtaposes sixteenth-note triplets against the habanera rhythm in the bass in a technically demanding passage.



Figure 48: *Ojos criollos, danse cubaine*, mm. 49-52.

Again note that Gottschalk separates these rhythmically independent yet interlocking lines by extreme vertical space on the piano. Again the bass line is doubled an octave lower on the last eighth-note and the following downbeat of each measure, suggesting that Gottschalk have felt the rhythm as it might be felt in Africa, pushing forward to the downbeat, rather than beginning there. The sixteenth-note triplets juxtaposed against the repeating habanera bass-line return in greater complexity in measure 80, and continue to the end of the work.

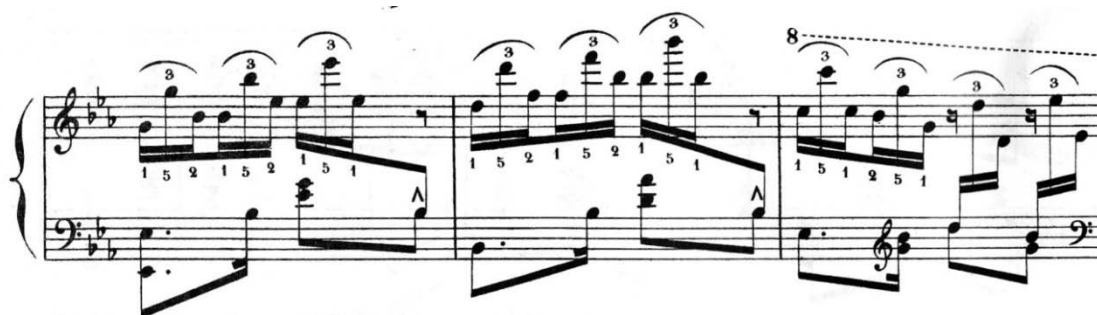


Figure 49: *Ojos criollos, danse cubaine*, mm. 80-83.

Examination of Gottschalk's later African-European hybrid works, such as his contradanzas, makes it clear that he was building on an internalized hybrid system that he had learned in his childhood, and that was already present in his earliest compositions. Gottschalk made it clear that he could blend multiple musical concepts and systems. *El Cocoyé*, op. 80, written in 1854, was an immediate crowd-pleaser for Cuban audiences. Gottschalk based the work on one of the most popular Cuban melodies of the time.⁹⁵ As Starr has noted, "The tune originated among the Afro-Cuban carnival organizations of Santiago de Cuba and was thought to have been brought there from Saint-Domingue."⁹⁶ Like *Bamboula*, the introduction of *El Cocoyé* could suggest a drumbeat in the bass line. Note that Gottschalk begins the work by juxtaposing duple and triple pulses.

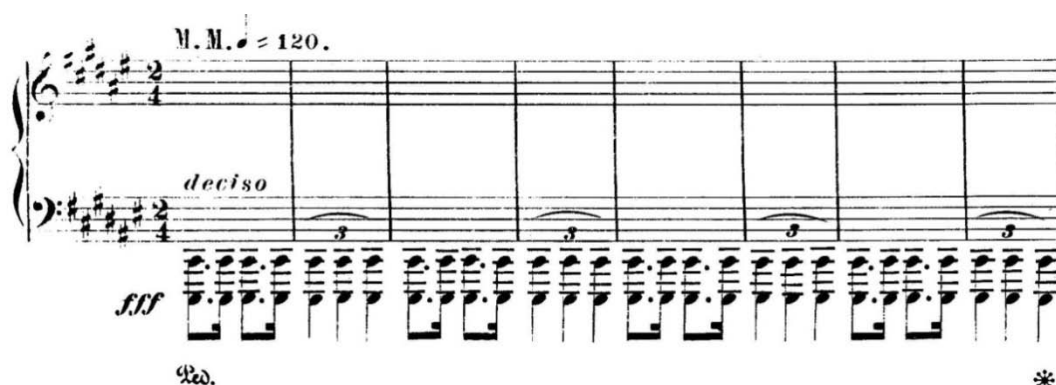


Figure 50: *El Cocoyé*, mm. 1-8.

⁹⁵ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 178.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

Starr adds that “*El Cocoyé* was a show-off piece, the kind of work Liszt might have written had he been Creole instead of Hungarian.”⁹⁷ As in his other contradanzas, Gottschalk builds on the habanera, tresillo, and cinquillo rhythms, frequently juxtaposing them against each other. Note how in measure 55 the tresillo rhythm is written as the habanera rhythm with the two middle notes tied together while the “3” written above it may indicate a triplet as in the quarter-note triplet in measure 52.



Figure 51: *El Cocoyé*, mm. 50-59.

El Cocoyé is so rhythmically complex and virtuosic that in many measures an alternate, easier version is provided above the original.

A number of Gottschalk’s Caribbean dances that likely had African influences have disappeared. Among them are additional works entitled *Danza*, and *Maria la O*, a companion piece to *El Cocoyé*. The New Orleans *Daily Picayune* stated that Gottschalk:

⁹⁷ Ibid., 185-6.

derived *Maria la O* one night from some celebrant runaway Negroes in the woods near Santiago de Cuba (whence he later also obtained the native drummers for the 1869 Havana premiere of his first symphony), and in 1854 the piece excited the critics of New Orleans far more than the famous *Bamboula* had done (Offergeld's parentheses).⁹⁸

La Nuit de tropiques

If there is any doubt about the rhythmic sound Gottschalk was trying to achieve in his compositions with African influence, his treatment of the percussion in the second movement of his first symphony, *La Nuit de tropiques*, clarifies his intentions. In the score for the second movement, Gottschalk only wrote percussion parts for bamboula, bass drum, and cymbals, although reconstructed publications of the work have included additional parts, as in Gaylen Hatton's version of the score published by Boosey and Hawkes in 1965. By scoring the work this way, Gottschalk became the first composer to include Afro-Cuban instruments in a classical composition.⁹⁹ As it is written in the score, the bamboula repeats the same two-beat rhythm throughout the entire second movement. Gottschalk wanted the sound of the oral tradition and improvisations preserved in the work's premier performance in Havana. Gottschalk could have written out more of the African drummed rhythms, yet he chose to recruit live musicians instead. Perhaps he realized the only way to get the sound he wanted was to find performers who lived the tradition and allow them to provide the percussion. Havana did not have the traditional type of sophisticated drumming ensemble Gottschalk required despite having numerous Afro-Cuban musicians. Gottschalk instead sent for an Afro-Cuban drumming ensemble, the Tumba Francesa of Santiago de Cuba, despite the fact that they were nearly five-

⁹⁸ Robert Offergeld, "On the Trail of Louis Moreau Gottschalk," *Stereo Review* 24, no.3 (1970): 82.

⁹⁹ Alejo Carpentier, *La Música en Cuba* (Pánuco, Mexico, Fondo de Cultura Economica, 1946) 202.

hundred miles away. Gottschalk had heard them play six years prior at Carnival in Santiago de Cuba.¹⁰⁰ It is doubtful that Gottschalk would have gone to the trouble of bringing the Tumba Francesa from Santiago de Cuba to Havana only to have them play one rhythm without variation on one drum. Characteristic of Gottschalk, the performance was huge and the Tumba Francesa performed with Cuba's grandest orchestra in the Teatro Tacón, the third largest theater in the world at that time.¹⁰¹

Though he does not cite the source of his information, S. Frederick Starr states that Gottschalk originally scored parts for maracas, guiros, and a great variety in size and number of Caribbean drums.¹⁰² He also states that Gottschalk gave the Tumba Francesa equal weight in the ensemble, placing their leader and his enormous drum in front of the orchestra, giving the master drummer the prominence of the conductor.¹⁰³ If this is so, Gottschalk was showing a level of musical pluralism that obliterated the racial inequality of the time.

When Spain ceded Santo Domingo (which became Saint-Domingue) to France in 1697, African-descended refugees fled to Cuba and settled in the capital of Cuba's easternmost province, Santiago de Cuba. They brought their music including African rhythms, such as the cinquillo, which would transform the contradanza. The arrival of these refugees gave Cuba for the first time a substantial civilian population. In Santiago, black musicians, because of their talent would come to play music in all parts of society. As Libby Rubin has noted, "In Santiago, Black musicians dominated the ballroom

¹⁰⁰ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 291.

¹⁰¹ Sublette, *The World That Made New Orleans*, p. 281.

¹⁰² Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 287.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 291.

orchestras and were preferred by the Creoles, for the blacks played with an accent and vitality beyond the written score.”¹⁰⁴

Tumba francesa societies began when French-speaking refugees of African descent, primarily Fon and Bantu descendents fleeing from the revolution, took up residence in Santiago de Cuba.¹⁰⁵ The tumba francesa societies were originally festivals performed on plantations. Later, they were transformed into organizations of the same name. The one from Santiago, still in existence today, is considered the most authentic. Tumba francesa societies in Cuba continue performing the eighteenth-century dances of Santo Domingo. Their music is polyrhythmic and centers around a drum of Bantu origin called the *catá*, which keeps a timeline pattern, maintaining the fundamental rhythm, and is played with sticks.¹⁰⁶

Although Gottschalk’s scoring for the bamboula in the second movement of *La Nuit des tropiques* is likely quite skeletal compared to how the work was performed at its premier in Havana, the score for the strings, winds, and brass contains at least half a dozen variations on African-derived rhythms including the habanera and cinquillo. This movement of Gottschalk’s first symphony is historically the first symphonic use of Afro-American rhythms by an American composer.¹⁰⁷

When Gottschalk went to Santiago de Cuba, it reminded him of New Orleans. The Tumba Francesa must have reminded him of Congo Square. To Gottschalk, the Tumba Francesa was an essential part of his first symphony.

¹⁰⁴ Libby Antarsh Rubin, “Gottschalk in Cuba,” (master’s thesis, Columbia University, 1974), 145.

¹⁰⁵ Maya Roy, *Cuban Music: From Son and Rumba to the Buena Vista Social Club and Timba Cubana*, trans. Denise Asfar and Gabriel Asfar (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2002), 42-46.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 42-46.

¹⁰⁷ Doyle, “Gottschalk: Nationalist Composer, Native Virtuoso,” 30.

Songs for Voice and Piano

Gottschalk composed vocal songs primarily between 1861 and 1865.¹⁰⁸ Unlike many of his piano works that quote African-derived melodies, Gottschalk's surviving vocal songs with piano accompaniment appear to be largely devoid of direct African influence. They do not contain rhythmic layers and syncopations to the degree that the Louisiana Quartet and later Caribbean piano works do. Yet certain criticisms of his vocal songs reveal that he may have been composing from an African-derived standpoint.

Noted Gottschalk scholar Richard Jackson has criticized Gottschalk's vocal songs for being overly repetitive and for misaligned textual and musical accents. Jackson is quick to point out where strong words of text coincide with weak beats in music, and how uncomfortable it is for him, the listener. He writes, "The songs are littered with weak syllables or weak words falling on strong musical beats, the situation occasionally aggravated by the musical note on which the weak textual element falls being higher than the preceding note."¹⁰⁹ Was Gottschalk trying to make the listener feel uncomfortable? Was he inept at setting text, or did he feel the music differently? Perhaps for Gottschalk, aligning weak words with strong beats, and likewise, strong words with weaker beats allowed both the text and the accompaniment to speak in the gaps left in the other part. In a way, Gottschalk was interlocking the text and the accompaniment in much the same way an African master drummer plays in the gaps left between the accents of the other players' rhythms. Likewise, it is common for vocal songs in West Africa to interlock with corresponding rhythms in the same way. Jackson further criticizes Gottschalk's use of repetition. Commenting on Gottschalk's *Ave Maria*, Jackson concludes that the piece

¹⁰⁸ Richard Jackson, ed., *The Complete Published Songs of Louis Moreau Gottschalk with a Selection of Other Songs of Mid-Nineteenth-Century America* (Newton Centre, Massachusetts: Margun Music, 1992), 1.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

is “undoubtedly too repetitious, a general Gottschalk failing.” Yet in much African and African-derived music, repetition is a key element, facilitating structure and participation. Perhaps Jackson’s discomfort could have been Gottschalk’s comfort. Gottschalk may not have been making mistakes by misaligning text or using repetition overzealously; instead, perhaps he was composing music from his own perspective, one that was deeply ingrained with African-derived tendencies. John Doyle also commented on what he considered Gottschalk’s overuse of repetition:

Among the more hackneyed figurations are the excessive use of repeated chords, repeated notes, and arpeggios in the extreme upper register of the keyboard, celeste effects now considered outmoded or in poor taste.¹¹⁰

Even when Gottschalk was not composing with African-derived melodies or trying to evoke African-derived sounds, he still may have been writing music that reflected how much the elements of African-derived music were part of him.

The Core of Gottschalk and his Compositions

African-derived rhythms and musical structures permeate many of Gottschalk’s compositions. The presence of these elements in his earliest piano works suggests that he first absorbed the sounds that he repeatedly chose to incorporate into his works during his childhood in New Orleans. Early exposure to African, African-derived, and hybrid musics led Gottschalk to appreciate and incorporate the sounds, rhythms, and structure he heard into his own works. These African-derived musical elements became “his.” Though initially his incorporation of African musical practices and processes may have been subconscious, Gottschalk later made concerted efforts to include African-derived rhythms and musical structure into his works, for example, when he incorporated the

¹¹⁰ Doyle, “The Piano Music of Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829-1869),” 119.

Tumba Francesa into the premier of his first symphony. We will never know if he tried to play a bamboula or if he even wanted to. Even if he had, it is doubtful he would have subjected the drumming to the kind of analysis over which scholars today labor. He did not need to do either to absorb what he heard and felt as a child. When Gottschalk absorbed the African-derived musics of his childhood, they became a fundamental part of who he was as a musician. Their characteristics filled his early compositions and facilitated similar structures in his later works throughout his short lifetime.

Critics could argue that the many parallels between African musics and Gottschalk's works might be coincidental. Is it possible that Gottschalk's early compositions share so much in common with African musics by accident? Gottschalk was fully immersed in a city with thriving African and African-American cultural practices during his childhood. True, his compositional ideas were his, but what "his" included musically was both African and European. African musical elements are often hidden or obscured in American music behind historically European instruments, Western notation, and Caucasian faces. Without experience in both African- and European-derived music traditions, the connection between Gottschalk and Africa is not immediately obvious. When African musical traits are hidden behind Gottschalk's white face and European instrumentation, discerning them requires looking beyond the man, his piano, and the notes on the page in order to understand fully what is happening.

Gottschalk was not trying to depict a foreign culture in his compositions. When he named *Bamboula* "*Bamboula, danse de nègres*," he was not imagining what the bamboula sounded like. His original subtitles for *Le Mancenillier, marche nègre*, and *Le Bananier, chanson nègre*, were not suggesting an artistic fabrication. He was telling his

audiences that these were what the African-derived musics of his childhood culture were like, just as he would label later Caribbean-themed works *Danse cubaine*. Gottschalk's works reflect his musical heterogeneity. The abundance of parallels between Gottschalk's music and African traditions is too great to be only a coincidence.

CHAPTER VIII

SHARED PROCESSES: PARALLELS BETWEEN HOW GOTTSCHALK LEARNED
MUSIC AND WEST- AND CENTRAL-AFRICAN ORAL TRADITIONS

Learning Processes and Practices

Part of what made Louis Moreau Gottschalk unique was his encompassing of two different yet complementary learning processes and systems. As a result of his talent and his childhood environment, Gottschalk absorbed and incorporated much of what he heard in a way that parallels the way many musicians learn through oral traditions in West and Central Africa.

In West and Central Africa, music is part of nearly all life activities. It is not just for entertainment. Ruth Stone recognizes that in many communities:

. . . performing in West Africa is like speaking one's native language. Everyone is expected to be able to sing and dance to a certain level of competence. Beyond that, talented young men and women are selected for special training. In other cases, families of musicians train children born into the lineage to carry on their parents' occupation.¹

Music was so important in the African societies from which enslaved people came that those responsible for preserving it often did so as a full-time occupation, not as a recreation, and were supported by their communities.

Gottschalk learned and absorbed many musical practices and processes by ear, much as a young musician in sub-Saharan Africa would. He based many of his compositions on the musical sounds around him, as in oral traditions. In an age predating recorded music, Gottschalk served as a vessel for capturing and reproducing what he heard, thereby helping to preserve it. His composition *The Banjo*, op. 15, has been used

¹ Ruth M. Stone, *Music in West Africa: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 18.

to reconstruct what African-American banjo playing in New Orleans in the early 1850's was like.² Of Gottschalk and this composition S. Frederick Starr writes, "he knew the traditional African-American banjo so well that his *The Banjo* is today considered a prime source of how it sounded."³ Gottschalk's depiction of the banjo's textures is remarkably detailed. Both of his pieces titled *The Banjo* (op. 15 and op. 82) are pentatonic, depict the African-American method of plucking, and the "weakened beat" method of syncopation (whereby a note is sometimes omitted on the downbeat or other beats of the measure) common in Irish jigs performed by African-American banjo players in the early nineteenth century.⁴ Gottschalk himself even acknowledged how open he was when learning about other people and their cultures. In his journal he wrote that:

To know a country—that is to say, to observe its customs, and the manners of its inhabitants—one must lay aside all preconceived opinions, forget one's own habitudes, and, above all, speak the language of the people one wishes to study.⁵

For Gottschalk this knowledge began with the diverse cultures of his childhood home. I believe that Gottschalk not only made it a point to speak and learn verbal languages as he traveled, but musical processes similar to language as well. He made an effort to play what people wanted to hear by learning local styles of music wherever he went, and then used music to reach out to and communicate with his audience. This was possible for him because as a child he was exposed to and had absorbed many of the musical components he would later encounter in his travels to Europe, the Caribbean, and Central

² Paul Ely Smith, "Gottschalk's "The Banjo," op. 15, and the Banjo in the Nineteenth Century," *Current Musicology* 50 (1992): 47-61.

³ S. Frederick Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 147.

⁴ Paul Ely Smith, 47-61; Hans Nathan, "Early Banjo Tunes and American Syncopation," *The Musical Quarterly* no. 41 (1956): 455-72.

⁵ Louis Moreau Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist*, ed. Jeanne Behrend, with a forward by Frederick Starr (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 8.

and South America. In other words, musically, he was able to interact as a “native speaker” in the music traditions of the places he visited.

Oral Tradition

In many traditional African communities, learning music happens similarly to learning spoken languages. Simha Arom summarizes how this happens in Central Africa:

Instrumental music, the use of the voice and dance, all of which, as we have just seen, involve the whole community, imply an apprenticeship and training. How then is music learnt in traditional societies in Central Africa? The answer is that one learns it just as one learns how to speak! Indeed, for the Central African child, the acquisition of the musical language peculiar to his or her own cultural community runs parallel to the acquisition of language; one could even argue that, in a certain sense, it precedes it.⁶

Musical learning thus begins with observation and immersion. When children are capable, they will begin to mimic the behaviors of those around them. Describing this second stage of learning, Arom continues:

The second stage begins when the child, able to speak and to walk, i.e., to master the movements of his body, of his legs *and of his hands*, feels the need to act, in imitation of the adults and the older children. To this end he is constantly solicited and stimulated socially.⁷ (Arom’s italics)

Thus begins the apprenticeship:

One can therefore argue that, generally speaking, apprenticeship in music among the peoples of Central Africa occurs through simple observation and imitation. Which means that those who acquire these techniques are all, to some extent, self-taught.⁸

The ability to imitate and master various musical patterns is solidified and reinforced through repetition. Arom adds:

⁶ Simha Arom, *African Polyphony and Polyrhythm: Musical Structure and Methodology*, trans. Martin Thom, Barbara Tuckett and Raymond Boyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 13-14.

⁷ Ibid., 14.

⁸ Ibid., 14-15.

Only repetition gives a rhythmic figure its meaning; without it, the as yet unformed temporal structure remains in the realm of the possible, disconnected and unmotivated, i.e., without *relevance*.⁹ (Arom's italics)

Only once a musician fully understands how his part fits into the others will he be able to move on to the final step in the learning process, that of improvisation or creativity.

Creative license only comes after one has learned the structure and rules of a certain genre or piece of music. These steps in the musical learning process are found throughout sub-Saharan Africa

Like many musicians in sub-Saharan Africa, Gottschalk was self-taught in regards to the diverse musics he would incorporate into his musical vocabulary. This ability was combined with the structure of his formal training. From an early age he was reproducing what he heard. Proof that what Gottschalk heard in his youth profoundly influenced his later works becomes especially clear when looking at Giacomo Meyerbeer's music. When he was just seven years old, Gottschalk's mother took him to a performance of Meyerbeer's opera *Robert le Diable*, and this work would have a profound effect on his childhood as well as his later musical style.¹⁰ In a memorial sketch written by Marguerite F. Aymar following Gottschalk's death we get a glimpse of just how significant Meyerbeer was to Gottschalk:

At the age of four, he sought an outlet for his wonderful inspiration, for by no other name can it be called, on the piano; and not unfrequently [*sic*] at that tender, nay, baby age, his mother would be awakened in the long, still nights, by faint, sweet melodies from below, and descend to find the child fingering the 'beautiful cold keys,' with a marvelous rapt look on his little face. The first opera he ever heard, was 'Robert le Diable;' and, upon his return from the theatre, he sat down and played all the principal airs with a miraculous exactitude. Long years after, when the child had grown to a world-famous man, he says, speaking of the death of Meyerbeer, 'I will not attempt to tell you of my grief; to understand it, you must have been habituated, like myself, from infancy, to something little

⁹ Ibid., 162.

¹⁰ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 38.

short of worship for this great genius, whose first *chef-d'œuvre*, 'Robert le Diable,' filled my early years with ineffable joy.'¹¹

Gottschalk had an uncanny ability to remember and reproduce what he heard from an early age. Of Gottschalk and *Robert le Diable* Robert Offergeld writes, "In the course of his childhood, he assimilated the complete scores of the Meyerbeer opera and Bellini's *Norma*, and is said never to have forgotten a note of either."¹² Gottschalk's amazing ability to remember Meyerbeer's works did not stop with *Robert le Diable*. Offergeld provides another example:

There is a plausible tale (Gottschalk himself does not recount it, but he was obviously its source) of his having once wagered Berlioz that he could memorize a new Meyerbeer opera in its entirety from hearing three performances. The new Meyerbeer opera was necessarily *Le Prophète*, and the year of the episode would have been 1849, when Gottschalk was twenty. After Gottschalk won the wager, playing even the opera's recitatives, Berlioz privately approached Meyerbeer's publisher to ascertain if Gottschalk had borrowed a score. On learning that such was not the case, Berlioz reportedly circulated the story himself.¹³ (Offergeld's parentheses)

Musicologist Leann F. Logsdon has also shown how Meyerbeer influenced Gottschalk's methods of harmonization, including the use of progressions by thirds, secondary dominant chords, and diminished triads. Logsdon considered the progressions by thirds key to Gottschalk's sound and emotional impact, allowing Gottschalk to easily switch between major and minor keys.¹⁴

¹¹ Quoted in Octavia Hensel, *Life and Letters of Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (Boston: Oliver Ditson and Company, 1870), 195.

¹² Robert Offergeld, "The Gottschalk Legend: Grand Fantasy for a Great Many Pianos," in *The Piano Works of Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 5 volumes, Vera Brodsky Lawrence, ed. (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), xiv.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 38.

Observation and Immersion

Alan Merriam famously wrote that in Africa, “Music . . . plays a part in all aspects of culture.”¹⁵ Musical learning is a social experience where exposure and participation are emphasized over formal teaching.¹⁶ As in many cultures, children are often first exposed to music when their mothers sing to them. In sub-Saharan Africa, mothers may even sing drum syllables to their children, which they can later tap on toy drums. They learn the rhythms and songs of their culture by playing games and learn music alongside language in the same fashion. Children must learn for themselves how to learn.¹⁷ For example, to become a flutist in the royal ensemble, not only must a Baganda child learn to play the instrument well, but he also must have been at the palace from ten or twelve years of age listening to the ensemble for several years.¹⁸ In Ghana, women wrap infants and toddlers onto their backs and carry them throughout their daily activities until the children can walk on their own. C. K. Ganyo, a Ghanaian drummer and dancer, said he “started learning the rhythms in the womb and the dances on my mother’s back.”¹⁹

Likewise, Gottschalk was immersed in music of diverse traditions in his childhood environment: his mother and her love of music, the songs of his grandmother and his nurse Sally, early lessons on the keyboard and violin, and the city of New Orleans. Research has shown that musical familiarity begins even before birth:

Inside the womb, surrounded by amniotic fluid, the fetus hears sounds. It hears the heartbeat of its mother, at times speeding up, at other times slowing down.

¹⁵ Alan P. Merriam, “African Music,” chap. 4 in *Continuity and Change in African Cultures*, ed. William R. Bascom and Melville J. Herskovits (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 50.

¹⁶ J. H. Kwabena Nketia, *The Music of Africa* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1974), 58-9.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 61-2.

¹⁹ Quoted in Mark Sunkett, *Mandiani Drum and Dance: Djimbe Performance and Black Aesthetics from Africa to the New World* (Tempe: White Cliffs Media, 1995), 63.

And the fetus hears music, as was recently discovered by Alexandra Lamont of Keele University in the UK. She found that a year after they are born, children recognize and prefer music they were exposed to in the womb. The auditory system of the fetus is fully functional about twenty weeks after conception.²⁰

Familiarity continues to develop as the infant grows, and “Young children start to show a preference for the music of their culture by age two, around the same time they begin to develop specialized speech processing.”²¹ Daniel Levitin expands on how critical it is for children to learn at an early age:

Also, our brains are developing and forming new connections at an explosive rate throughout adolescence, but this slows down substantially after our teenage years, the formative phase when our neural circuits become structured out of our experiences. This process applies to the music we hear; new music becomes assimilated within the framework of the music we were listening to during this critical period. We know that there are critical periods for acquiring new skills, such as language. If a child doesn’t learn language by the age of six or so (whether a first or a second language), the child will never learn to speak with the effortlessness that characterizes most native speakers of a language. Music and mathematics have an extended window, but not an unlimited one. If a student hasn’t had music lessons or mathematical training prior to about age twenty, he can still learn these subjects, but only with great difficulty, and it’s likely that he will never “speak” math or music like someone who learned them early. This is because of the biological course for synaptic growth. The brain’s synapses are programmed to grow for a number of years, making new connections. After that time, there is a shift toward pruning, to get rid of unneeded connections.²²

While it is still unclear how crucial it is for children to learn their culture’s music by a certain age in order to be “fluent” in it, it is clear that much musical knowledge can be absorbed, even if no conscious effort is made to do so. Levitin continues:

Our music listening creates schemas for musical genres and forms, even when we are only listening passively, and not attempting to analyze the music. By an early age, we know what the legal moves are in the music of our culture. For man, our future likes and dislikes will be a consequence of the types of cognitive schemas we formed for music through childhood listening. This isn’t meant to imply that the music we listen to as children will necessarily determine our musical tastes for

²⁰ Daniel Levitin, *This is Your Brain on Music: The Science of a Human Obsession* (New York: Dutton, 2006), 217.

²¹ Levitin, 224.

²² *Ibid.*, 227.

the rest of our lives; many people are exposed to or study music of different cultures and styles and become acculturated to them, learning their schemas as well. The point is that our early exposure is often our most profound, and becomes the foundation for further musical understanding.²³

For Gottschalk, the diverse musics of New Orleans became his musical foundation.

Imitation and Participation

Apprenticeship happens through imitation, and in Gottschalk's case, much of his musical learning happened outside his formal training as he discovered for himself as a child how to reproduce the sounds he was hearing. Not only would he quote melodies from the range of musics he encountered, but he would also absorb musical structure. In traditions with deeply rooted histories such as those in Africa, it is important for young musicians to learn first what it is that gives a particular tradition or piece of music its identity. Musicians must do this so that when they reach the point in their musical development where they begin improvising, they will realize what can and cannot change so as to preserve the tradition. Introducing too much change might create something entirely new. Nketia elaborates:

The structures used in African music represent usages which are learned through participation in musical events, passed on aurally from generation to generation, and applied, modified, and expanded by succeeding generations. They include melodic and rhythmic elements, both linear and multilinear, which permit limited improvisations to be made where appropriate.²⁴

While learning to play Ewe and Dagbamba drumming traditions in Ghana, Chernoff observed that:

When I was learning how to beat drums, I was explicitly told not to try to improvise at first; rather, I was told to learn to play a particular dance exactly as it

²³ Ibid., 240.

²⁴ Nketia, *The Music of Africa*, 111.

was played by others. Indigenous musicians also learned by imitating the styles of their seniors.²⁵

Playing music in these oral traditions, such as the drumming traditions mentioned above, requires a high degree of familiarity, which is acquired through imitation and participation. Among the Mande, “Young drummers observe older experienced players to acquire the techniques of tone production and style.”²⁶ Likewise, Gottschalk could pick up the melodies, expressive characteristics, and dance structures of many of the musics he encountered. His success in doing so is illustrated by his popularity with local populations as he traveled later in life. New Orleans gave him the opportunity to begin internalizing a wide range of musics as a child.

Repetition

As with any skill, competency in learning much African music comes from repetition, and repetition can happen simultaneously with observation and immersion. For example, if a Ghanaian musician is learning a new drumming genre, he might only play a repeated pattern on a bell for the first couple of years. During that time, as he repeats the same short rhythmic pattern hundreds, perhaps thousands, of times, he is listening to how his part fits among the other rhythmic layers. When he does move to another part, for example one of the support drums, he already understands how the part should sound, and how it should interlock with the others. This scenario can occur whether he is learning within his own community or in the context of a national dance troupe that specializes in traditions from a variety of ethnic groups. Repetition is not

²⁵ John Miller Chernoff, “The Artistic Challenge of African Music: Thoughts on the Absence of Drum Orchestras in Black American Music,” *Black Music Research Journal* 5 (1985): 3.

²⁶ Sunkett, 63-4.

something that bores this musician. Rather, repetition allows him the opportunity to explore new ways of hearing and feeling a particular phrase.

This characteristic of West- and Central-African music is not a recent development. In 1780, Abbé Guillaume-Thomas-François Raynal wrote in his *Histoire philosophique et politique, des établissements [sic] & du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* (*Philosophic and Political History of European Establishments and Commerce in the Two Indies*) that:

An idea, a thought strikes a black man, and he immediately turns it into the subject of a song. . . . Three or four words that are repeated alternatively between the singer and the chorus sometimes form the entire poem. Five or six measures are all that is heard in the song. What is curious is that the same air, which is nothing but a continual repetition of the same sounds, keeps them busy, makes them work or dance for hours; it doesn't cause for them, or even for the whites, the tedious monotony that these repetitions might cause.²⁷

Thus, repetition does not detract from the music, but enhances it. The repetition necessary for learning is an inherent trait of the music itself, thereby guaranteeing practice to those who participate. Repetition is also an inherent trait of the African-derived dance rhythms Gottschalk used in his compositions. The dance rhythms he would have heard in New Orleans would have been repetitive, facilitating his ability to learn them.

Creativity, Composition, and Improvisation

With greater freedom comes greater responsibility. How a musician improvises involves a balance between the variables of repetition and change. Chernoff elaborates:

The most important issues of improvisation, in most African musical idioms, are matters of repetition and change. . . . Within the various ways that African music is repetitive, a drummer takes his time and repeats his styles to allow an

²⁷ Translated in Ned Sublette, *The World That Made New Orleans: From Spanish Silver to Congo Square* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill books, 2008), 106.

interesting beat to continue, or a repeated rhythmic response provides a stable basis to clarify other rhythms which change. Repetition is an integral part of the music. It is necessary to bring out fully the rhythmic tension that characterizes a particular “beat,” and in this sense, repetition is the key factor which focuses the organization of the rhythms in an ensemble.²⁸

Furthermore:

In his changes, a great drummer converses with different drums and paces the audience through a rhythmic commentary which stresses and asserts the complexity of the ensemble. The drummer keeps the music moving forward fluidly, and by continually changing his accents and his beating, he thus relies on the multiplicity of *possible* ways to cut and combine the rhythms. Westerners trying to appreciate African music must always keep in mind the fact that the music is organized to be open to the rhythmic interpretation a drummer, a listener, or a dancer wishes to contribute. *The music is perhaps best considered as an arrangement of gaps where one may add a rhythm, rather than as a dense pattern or sound.* In the conflict of the rhythms, it is the space between the notes from which the dynamic tension comes, and it is the silence which constitutes the musical form as much as does the sound. It is in this sense that the small boys tapping on bottles can make more forceful music than a group of Westerners pounding on drums with all their might. Just as important as his own contribution is the time a drummer allows the other musicians to have their say, and most important, of course, the musicians leave room for a dancer.²⁹ (Sublette’s italics)

Improvisation is a characteristic of vocal music as well. Vocal songs are subject to similar rules within a given tradition. W. E. Ward wrote of this being the case in Ghana nearly a century ago:

. . . the actual notes of the melody are comparatively unimportant, provided the rhythm and the general outlines of the phrase are preserved; in fact, the melody can often be very considerably varied at the taste of the singer. The same licence [*sic*] is allowed even to the drummer and the gong-player, on whom the whole rhythm and the time (if this word is allowable in dealing with African music) of the song depend: provided they keep to the main structure of the rhythmical phrase they are at liberty to introduce at their discretion all sorts of variations and embroideries. It is even expected of a good drummer that he shall do so.³⁰

²⁸ Ibid., 111-112.

²⁹ Ibid., 113-114.

³⁰ W. E. Ward, “Music in the Gold Coast,” *The Gold Coast Review* 3, no. 2 (July-December, 1927): 204.

Although musical traditions in Africa do fluctuate with the changing needs of the community, certain structural elements and expectations have as far as we know remained stable for significant lengths of history.

Gottschalk did not have the specific rules of a particular African tradition to consider as he incorporated into his own works the rhythms and structures he heard. As a result he had more freedom in the choices he made while creating his own compositions. This freedom facilitated the blending of European and African elements that characterizes many of his works.

Accounts of Gottschalk and his life make it clear that he had an outstanding memory. In addition to his ability to remember music, as demonstrated in the scenarios involving the Meyerbeer operas discussed earlier in this chapter, his memory in general was often surprising. According to Madame Clara M. Brinkerhoff:

Gottschalk's memory was peculiar. I met him while travelling at Montreal. He joined our party at the theatre. . . Our party left Montreal the next day without seeing him. Four months afterwards, we met in New York. He began the conversation exactly where we left off, not even premising it with, 'How do you do?',³¹

A critic for the Buenos Aires *La Tribuna* reported witnessing Gottschalk look through the orchestral score of a new waltz by composer Gustave Nessler (1835-1905) and immediately sit down at the piano and play it through from memory.³² The critic added that "Without having heard Gottschalk, one cannot believe possible his feats."³³

In addition to his excellent memory, Gottschalk took it upon himself to intentionally play the music he encountered as he traveled. After listing various places he

³¹ Quoted in Hensel, *Life and Letters*, 189.

³² Bizet and Liszt were also reported to have been able to do this. See Harold C. Schonberg, *The Great Pianists: From Mozart to the Present*, revised edition (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1987), 359.

³³ Robert Murrell Stevenson, "Gottschalk in Buenos Aires," *Inter-American Music Bulletin* 74 (November 1969): 2.

visited in the Caribbean, he mentions stopping from place to place and playing the “simple ballads” of the locals.³⁴ Because New Orleans was so musically diverse, much of what Gottschalk encountered was in some way already familiar to him. Gottschalk often quoted popular American tunes, such as Stephen Foster’s “Camptown Races” in *The Banjo*. His *Bercuse (Cradle Song)* is based on the French lullaby *Fais dodo, mon bébé*.³⁵ Gottschalk was highly creative and frequently introduced quoted tunes in unexpected ways; for example, he quoted two concurrently in *Union*. Gottschalk’s imitation and quoting of operatic works is also clear. Gottschalk incorporated themes from numerous operas into his works, including themes from Méhul, Verdi, Thomas, Rossini, Donizetti, Bellini, Weber, Wagner, Gounod, Mendelssohn, and Flotow.³⁶ He would also improvise regularly at his concerts on themes from operatic arias.³⁷ As Starr has noted, “Even Gottschalk piano pieces with no obvious relation to opera reveal the influence of the romantic stage in their emphases on emotional impact at the expense of formal structure and in their overall vocal and lyric quality.”³⁸

Gottschalk’s ability to absorb and compose in the styles of music he encountered in Spain is readily accepted. Though often linked to his childhood musical environment, Gottschalk’s interest in and ability to incorporate diverse popular musical styles into his own compositions was not limited to those to which he was exposed in childhood. Gottschalk began his tour of Spain in September of 1851.³⁹ At age twenty-three, he

³⁴ Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist*, 40.

³⁵ Jeanne Behrend, “Louis Moreau Gottschalk: First American Concert-Pianist,” *Etude* (January 1957): 58.

³⁶ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 37.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 101.

began studying Spanish popular music and incorporating it into his compositions.⁴⁰ He frequented the cafes in Madrid and even improvised with local pianists.⁴¹ Gottschalk familiarized himself with Spanish dances including the *caña*, the *fandango*, the *jaleo*, and the *jota aragonesa*, which he included in his *Capricho español*. He also incorporated a *cachucha*, another Spanish dance with which he first became acquainted in New Orleans during his childhood.⁴² When in the Moorish autonomous community of Andalusia, Gottschalk took interest in the gypsies of Córdoba and their music. He incorporated what he heard into his *Chanson du gitano* (gitano means gypsy) becoming the first “western” composer to incorporate what today we would call *flamenco* into a “classical” composition.⁴³ Gottschalk also drew upon the syncopated music he heard while traveling through La Mancha. He put his impressions into his composition *Machenga*, op. 38.

The Spanish autonomous community of Aragon lies between the Basque provinces and the autonomous community of Catalonia. It is known for its regional variations of the *jota* dance. The *jota* is of unknown origins and is characterized by quick triple meter and four-measure phrases that alternate harmonically between the tonic and the dominant. Strummed chords typically accent the rhythm of the *jota* because its instrumentation consists of various sizes of guitars and *bandurrias*, a type of mandolin.⁴⁴ The *jota* is considered one of the classic Spanish dances, as compared to the flamenco, which has its roots in gypsy culture.⁴⁵ The *jota* originated as a peasants’ courtship dance for one or more couples and is characterized by a rapid tempo interspersed with abrupt

⁴⁰ S. Frederick Starr, “Louis Moreau Gottschalk: Almost Forgotten Celebrity,” *The Instrumentalist* 53 no. 56 (September 1998): 56-72. First published in *Clavier* 35, no. 8 (October 1996): 56.

⁴¹ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 104.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 107.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁴⁴ Gilbert Chase, *The Music of Spain*. 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Dover Publications, 1959), 35.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 247.

pauses.⁴⁶ Gottschalk's work *El Sitio de Zaragoza*, a symphony for ten pianos, is based on the jota and survives today only as a fragment published later as *La Jota aragonesa*. Other Spanish-flavored works Gottschalk wrote while in Spain include *Souvenirs d'Andalousie*, op. 22; *Minuit à Seville*, op. 30; and *Le Carnaval de Venise*, op. 89.

Gottschalk's unwavering tendency to pick up the local popular music wherever he went continued when he returned to the United States from Europe, and later as he travelled the Caribbean and Central and South America. S. Frederick Starr called Gottschalk

a musical populist, whose greatest contribution to the art were his many tone poems, *souvenirs*, dances, and other compositions that drew on the vernacular music of his era. These included musical references to folk themes, popular songs, and the compositions of his older contemporary Stephen Foster, as well as to the syncopated music of the Caribbean world and Louisiana.⁴⁷

While in Cuba and Puerto Rico, Gottschalk would also frequent performances of local musics, specifically the Caribbean *contradanza* and Puerto Rican *danza*.⁴⁸ Gottschalk especially incorporated these dances into works he composed during his stay in Plazuela, Puerto Rico, including the compositions *Danza*, op. 33, and *Souvenir de Porto Rico*, op. 31, subtitled *Marche des Gibaros* to refer to the local farmers. It is likely that the local music of Plazuela may have reminded Gottschalk of New Orleans. Starr has noted that "Plazuela, with its large population of enslaved people, would have been one of the best places on the island to hear rural Afro-Caribbean performers" as well as the music of the *jibaros*.⁴⁹ Gottschalk even incorporated the Puerto Rican Christmas tune *Si me dan*

⁴⁶ Ibid., 247, 252-3.

⁴⁷ S. Frederick Starr, Foreword in Louis Moreau Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist*, ed. Jeanne Behrend (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), xv.

⁴⁸ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 265.

⁴⁹ Ibid., *jibaros* is the Spanish spelling of *gibaros*.

pastels, les dénnelous calientes into his *Souvenir de Porto Rico*.⁵⁰ As discussed in Chapter VII, Gottschalk incorporated African-derived rhythms into *Souvenir de Porto Rico* as well.

Gottschalk continued to write Cuban-themed pieces as he travelled on to Matouba and Saint-Pierre. These works include *Ojos criollos*, op. 37, (labeled *Danse Cubaine*), *Souvenirs de la Havane*, op. 39, and *Réponds-moi! (Dí qui sí)*, as well as other works that have unfortunately been lost.⁵¹ Although it had been more than two years since Gottschalk had been in Cuba, he had no problem saturating his newest works with Cuban themes and rhythms, especially the habanera rhythm and cinquillo rhythm in countless variations.⁵² What is especially noticeable about these works, though, is that Gottschalk moved away from quoting melodies and directly imitating what he heard to creating his own melodies and slight rhythmic variations.⁵³ He learned the musical language so fluently that he could create his own material in the same style. What Gottschalk does not change in these works is the way the melodies relate to the rhythm, a defining structure of Caribbean dances and a structure that traces directly to Africa. Gottschalk's works do tend to be longer and contain more sections with thematic variations than those of his Latin American contemporaries.

Gottschalk would incorporate Spanish rhythms he encountered in Cuba in much the same way as he did African-derived ones. In his one-act opera, *Esceñas campestres cubanas*, he plays with the rhythm of the Cuban *zapateado*, a rural clog dance originally from Spain. Gottschalk chooses to give the *zapateado* rhythm to the clarinets and other

⁵⁰ Ibid., 266.

⁵¹ Ibid., 284.

⁵² Ibid., 283.

⁵³ Ibid., 284.

woodwinds, placing counter-rhythms in the vocal lines and other orchestral parts.⁵⁴ This is similar to how he used the African-derived rhythms in his orchestral works, often giving what originally were percussion rhythms to other instruments such as the strings or woodwinds.

Gottschalk's ability to compose in such diverse styles and to write new material in these styles that went beyond quoting melodies and rhythms shows just how deeply he was able to internalize diverse musics. Such complete internalization is only possible through familiarity, which in the case of oral traditions comes from immersion and repetition. For Gottschalk this repetition began as he heard repeatedly the local musics that surrounded him at various points in his life. It continued as he spent time with the locals and learned to play with them. His ability to do so was aided by his superb memory. His was a self-taught process that parallels the way West- and Central-African musicians frequently ascertain how to learn through oral traditions.

As Gottschalk matured as a composer, he began taking more creative freedoms. Gottschalk borrowed musical elements from the styles in which he was composing, while simultaneously introducing his own material. As Starr has noted, Gottschalk's works composed while he spent time in the French colonies of the Caribbean:

exhibit daring chord structures similar to those found in more classical compositions of the same period. Another distinction is that Gottschalk had so completely mastered the melodic language of the region that he could now free himself entirely from specific prototypes and create his own themes.⁵⁵

In his one act opera, *Esceñas campestres cubanas*, Gottschalk incorporates guiros and the *tiple*, a three-stringed Spanish folk instrument, as well as the rhythm of the Cuban *zapateado*. Gottschalk also borrows from himself, using the first theme from his *Danza*

⁵⁴ Ibid., 292.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 283-4.

(op. 33),⁵⁶ suggesting he believed it evoked the Cuban countryside. The preface to *Suis-moi* states that Gottschalk has “endeavored to reproduce . . . the characteristic traits of the Dances of the West Indias [*sic*].”⁵⁷ Adding that:

The author in this morceau (which is entirely original) has endeavored to convey an idea of the singular rythm [*sic*] and charming character, of the music which exists among the Creoles of the Spanish Antilles.⁵⁸

For *La Gallina*, Gottschalk also suggests that he “borrowed an outline from the music of the Antilles, but used his own theme.”⁵⁹

So how did Gottschalk compose his music that was based on structures where new material was typically created through improvisation? A letter Gottschalk’s father Edward wrote provides a description of how Moreau composed written music:

It is curious to see him compose. He sits at his piano and plays for a quarter of an hour, speaking with any number of persons all the time, when suddenly he gets up and puts a few notes in writing; it is a new idea that has struck him. Thus he has sheets of [notes] carefully preserved and whenever he is in the mood he works them out.⁶⁰

Therefore it appears that Gottschalk began his composition process with a spontaneous idea that came to him while playing. He then wrote down the idea to preserve it and return to it later.

Gottschalk’s musical notation consisted of his own personal shorthand. This system created a huge task for Gottschalk’s close friend, Nicolás Ruiz Espadero, who often had to resort to having the composer sit and play through works in order to get them

⁵⁶ Ibid., 292.

⁵⁷ Louis Moreau Gottschalk, *Piano Music of Louis Moreau Gottschalk: 26 Complete Pieces from Original Editions*, ed. Richard Jackson, (New York: Dover Publications, 1973), 189.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ John Doyle, “Gottschalk: Nationalist Composer, Native Virtuoso,” *Music Educators Journal* 56, no. 4 (December 1969): 30, 71.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 99.

legibly transcribed onto paper. Even with his efforts countless works were still lost.⁶¹ As Robert Offergeld has pointed out:

Gottschalk is said to have used on occasion a peculiar musical shorthand—a not unlikely measure in such periods as those, in Havana and Rio do Janeiro, when he was desperate for time and professional help. It is perhaps significant that most of the larger surviving works exist not in Gottschalk’s autograph but in copies or transcriptions—some of them, it seems evident, produced by Espadero, who also is said to have been familiar with Gottschalk’s code.⁶²

Furthermore, many of Gottschalk’s works were never written down. Espadero noted that “Indeed, the published pieces are but as a shadow of his entire creations. It was necessary to persuade him [to write them down].”⁶³ The notably introverted Espadero idolized Chopin and assigned himself the role of Gottschalk’s literary executor as Jules Fontana had done for Chopin.⁶⁴ While in Cuba between 1860 and 1862, Gottschalk had also been troubled by a sense that his career would end prematurely, a foreboding that further motivated Espadero.⁶⁵

Like many of his contemporaries, Gottschalk was known as an accomplished improviser, even taking creative liberties when performing others’ compositions. Unlike his European contemporaries, however, Gottschalk’s first exposure to improvised musics was in New Orleans where it is highly likely that many of the improvisations he heard at home and in the city were African or African-derived. Perhaps as a result, Gottschalk felt more comfortable improvising than with more formal methods of composition and notation. In a comment to comrade and fellow musician William Mason who had just performed a Schumann work, Gottschalk remarked:

⁶¹ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 298.

⁶² Robert Offergeld, *The Centennial Catalogue of the Published and Unpublished Compositions of Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (New York: Stereo Review, 1970), 7.

⁶³ William Arms Fisher, “Louis Moreau Gottschalk: The First American Pianist and Composer,” *The Musician* 13, no. 10 (October 1908), 438.

⁶⁴ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 297-8.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 298.

Mason, I do not understand why you spend so much of your time over music like that; it is stiff and labored, lacks melody, spontaneity, and naïveté. It will eventually vitiate your musical taste and bring you into an abnormal state.⁶⁶

While this quote does not shed light on Gottschalk's composition process, it does suggest that Gottschalk valued spontaneity and was not enamored with at least certain Germanic Romantic music.

Unfortunately we can never know what Gottschalk was thinking as he improvised or composed. However, if we were to take a guess, I would imagine that Jerry Coker's description of how a jazz musician improvises comes close:

What is the soloist doing when he attempts to "build"? Actually the ideal process hardly ever takes place—that is, it is hardly ever the case that a conscientious soloist plays a thinking solo for a hard-listening hearer—but when this does happen, the key process is memory. The soloist has to establish for the listener what the important POINT, the motif if you like, is, and then show as much as he can of what it is that he sees in that motif, extending the relationships of it to the basic while never giving the feeling he has forgotten it. In other words, I believe that it should be a basic principle to use repetition, rather than variety—but not too much. The listener is constantly making predictions; actual infinitesimal predictions as to whether the next event will be a repetition of something, or something different. The player is constantly either confirming or denying these predictions in the listener's mind. As nearly as we can tell (Kraehenbuehl at Yale and I), the listener must come out right about 50% of the time—if he is too successful in predicting, he will be bored; if he is too unsuccessful, he will give up and call the music "disorganized."

Thus if the player starts a repetitive pattern, the listener's attention drops away as soon as he has successfully predicted that it is going to continue. Then, if the thing keeps going, the attention curve comes back up, and the listener becomes interested in just how long the pattern *is* going to continue. Similarly, if the player never repeats anything, no matter how tremendous an imagination he has, the listener will decide that the game is not worth playing, that he is not going to be able to make *any* predictions right, and also stops listening. Too much difference is sameness: boring. Too much sameness is boring—but also different once in a while.⁶⁷ (Coker's emphasis)

⁶⁶ William Mason, *Memories of a Musical Life* (Original ed., The Century Co., 1901; New York: AMS Press, 1970), 206-7.

⁶⁷ Jerry Coker, *Improvising Jazz*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1964), 15-16.

Whatever style or dance idiom Gottschalk was following, he was most likely playing with a combination of meeting the expectations of his audiences while still including elements of surprise. As cognitive neuroscientist Michael H. Thaut explains:

Prediction and anticipation are key terms in certain theories of emotion and meaning . . . Temporary violations of expectations or predictions (e.g., in compositional structures in music) have potential and opportunity for arousal increments that are related to the search for meaningful resolutions in the process of violating expectations.⁶⁸ (Thaut's parentheses)

Like many accomplished composers, Gottschalk understood how to use the emotional process of tension and release in the fullest. Furthermore, it is likely that his first experiences of how to apply this concept successfully to music were from African-derived traditions in his home and hometown of New Orleans.

Learning Music as Language

In many parts of Africa, music is a meaningful and multifarious communication tool analogous to language. The connection between music and spoken language in much of sub-Saharan Africa is both complex and deep. Philosophically, in many of these traditions, music and language are not two separate ideas but one whole. This connection has been expressed both from a sociological perspective: "Music and dance are so closely bound together in the thinking of many West Africans that it is difficult to separate song from movement or playing the drum from speech," and from the scientific: "Stylistic traits in African music have been found to be correlated with language in Africa, at least in its broad divisions, and in many cases also with regional ethnic/linguistic relationships."⁶⁹ Gerhard Kubik observed that "African music is also closely connected

⁶⁸ Michael H. Thaut, *Rhythm, Music, and the Brain: Scientific Foundations and Clinical Applications* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 5.

⁶⁹ Stone, 15; Gerhard Kubik, *Theory of African Music*, vol. 1, (Wilhelmshaven: Florian Noetzel, 1994), 9.

with language, to an extent that it is hardly possible today to study it without the necessary background in African languages.”⁷⁰ Depending on how they are distinguished, there are between 150 and 500 Bantu languages in sub-Saharan Africa. The Bantu languages are furthermore part of the Niger-Congo language family.⁷¹ Many African languages are tonal, and as Nketia has noted, “African traditions deliberately treat songs as though they were speech utterances.”⁷² Melodies must adhere to tonal languages to be comprehensible, and even instrumentalists play as if they are talking to listeners. For example, Trevor Wiggins has noted the “close links between music and language” in studying Ghanaian drumming ensembles.⁷³

Gottschalk was socialized in multiple interrelated musical and spoken languages as a child. In New Orleans, he learned European compositions, operas, and chordal harmonies as well as African-derived melodies, rhythms, and musical structure. The vitality of African musical languages was present in the West- and Central-African musical genres which were continuing in New Orleans during Gottschalk’s childhood. Their presence guaranteed young Gottschalk the opportunity to recognize just how thorough and substantial a communicative tool music could be. Music, language and rhythm are part of sub-Saharan African societies as a whole, and this integration transferred to New Orleans. Regarding African music Agawu notes:

The vitality of this music is best understood and appreciated in the context of a larger scheme of rhythmic expression which embraces just about all aspects of West African traditional life. Musical expression (or, essentially, rhythmic

⁷⁰ Kubik, *Theory of African Music*, 9.

⁷¹ Ned Sublette, *Cuba and Its Music: From the First Drums to the Mambo* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2004), 45.

⁷² Nketia, *The Music of Africa*, 177.

⁷³ Trevor Wiggins, “Drumming in Ghana,” chap. 5 in *Composing the Music of Africa: Composition, Interpretation and Realisation*, ed. Malcolm Floyd (Brookfield, Vermont: Ashgate, 1999), 45.

expression) is not divorced from other forms of communication—speech, gesture, greetings, and dance—but derives directly from these.⁷⁴ (Agawu’s parentheses)

African societies’ saturation with rhythm has led some commentators to overemphasize drumming. Agawu comments:

Because its chief vehicle is drumming, many a commentator has concluded that West African music is synonymous with West African instrumental music. This is certainly the aspect of this music that the accounts of the early explorers . . . referred to. It has further led to the view that “African music is ultimately founded on drumming.” It is true that drumming and dancing constitute the most prevalent forms of recreation in traditional West African society, but music is founded on language, not on drumming, for unless one understands the rhythmic formations that stem from language, one misses a crucial dimension in what would appear to be a purely instrumental genre. To the West African, the idea that an instrumental genre exists outside the functional domain of words and their meanings is simply absurd.⁷⁵

It is no coincidence that Gottschalk’s first composition based on African-derived musical traditions in New Orleans was *Bamboula*, a work inspired by African drumming.

When Africans arrived in the New World, they worked out new traditions that combined elements from the various peoples represented. In the New World, music would speak languages from the old country as well as new pidgin hybrids. Musical communities grew out of new cultures. They absorbed, included, and reflected their whole environment. The results varied as much as the circumstances. Richard Cullen Rath describes:

Music bears more than a surface relationship to language. A culture’s music has a phonology of aesthetically permissible notes, a vocabulary of acceptable scales and rhythms, and a syntax of customs and rules that govern the largely unconscious ways people represent themselves through these notes, scales, and rhythms to produce what they recognize as music. These soundways are conditioned by the cultural community—in the case of settled cultures, by means

⁷⁴ V. Kofi Agawu, “The Rhythmic Structure of West African Music,” *The Journal of Musicology* 5, no. 3 (summer 1987): 43.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 414–15.

of tradition and adaptation; in the case of displaced African ethnic cultures meeting in the bonds of slavery, by means of negotiation.⁷⁶

New Orleans provided ample material and opportunity for renegotiation and regeneration.

The musical elements Gottschalk incorporated into his “Creole” compositions of the Louisiana Quartet were learned in his childhood and share parallels with the way a Creole language forms. As Richard Cullen Rath points out:

If African cultures were not destroyed, replicated, or leveled by transit to the Americas, then how can description of what happened, as exemplified by the music, be approached? Pidginization provides a key. When adults acquire a second language, they never learn it as well as a native speaker. When adults acquire a second language, they will always be recognizable as non-native speakers, given away by some slight difference in pronunciation or stress. Pidginization is the same process, but the language must be reinvented from what is available; there are no native speakers. As a result, none can ever be quite at ease with the tentative music, language, or culture of the first generation. . . . The first, or pidgin, generation had to negotiate and compromise ad hoc to reach any shared cultural understanding or sense of community. Later, creolized generations acquired this makeshift culture as native, expanding and formalizing it—making it fully their own . . . The resulting creole form elucidates the lack of explanatory power of most retentions: they are not sacrosanct traditions handed down reverently through the ages but provisional solutions that only became native when a new generation acquired them as part of a cultural first language.⁷⁷

In other words, Gottschalk acquired a truly Creole musical language to incorporate into the Louisiana Quartet that used both European and African vocabulary and suggests an African-derived musical structure. When he composed these early works, he was composing in his native language. Musically speaking, Gottschalk’s first language was an African-European hybrid. He learned the two systems as a fully-integrated whole with the fluidity of a native speaker. He could then easily adapt his native musical language to

⁷⁶ Richard Cullen Rath, *How Early America Sounded* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 72.

⁷⁷ Rath, 84-5.

others he encountered later in the Caribbean and South America that shared African and European roots.

One of Gottschalk's admirers, Frédéric Chopin emphasized the close relationship between music and language. In discussing the importance of phrasing to Chopin's style, Jonathan Bellman wrote, "Consider the rhetorical model for phrasing, a time-honored conception that depends on a verbal rather than mathematical conception of notated musical rhythms."⁷⁸ Jean Kleczyński, one of Chopin's students, agrees:

All the theory of the style which Chopin taught to his pupils rested on this analogy between music and language, on the necessity for separating the various phrases, on the necessity for pointing and for modifying the power of the voice and its rapidity of articulation. . . .

In a musical phrase composed of something like eight measures, the end of the eighth will generally mark the termination of the thought, that which, in language written or spoken, we should indicate by a full-point; here we should make a slight pause and lower the voice. The secondary divisions of this phrase of eight measures, occurring after each two or each four measures, require shorter pauses—that is to say, they require commas or semi-colons. These pauses are of great importance; without them music becomes a succession of sounds without connection, an incomprehensible chaos, as spoken language would be if no regard were paid to punctuation and the inflection of the voice.⁷⁹

Upon first hearing Gottschalk, Chopin was immediately impressed, as mentioned in Chapter II. Perhaps Chopin noted in Gottschalk's playing similarities to his own preferences, including a tendency to play music as if "speaking" to the audience.

Gottschalk would have learned to do this prior to their encounter, and therefore could not yet have been imitating Chopin although he would be influenced by him later. After becoming familiar with Chopin, Gottschalk's playing would continue to be compared to his.

⁷⁸ Jonathan Bellman, "Chopin and His Imitators: Notated Emulations of the "True Style" of Performance," *19th Century Music* 24, no. 2 (fall 2000): 152.

⁷⁹ Jean Kleczyński, *How to Play Chopin: The Works of Frederic Chopin, Their Proper Interpretation*, 6th ed., trans. Alfred Whittingham (London: William Reeves, 1913), 49-50.

Of Gottschalk's playing, a 22 December 1855 *New York Times* review would state "the instrument became vocal under his touch."⁸⁰ A reviewer for the *Detroit Daily Journal* likewise noted that Gottschalk "succeeded in imparting a peculiar singing character to his melodies."⁸¹ Another reviewer for the Cincinnati *Daily Courier* wrote on 31 March 1862 that Gottschalk "can accomplish better than any pianist living that most difficult of all feats, making the piano sing."⁸² Clearly Gottschalk was creating recognizable use of vocal qualities when he performed.

The Science of Rhythm

Modern cognitive neuroscience studies music as "a highly complex, temporally ordered and rule-based sensory language."⁸³ The study of music and the brain shows that music is "a biologically deeply ingrained function of the human brain. The brain has neural circuitry that is dedicated to music."⁸⁴ Understanding rhythm is essential to understanding how the brain processes sound.

Rhythm is the underlying element in both musical communication and perception. Rhythm is not just a part of the sound patterns contained in the music, but also an inherent part of the vibrations that make up all sounds. Rhythm provides the structure that allows for both physical and emotional responses to music. According to Thaut:

Music unfolds only in time, and the physical basis of music is based on the time patterns of physical vibrations transduced in our hearing apparatus into electrochemical information that passes through the neural relays of the auditory system to reach the brain.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 233.

⁸¹ *Detroit Daily Journal*, 7(?) January 1863, Scrapbook no. 4, Gottschalk Collection, New York Public Library.

⁸² Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 233.

⁸³ Thaut, vii.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

He adds that within this process musical sounds either happen one after another or at the same time, creating two dimensions: “sequentiality and simultaneity.”⁸⁶ Rhythm is both inherent in musical sounds and essential. Thaut elaborates:

Rhythm in music is the core element that binds simultaneity and sequentiality of sound patterns into structural organizational forms underlying what we consider musical language. In this function, rhythm assumes a critical syntactical role in communicating symbolic, as well as associative, meaning in music.⁸⁷

Rhythm is what allows participants to make logical assumptions and expectations of what will happen next. Participants’ emotional responses are often linked to whether or not their expectations are met.

Gottschalk understood that in order to please his audiences, he had to meet or exceed their expectations. He met the challenge of learning local musical styles and melodies wherever he traveled and performed. Not only was he able to compose and improvise according to the structure of the musics he encountered, he also frequently incorporated favorite melodies and nationalistic airs into his performances, leaving his audiences elated and satisfied. Polyrhythmic musical structures, such as those used in sub-Saharan Africa, and hybrids based upon their influence, such as those Gottschalk learned as his first musical language, inherently contain rhythmic patterns that build and release tension as well, as shown in Chapter VII. This characteristic, when Gottschalk employed it in his Creole and Caribbean works, merely added another level to the exuberance his audiences felt at the end of a performance.

Studies suggest that there may be a biological basis to the satisfaction musical participants feel when their rhythmic expectations are met. As Thaut has pointed out:

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 4.

Rhythm organizes time. . . . the perception of rhythm and formation of rhythm may be biologically based more on the entrainment of oscillatory circuits in the brain than on actual acts of measurement in terms of timekeepers that are often conceptualized and modeled as clocks, pulse counters, or stopwatches in the brain.⁸⁸

Furthermore:

. . . periodicities of rhythms would be determined not by the measurement of discontinuous time elements, but by categorical entrainment of interval-based time modules, coded in the neural firing rates of the auditory system and projected into other resonant brain tissue.⁸⁹

In other words, the brain is not counting rhythms in music but synchronizing with them.

As Thaut has shown, rhythm forms the foundation for musical structure, providing the organization necessary to facilitate musical languages. He adds that, “in rhythm we become aware of a comprehensive architecture of time that is communicated to us through sound in complex motion.”⁹⁰ Furthermore, “Rhythm in music translates the perception of time into a sensory language that makes time visible in complex order for our brain.”⁹¹

As shown in Chapter VII, proportions underlie the polyrhythmic layering of much sub-Saharan African music. In particular, the ratio of 2:3 can often be found not only within a single rhythmic line, but among the independent pulses of parallel rhythmic layers as well. Gottschalk also made frequent juxtapositions of duple and triple pulses within his African-influenced compositions. Thaut goes on to suggest that proportional ratios may even underlie tempo changes:

By analyzing tempo changes in live music performances of non-Western cultures, strong evidence was found that these changes occurred in proportion to each other characterized by low integer ratios. Such exact proportional tempo changes, found in very diverse musical cultures with no or little history of musical notation

⁸⁸ Ibid., 6.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 7.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 15.

⁹¹ Ibid.

across a wide geographical spread, point to the universality of behavior that in turn suggests biological factors. In parallel to Chomsky's proposal of a universal language acquisition device in the human brain, then, we may ask whether we do possess intrinsic mechanisms of categorical tempo perception that produce proportional time- or tempo-keeping. If we assume the existence of oscillatory entrainment mechanisms underlying rhythm perception, such a hypothesis may find a fairly logical biological rationale.⁹²

If it is true that Gottschalk understood how musically to make use of both proportional time and biological rhythmic entrainment, it is not likely that he would have learned these processes from his classical training where preconceived meters frequently determine the rhythmic framework. Gottschalk could have learned them, and likely did so, through his exposure to African musics which possess the necessary qualities.

Gottschalk had no way to notate his compositions other than through Western music notation. When he used polyrhythms and juxtaposed duple and triple pulses, he did so within the metrical framework of the piece. Therefore, while Gottschalk's works began to approach polyrhythmic layering, they nevertheless did not reach the level of rhythmic complexity typically found in sub-Saharan African percussion ensembles.

Gestalt psychology suggests that responses to stimuli go beyond adding together an organism's responses to each of the individuated parts of the stimulus. In other words, the whole reaction is greater than the sum of its parts. This idea has great implications for how we learn and respond to music:

The recent body of brain research shows impressively that sensory experience changes the brain. An enriched sensory environment facilitates the construction of synaptic connections and the proliferation of highly distributed networks of neuronal ensembles. Exposure, learning, and training shape and develop the complexity of the neuronal architecture, the wiring scheme of the brain, into a more and more diverse and efficient executive system. Music can play an interesting dual role in this process; on one hand, it is a part of the basic biological blueprint of the brain and, on the other hand, it is a strong environmental sensory stimulus able to influence changes in the brain. If we

⁹² Ibid., 9-10.

return briefly to the importance of temporal regulation for all our higher cognitive and motor functions, we may have very good reason to believe that rhythm in music, the element of temporal order, has a unique and profound influence on our perceptual processes related to cognition, affect, and motor function. Rhythm may enhance our brain operations through providing structure and anticipation in time. Rhythm may be one of the central processors to optimize our gestalt formation in the basic processes of learning and perception.⁹³

Rhythm may not only have facilitated Gottschalk's learning of complex musical systems and their hybrids but also helped to explain how Gottschalk's music was able to have such an impact on his audiences.

Finally, there is reason to believe that Gottschalk's exposure to African and African-derived musics which occurred during childhood was critical to his development. Research in language acquisition has suggested that there may be a critical period after which learning multiple languages becomes more challenging. The cut-off point for this critical period ranges from age five to puberty. While this critical learning hypothesis remains controversial, research has suggested changes between child and adult learning patterns.⁹⁴ Furthermore, Michael Thaut has also wondered if music may help facilitate the ordering of brain patterns during learning:

Could it be that children in all cultures, during certain phases of their development, engage spontaneously in activities during play and learning that integrate singing and moving, dancing and rhyming, because the common denominator between musical play and the basic physiology of learning is the critical component of time? In other words, does music help to create better time-ordered traces in learning and perception during development? Do we need music to provide a specific type of perceptual input and a specific type of perceptual training to the brain in order to optimize its basic information-processing capabilities? Is music a perceptual template for order in time (i.e., temporal structure and organization) that helps to shape all aspects of cognitive, affective, and motor functions?⁹⁵

⁹³ Ibid., 16-17.

⁹⁴ Una Cunningham-Andersson and Staffan Andersson, *Growing Up with Two Languages*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 57.

⁹⁵ Thaut, 35.

Research has shown that bilinguals are more creative than monolinguals. Bilingual children have a greater metalinguistic awareness, meaning that they understand language as a “system that can be analyzed or played with.”⁹⁶ Gottschalk spoke several languages including French, English, Spanish, some Italian, and some Portuguese. He also demonstrated great “musical metalinguistic” awareness.

Gottschalk also absorbed musical ideas from his European contemporaries. He considered Chopin, Thalberg, and Liszt his three biggest pianistic influences.⁹⁷ These influences were recognizable to others of the time. French pianist and teacher Antoine François Marmontel noticed the uniqueness of Gottschalk’s early compositions calling them “*un parfum special*,” but compared Gottschalk’s playing to Chopin stating that the two shared “certain melodic contours, certain undulations.”⁹⁸ Of particular note is Chopin’s concept of “rubato,” whereby Chopin would play the main melody in a very free and almost improvisatory manner with slight hesitations and accelerations, a sound likely similar to Gottschalk’s. Chopin’s student Carl Mikuli noted:

In keeping time Chopin was inexorable, and some readers will be surprised to learn that the metronome never left his piano. Even in his much maligned tempo rubato, the hand responsible for the accompaniment would keep strict time, while the other hand, singing the melody, would free the essence of the musical thought from all rhythmic fetters, either by lingering hesitantly or by eagerly anticipating the movement with a certain impatient vehemence akin to passionate speech.⁹⁹

Gottschalk would likely have first heard this type of phrasing in his own home in the way an African vocalist may similarly stretch the lead vocal line, or “call” of a song against a

⁹⁶ Kendall King and Alison Mackey, *The Bilingual Edge* (New York, Collins, 2007), 5.

⁹⁷ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 54.

⁹⁸ Schonberg, *The Great Pianists*, 219.

⁹⁹ Carl Mikuli, *Vorwort to Fr. Chopin’s Pianoforte-Werke*, edited by Mikuli, Leipzig, Kistner, [1880], 17 vols., quoted in Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher: As Seen by His Pupils*, ed. Roy Howat, trans. Naomi Shohet with Krysia Osostowicz and Roy Howat (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 49.

rhythmically exact accompaniment of clapping or percussion, and the chorus. He most likely also heard how a master drummer “stretches” the beat while improvising over a rhythmically strict accompaniment of support drums, bell, and other percussion. When Gottschalk later traveled to Europe and encountered Chopin and his playing, he was hearing a second musical system that valued a speech-like melody or lead played against a rhythmically exact accompaniment. Chopin’s rubato and the African-derived musics of Gottschalk’s childhood complemented each other, and Gottschalk was influenced by both.

Gottschalk was well aware of what his contemporaries were doing. Of Thalberg, Gottschalk would state:

The modern piano began . . . with Thalberg. He gave the instrument the stamp of his serene, majestic, and elegant talent. He brought many orchestral effects to the piano, bringing out at one time three, four, or more parts, and differentiating each of them with heretofore unknown shades of color. Inspired by the harp, he invented the so-called “arpeggio” effect, which has been so abused, and which consists of surrounding the melody with a brilliant group of notes which cover it without concealing it, like a light, transparent veil.¹⁰⁰

Marmontel placed Gottschalk among all three of his main influences, stating that Gottschalk’s

work as a composer approached Chopin’s. As a virtuoso he must be placed between Liszt and Thalberg. He obtained special sonorities. His playing, by turns nervous and of extreme delicacy, astonished and charmed.¹⁰¹

According to *The New York Times* music critic Harold Schonberg, Gottschalk

was a natural pianist who never had to practice much (when he left Stamaty at the age of seventeen he never took another lesson and never felt he needed one), was blessed with a facile technique and a special ability in repeated notes and rapid figurations. He used considerable pedal, and he exploited the upper reaches of the piano (this, too, is found in much of his music; he liked the silvery sound of rapid quasi-glissando patterns in the high treble). His tone was clear and penetrating,

¹⁰⁰ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 54.

¹⁰¹ Schonberg, *The Great Pianists*, 219.

without much sonority; he was not an “orchestral” pianist like Liszt and was more the salon type. Critics kept referring to his “silvery sound” and his “fingers of steel.” He seems to have had a good ear for delicate color effects, and his playing had charm and rhythmic vitality. Altogether he was an original, skillful and exciting pianist, able to compete on equal terms with any of the great European figures.¹⁰² (Schonberg’s parentheses)

In his day, Gottschalk had earned a place comparable to that of his European contemporaries.

The effect of the diversity of New Orleans on Gottschalk and his childhood cannot be overestimated. Beginning in his home, Gottschalk discovered how to learn musics from Europe, and West and Central Africa. Diverse musical traditions from both continents became “his” music. Gottschalk learned from social experience, exposure, and participation, just as a child could in much of Africa. He also learned pluralistically, having the chance as a child to internalize a variety of musical systems. Learning in a way that parallels how oral traditions in sub-Saharan Africa are learned allowed Gottschalk to incorporate musical processes and practices that went beyond the printed page. He could pick up new works by ear or from the printed score. As a result, Gottschalk most likely learned how to preserve the structural relationships between the melody and dance rhythms of each African-derived style he encountered as he traveled. Gottschalk’s ability to do so was already suggested in his earliest compositions, and became especially apparent as he matured as a composer. Regarding Gottschalk’s Caribbean compositions written while he spent time on the islands of Matouba and Saint-Pierre, S. Frederick Starr writes “Even though he used original material in these pieces, Gottschalk took pains to ensure that others would play them in such a way as to preserve

¹⁰² Ibid., 221.

the distinctive relation of melody and rhythm that defines all Caribbean dances.”¹⁰³

Gottschalk understood how essential rhythmical relationships were in African-European musical hybrids, an understanding he likely first absorbed in New Orleans as a child.

Gottschalk was highly creative in how he used the musical concepts he encountered. His ability to learn and expand upon the musical systems with which he interacted extended beyond how he explored the dichotomy between melodic and rhythmic relationships. He understood how music could be used to communicate because he grew up immersed in African and African-derived traditions that fully enacted this potential. Gottschalk transcended musical and cultural barriers, and interacted with diverse people wherever he went, communicating with them and absorbing their musics. He did not acknowledge an assumed barrier between popular and art music. Starr writes:

Gottschalk showed an unerring ear for the nuances that define national and regional musics. Anticipating Charles Ives by half a century, he recomposed familiar melodies into sophisticated compositions that defy the high-culture vs. popular-culture dichotomy that permeates our thinking today.¹⁰⁴

New Orleans first introduced Gottschalk to diverse musics from both Europe and Africa, which would provide the foundation for his personal “musical language.” Gottschalk learned, created, and used music to communicate in ways that parallel common practices still utilized throughout sub-Saharan Africa today.

¹⁰³ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 284.

¹⁰⁴ S. Frederick Starr, “Louis Moreau Gottschalk: Almost Forgotten Celebrity,” 56.

CHAPTER IX

PARALLELS AS EVIDENCE OF AFRICAN INFLUENCE IN GOTTSCHALK'S PERFORMANCE PRACTICES

Gottschalk's performance processes and practices often parallel those of West and Central Africa just as his musical and learning processes and practices did. Though the format of his concerts, both formal and informal, was not African and involved a clear separation between him and the audience, the way he interacted with his audience parallels African performance ideology.

Gottschalk was an entertainer. His dance pieces were first and foremost for fun. Gottschalk performed for his audiences in such a way as to encourage their interaction. He made it his goal to connect and communicate with them. He was just as much a part of the performance as his music was. As Irving Lowens pointed out in his book *Music and Musicians in Early America*, Gottschalk was "Our first matinee idol."¹

Though Gottschalk's primary ambition was to reach out, satisfy, and enliven his audiences, it is likely that at least part of his decision to be a performer was financial. As was the case for many Romantic-era musicians, Gottschalk had to rely on the public for support. Performing brought him income, publicity to attract piano students, and an audience for his compositions. Later in his life, performing would provide him with a vehicle for educating the general public about music as well.

¹ Irving Lowens, *Music and Musicians in Early America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1964), 223.

Performance Processes and Practices

In West- and Central-African musical performances, there is typically little separation between audience and performers. If some separation is required, both congregate around the edges of the performance space, allowing room in the middle for musicians and dancers. People are free to move into or out of the performance space at any time, or to leave altogether should they so choose.² Alan P. Merriam noted that:

The separation of the “artist” from the “audience” is not an African pattern—although specialists are always present, music is participative. Almost everyone can and does sing; many people play musical instruments; most people are competent in at least one type of musical expression. African music is functional on two levels—the music itself is integrated into daily life, and it is performed and enjoyed by large numbers of people within the society.³

In other words, the essential role of the African audience is active participation in the performance. The “audience” and “performers” communicate and interact. Participants assume everyone will join in. Chernoff elaborates on how deep this need to participate is for Africans:

If you play a recording of American jazz for an African friend, even though all the formal characteristics of African music are there, he may say, as he sits fidgeting in his chair, “What are we supposed to do with this?” He is expressing perhaps the most fundamental aesthetic in Africa: without participation, there is no meaning. When you ask an African friend whether or not he “understands” a certain type of music, he will say yes if he knows the dance that goes with it. The music of Africa invites us to participate in the making of a community.⁴

Gottschalk communicated with his audiences through the use of familiar tunes and rhythms. By doing so he allowed them to engage mentally in his performances. Of music, Gottschalk acknowledged:

² J. H. Kwabena Nketia, *The Music of Africa* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1974), 33-4.

³ Alan P. Merriam, “African Music,” chap. 4 in *Continuity and Change in African Cultures*, ed. William R. Bascom and Melville J. Herskovits (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 56.

⁴ John Miller Chernoff, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility: Aesthetics and Social Action in African Musical Idioms* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 23.

Music, you know, is a mirror in which, according to our mood, we see a reflection of the images that engage us most. It is a sketch that we color with our own dominant passions. Its language being comparatively undefined, it has the advantage over written poetry of imposing no boundaries upon the hearer's thought, of opening infinite spaces wherein his soul may spread its wings to rove unmanacled.⁵

Gottschalk provided his audiences with an opportunity to listen actively, and he used rhythm to encourage them to become physically engaged as well.

Dance and the Physical Aspects of African Musics

In West and Central Africa, music and dance are often inseparable. Richard Alan Waterman summarizes this fact clearly:

. . . the appreciation of African rhythms requires the development of a musical sense that . . . may be spoken of as the *metronome sense*. . . . From the point of view of the listener, it entails habits of conceiving any music as structured along a theoretical framework of beats regularly spaced in time and of co-operating in terms of overt or inhibited motor behavior with the pulses of this metric pattern whether or not the beats are expressed in actual melodic or percussion tones. Essentially . . . African music, with few exceptions is to be regarded as music for the dance, although the "dance" involved may be entirely a mental one. Since this metronomic sense is of such basic importance, it is obvious that the music is conceived and executed in terms of it; it is assumed without question or consideration to be part of the conceptual equipment of both musicians and listeners and is, in the most complete way, taken for granted. When the beat is actually sounded, it serves as a confirmation of this subjective beat. . . . The assumption by an African musician that his audience is supplying these fundamental beats permits him to elaborate his rhythms with these as a base The off-beat phrasing of accents, then, must threaten, but never quite destroy, the orientation of the listener's subjective metronome.⁶

Whether maintaining a steady beat or pulse in his or her head, or actively stepping out that beat through dance, everyone participates in the performance by providing the beat.

Listeners in Africa are active listeners. All present are part of the musical community,

⁵ Louis Moreau Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist*, ed. Jeanne Behrend, with a foreword by Frederick Starr (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 113-114.

⁶ Richard Alan Waterman, "African Influence on the Music of the Americas," in *Acculturation in the Americas: Proceedings and Selected Papers of the XXIXth International Congress of Americanists*, ed. Sol Tax (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1967), 211.

and all are “dancing,” whether internally or externally. Even musicians “dance” as they play. “African music is motional behaviour. . . . The late Daniel J. Kachamba (1947-1987), eminent guitarist from Malaŵi, once expressed it like this: ‘My fingers dance on the strings of the guitar.’ ”⁷ Olly Wilson specifies:

In sub-Saharan musical cultures body movement must be seen as an integral part of the music-making process. Although it is true that physical motion, especially as dance, frequently accompanies music in many cultures, in most instances that physical activity is extrinsic to the act of making music. That is, it is seen as something which accompanies the musical experience, something which is not absolutely necessary in order for the music to exist. In sub-Saharan cultures, conceptually, the two activities are viewed as interrelated components of the same process. The Western conceptual assumption of a division between consciously organized sound (music) and movement associated with that sound (dance) usually does not exist here. That is why in many traditional music-making situations the dancers and the musicians frequently are one and the same.⁸

Additionally, many West- and Central-African music genres and their characteristic dance steps share the same name. Thompson summarizes these ideas by saying that “The African dancer not only dances many drums. He plays many patterns.”⁹ He adds that the “Chokwe say, ‘dance all the drums in your body.’ They talk about absorbing one tasty ‘drum bit’ after another until all are digested within a strongly moving single frame.”¹⁰ Africans do not limit themselves to dancing just one rhythm with their bodies. Rather, they may reflect the rhythmic layers of the music in different centers of their bodies. Kubik recognized this stating, “There are at least two motional centres in a given African dance.”¹¹ The polyrhythms of the music translate into the dancer’s body.

⁷ Gerhard Kubik, *Theory of African Music*, vol. 1, (Wilhelmshaven: Florian Noetzel, 1994), 37.

⁸ Olly Wilson, “The Association of Movement and Music as a Manifestation of a Black Conceptual Approach to Music-Making,” chap. 1 in *More than Dancing: Essays on Afro-American Music and Musicians*, ed. Irene V. Jackson (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1985), 10-11.

⁹ Robert Farris Thompson, *African Art in Motion: Icon and Act* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), 16.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Kubik, “Theory of African Music,” 37.

These danced pulses apply to playing musical instruments as well. Although von Hornbostel emphasized how this applies to drumming, it holds true for playing other instruments as well. He writes:

African rhythm is ultimately founded on drumming. Drumming can be replaced by hand-clapping or by the xylophone; what really matters is the act of beating; and only from this point can African rhythms be understood. *Each single beating movement is again two-fold: the muscles are strained and released, the hand is lifted and dropped.* Only the second phase is stressed acoustically; but the first, inaudible one has the motor accent, as it were, which consists in the straining of the muscles. This implies an essential contrast between our rhythmic conception and the Africans'; we proceed from hearing, they from motion; we separate the two phases by a bar-line and commence the metrical unity, the bar, with the acoustically stressed time-unit; to them, the beginning of the movement, the arsis, is at the same time the beginning of the rhythmical figure; up-beats are unknown to them.¹² (von Hornbostel's italics)

What makes his statement remarkable is that von Hornbostel wrote it in 1928, when it was rare for outsiders to apply an African perspective to African music. In many West-African music and dance genres, music and dance share the same name, for example, *Mandiani* or *Kuku*. In some styles, such as *Kpanlogo* from Ghana, the music, the dancing, and the drums that musicians play all share the same name (in this case Kpanlogo).

The physical aspect of music would continue among African-derived music and African-American music in the New World. Kubik points out that "African-American music has inherited from Africa a specific approach to movement and the concept of 'music' as an integrated aural, kinetic and visual event."¹³ This has especially been reflected in the new dance styles African Americans have created to go along with each new style of African-American music.

¹² Erich Moritz von Hornbostel, *African Negro Music* (London: Oxford University Press, 1928), 52-3.

¹³ Kubik, "Theory of African Music," 20.

Gottschalk's performances were aural, kinetic, and visual as well. Many of Gottschalk's works are dance pieces in structure, and although his audiences were seated, the driving rhythms of his works had the potential to generate a kinetic response in his audiences, especially those audiences in New Orleans, the Caribbean, and Latin America who were already familiar with African-derived musics. The dance rhythms Gottschalk chose for his works are completely integrated with his melodies. They are not merely accompaniments. For example, as musicologist Gilbert Chase has pointed out, Gottschalk treats *Bamboula* as both a melody and a dance, "with a strongly marked syncopated rhythm."¹⁴ This structure parallels many African traditions. As one anonymous nineteenth-century commentator wrote, "The basis of the pure negro melody is the dance, or what passes for a dance among negroes."¹⁵ Although clearly biased, this comment nevertheless shows that the connection between African music and dance was obvious even to a cultural outsider. This connection between melody and dance rhythms is just as strong in Gottschalk's works with African influence. As discussed in Chapter VII, Gottschalk's African-influenced works follow a similar structure to sub-Saharan African dance music. Both are built on repetitive rhythms that could evoke a physical response in listeners.

In his travel journals, Gottschalk would write at length about what he believed to be the three "attributes of musical phenomena."¹⁶ First, he believed music to be a "physical agent," beyond the energizing effects of rhythm, adding that "musical sound, rhythmical or not rhythmical, influences our whole being; it quickens the pulse, slightly

¹⁴ Gilbert Chase, *America's Music: From the Pilgrims to the Present*, rev. 3rd ed. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 290.

¹⁵ *Music and Drama*, 14 April 1883, Gottschalk Collection, New York Public Library: 7.

¹⁶ Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist*, 107-111.

excites perspiration, and produces a species of voluptuous and transient irritation in our nervous system.”¹⁷ Secondly, he believed music to be a “moral agent,” explaining that:

Through the medium of the nervous system it brings the superior faculties into play; its language is that of sentiment. Moreover, the ideas that have presided over the combinations of musical art establish relations between its composers and the soul . . . Music awakens in us reminiscences, memories, associations.¹⁸

Third, Gottschalk called music a “complex agent,” believing that “It acts at the same time on life, its force, its instinct, its organism; it has a psychological action.”¹⁹

Gottschalk summarizes:

I will sum up: Music being a *physical agent*—that is to say, acting on the individual without the assistance of his intellect; a *moral agent*—that is to say, reviving his memory, exciting his imagination, developing his sentiment; and a *complex agent*—that is to say, having a psychological action upon the instinct, the organism, and the forces of man.²⁰ (Gottschalk’s italics)

It was in these ways that Gottschalk would have expected his music, like any music, to affect his audiences. Like his European contemporaries, Gottschalk placed emphasis on the emotional effects of music rather than the intellectual. Like his contemporaries in the Caribbean (and others who were from African-European hybrid traditions) Gottschalk also emphasized the physical effects of music, another likely link to his absorption of African elements during his childhood in New Orleans.

Community

In much of West and Central Africa, music cannot be separated from social context. Musical “performances” are creative experiences in which the whole

¹⁷ Ibid., 108.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 110.

²⁰ Ibid., 111.

community shares and participates.²¹ Music is typically part of any social event, and often precedes or leads up to the climax of important social events.²² These communities emphasize group musical activities rather than solo performances.²³ Chernoff shows just how deeply music saturates social frameworks in sub-Saharan Africa:

A typical musical event, with its distinctive patterns of interaction and communication, presents us with a basis for an interpretation of African social life, an interpretation modeled on Africans' own standards of order. The depth of music's integration into almost all the various aspects of African social life is an indication that music helps to provide an appropriate framework through which people may relate to each other when they pursue activities they judge to be important—or commonplace. Music is essential to life in Africa because Africans use music to mediate their involvement within a community, and a good musical performance reveals their orientation toward this crucial concern.²⁴

Gottschalk's performances went beyond those of a mere soloist. As he traveled, he made an effort to become part of the community where he would be performing and this effort translated to the stage. He often socialized with the local musicians as he familiarized himself with their musics. By getting to know the community he would be performing in, Gottschalk was able to reach out to them as he performed by playing what they enjoyed hearing. He was able to lower the invisible barrier between himself and his audience by incorporating their music into his compositions as if he was saying to them "I am one of you." For Gottschalk, this high degree of socializing was part of him at an early age. As Robert Offergeld has noted, "At eighteen, Gottschalk was in full exercise of his most lasting social habit, which was simply that of knowing everybody everywhere."²⁵

²¹ Nketia, *The Music of Africa*, 22.

²² *Ibid.*, 21, 30.

²³ *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁴ Chernoff, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility*, 154.

²⁵ Robert Offergeld, "The Gottschalk Legend: Grand Fantasy for a Great Many Pianos," in *The Piano Works of Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 5 volumes, Vera Brodsky Lawrence, ed. (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), xiv.

Gottschalk also put an emphasis on publicity from the beginning. He wanted his audiences to know who he was, and part of his motivation for doing this was no doubt financial. For example, before playing for the general public in New York City, his first goal was to meet the press and the “top” of society.²⁶ Gottschalk would inspire editor Baron Régis de Trobriand, an amateur musician who had previously met him in Paris, at a small private concert prior to his official New York debut. Trobriand then had one of his staff, Paul Aprin, write a biography of Gottschalk that was printed over three days in the *Courrier des États-Unis*.²⁷ Other early accounts of Gottschalk’s life soon followed.

For Gottschalk, the communication between himself and his audience went both ways. Gottschalk also relied on his audience to inspire him to play. Clara Brinkerhoff recalled how Gottschalk once described how he took the stage:

I never do commence till I feel at ease. I make myself deliberate, and keep my head cool. I walk in very leisurely, I salute very moderately, I begin to take off my gloves as if I had come on for that purpose. Then I glance around in hopes of seeing an inspiring face, or at least a friendly one, so that my spirit may be in consonance with the music I am going to play, even if I am not in the mood.²⁸

This is not to suggest that Gottschalk always loved the public. As pianist Richard Hoffman (1831-1909) recalled:

I have often seen him arrive at a concert in no mood for playing, and declare that he would not appear; that an excuse might be made, but that he would not play. He cared no more for the public than if he had been in a private drawing-room where he could play or not as he pleased, but a little coaxing and a final *push* would drive him onto the stage, and after a few moments the fire would kindle and he would play with all the brilliancy which was so peculiarly his own.²⁹
(Hoffman’s italics)

²⁶ S. Frederick Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 129.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 130.

²⁸ Clara Brinkerhoff, quoted in Octavia Hensel, *Life and Letters of Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (Boston: Oliver Ditson and Company, 1870), 190.

²⁹ Richard Hoffman, *Some Musical Recollections of Fifty Years* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1910), 134-5.

Hoffman also noted:

It was the fashion at that time to wear white gloves with evening dress, and his manner of taking them off, after seating himself at the piano, was often a very amusing episode. His deliberation, his perfect indifference to the waiting audience, was thoroughly manifest, as he slowly drew them off one finger at a time, bowing and smiling meanwhile to the familiar faces in the front rows. Finally disposing of them, he would manipulate his hands until they were quite limber, then preludize until his mood prompted him to begin his selection on the programme.³⁰

Gottschalk's friend and pupil, Octavia Hensel, also noted that Gottschalk's

physical strength depended much on the state of his feelings; and, when excited by society, he gave back the kind of pleasure he received. Truly musician-like, he kept to the tone that happened to be given by those around him.³¹

Gottschalk took it upon himself to make himself comfortable on stage, to connect with the audience, and by building their anticipation, to find the passion to play.

Because pianists during this time had to rely on public support rather than the aristocracy to make ends meet, they often relied on tricks to get audiences to want to come to their performances. For example, Gottschalk's contemporary, Sigismund Thalberg, developed a technique where he would play the melody of a piece with his thumbs in the middle register while surrounding it with arpeggios above and below, thus making it sound as if he were playing with three hands.³² Another pianist named Wolowski, who had been performing regularly in the United States just prior to Gottschalk's return from Europe, would play two pianos at the same time and boasted that he could play 400 notes in a measure.³³ Spanish-born pianist Isaac Albéniz (1860-1909) gained popularity by playing with his hands upside down.³⁴

³⁰ Ibid., 133-4.

³¹ Hensel, 23.

³² Harold C. Schonberg, *The Great Pianists: From Mozart to the Present*, revised edition (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1987), 183.

³³ Ibid., 227.

³⁴ Ibid., 360.

Gottschalk's desire to please his audiences as he traveled is especially apparent in a rather humorous account included in Luis Ricardo Fors' early biography of the composer. On this occasion in Barranquitas, Puerto Rico, Gottschalk would go to unusual lengths to perform for the insistent locals before moving along to his next destination. Translated here from the original Spanish by S. Frederick Starr, the scenario goes as follows:

This led, according to one account, to a bizarre adventure. The organizers eventually found an ancient piano, which Moreau himself had to tune. The only place suitable for a concert was the local inn, which at the time was monopolized by an invalid, a wealthy foreigner who chose precisely this moment to die. Since Gottschalk had to leave almost the next day, his hosts had no alternative but to organize the concert in the salon where the deceased still lay in his coffin. To hide this inconvenient presence, they built a platform over the wooden coffin and lifted the piano onto it.

The concert came off without a hitch. Gottschalk played some local tunes and dances and even introduced a new piece, *Marlborough, s'en va t'en guerre*. As he played, Gottschalk glanced several times to his feet, and each time he did so his music grew more and more sad. Suddenly, with a great crash, the entire platform collapsed, taking Gottschalk's piano down with it. The audience was thrown into pandemonium. One of the guests climbed into the rubble and announced, "He's dead!" With this, he pulled out a body—not Gottschalk's, however, but the foreigner's. Eventually the virtuoso himself climbed out of the mass of lumber, intact and smiling, amidst general relief.³⁵

Gottschalk neglects to mention this event in his journals, but if it is true, it would demonstrate his determination to perform for the local community. Gottschalk appealed to non-Latin audiences as well when need be. When he was invited to play for the German *Frohsinn* group in Uruguay, he composed several *Lieder* for them.³⁶

Gottschalk reached out to everyone he encountered. Additionally, he was not opposed to making himself and his music accessible to less accomplished players. Of Gottschalk's time in Madrid, Clyde Brockett writes "Gottschalk regularly granted these

³⁵ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 269-70.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 404.

requests to any noble amateur who wanted to play second piano with him, regardless of the level of expertise.”³⁷ Gottschalk’s support of amateur musicians also extended beyond the nobility. He published technically easier versions of his music to make it more accessible to amateur players.³⁸

Audience Participation

One of the most direct ways African music encourages participation is through call and response. In African vocal music, a leader typically sings a call to which the community responds with a chorus. Ruth Stone describes:

Music in West Africa has long been known for the call-and-response feature. That is, one performer or group of performers plays or sings first, followed by the second part, which becomes the response. This response is often performed by a chorus of singers or, more rarely, another single performer.³⁹

This design accommodates the community’s participation in the oral tradition.

Call and response also exists in the way a vocal song interlocks with its characteristic rhythm. Nketia points out that like instrumental music, vocal songs are also built over a regular pulse, and the timeline may be clapped. Cross rhythms and ratios of 2:3 pulses often occur between the clapped time line pattern and the sung melody.⁴⁰ Ruth Stone explains how the idea of call and response extends to the interlocking relationships of instrumental music in Africa as well:

The part-counterpart pattern that exists for vocal compositions also holds true for instrumentalists . . . The supporting drummer plays a steady, unvarying pattern, upon which the master drummer relies and to which he relates. This pair of drums then forms a part-counterpart relationship analogous to the epic singer and the questioner or the caller and responder. . . . The idea that drums converse is

³⁷ Clyde W. Brockett, “Gottschalk in Madrid: A Tale of Ten Pianos,” *The Musical Quarterly* 75, no.3 (autumn 1991): 281.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 291-2.

³⁹ Ruth M. Stone, *Music in West Africa: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 64.

⁴⁰ Nketia, *The Music of Africa*, 168-170.

quite a common idea that African musicians voice. They depend on another drum or several other drums and may find it difficult to play their part without other conversational partners present. They depend upon these other players to even think about their own parts.⁴¹

Call and response also happens as drum patterns “converse.”

Early travelers to African often noted the presence of call and response in music.

Mungo Park, travelling in Africa between 1795 and 1797, describes a procession of provisions he witnessed along the Senegalese River:

It was composed of about 400 men, marching in good order, with corn and ground-nuts in large calabashes on their heads. They were preceded by a strong guard of bowmen, and followed by eight musicians or singing men. As soon as they approached the town, the latter began a song, every verse of which was answered by the company, and succeeded by a few strokes on the large drums. In this manner they proceeded amidst the acclamations of the populace, till they reached the house of Tiggity Sego, where the loads were deposited; and in the evening they all assembled under the Bentang tree, and spent the night in dancing and merriment.⁴²

In their book *Narrative of Travels and Discoveries in Northern and Central Africa* published in 1826, travelers Hugh Clapperton, Dixon Denham, and Walter Oudney included what may be the earliest documented African song in clear call and response form. They heard the following example in Bornu:

Bi, kora, nama, da birkin safay:
 Ah! mi tuga yumma.
 Bokri me tugiamasso:
 Ah! mi tuga yumma.
 Manoganinka wykigani:
 Ah! mi tuga yumma.
 My daikee ya fruss undunga:
 Ah! mi tuga yumma.
 Fuda da goma baka soranko:
 Ah! mi tuga yumma.
 Kazibda goma bindiga da bia:
 Ah! mi tuga yumma.
 Gewa nagege avana do dona:

⁴¹ Stone, 74.

⁴² Mungo Park, *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1816), 80.

Ah! mi tuga yumma.
 Camaraka hamen sirkingo:
 Ah! mi tuga yumma.
 Girtho magaje wali:
 Ah! mi tuga yumma.
 Allahu Akber you do dona:
 Ah! mi tuga yumma.
 Allahu Akber you Zaramina:
 Ah! mi tuga yumma.⁴³

Translated it reads:

Give flesh to the hyenas at day-break:
 Oh! The broad spears.
 The Spear of the sultan is the broadest:
 Oh! The broad spears.
 I behold thee now—I desire to see none other.
 Oh! The broad spears.
 My horse is as tall as a high wall:
 Oh! The broad spears.
 He will fight against ten, he fears nothing:
 Oh! The broad spears.
 He has slain ten—the guns are yet behind:
 Oh! The broad spears.
 The elephant of the forest brings me what I want:
 Oh! The broad spears.
 Like unto thee—so is the sultan:
 Oh! The broad spears.
 Be brave! be brave! my friends and kinsmen:
 Oh! The broad spears.
 God is great!—To-day those I wished for are come
 Oh! The broad spears.⁴⁴

In these lyrics, the song clearly alternates lines of verse and refrain. The authors also provided this translation, demonstrating a clear interest in the cultures they were experiencing.

⁴³ Dixon Denham, *Narrative of Travels and Discoveries in Northern and Central Africa, in the Years 1822, 1823, and 1824, by Major Denham, Captain Clapperton, and the Late Doctor Oudney : Extending Across the Great Desert to the Tenth Degree of Northern Latitude, and from Kouka in Bornou, to Sackatoo, the Capital of the Fellatah Empire* (London: John Murray, 1826), 20.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

Johann David Schoepf would notice the same tendency among African-American musicians in the southern United States in 1911, writing that “The dancers, the musicians, and often even the spectators, sing alternately. Their national dances consist of wonderful leaps and a riotous bending and twisting of the body.”⁴⁵

Gottschalk’s audiences participated in his performances as well. Though the concert setting did not facilitate dancing, Gottschalk’s music and performance style demanded that listeners take an active role. Listening to music requires the listener to interpret what he or she is hearing through the filter of his or her cumulative past experiences. Gottschalk was an expert at knowing his audiences and could therefore play with their expectations and gain the results he wanted. Regarding Gottschalk’s performances, Peter J. Rabinowitz concluded that “there is an overlap between the musical and the verbal” and that “the listener’s role is active and creative.”⁴⁶ A quote from the *Home Journal* backs his conclusion: Gottschalk

is the only pianist we have yet heard, who can electrify and inflame an assembly. He produces the same sort, and the same degree of effect, as that which oratory sometimes has, in times of public commotion.⁴⁷

Gottschalk played the “call” and his audiences responded when he reached out to them. At his New York City preview the audience clapped when they felt moved to, even if it was during a piece.⁴⁸ If they had felt a need to sit quietly until the end of a piece, Gottschalk had found a way to convince them otherwise.

⁴⁵ Johann David Schoepf, *Travels in the Confederation (1783-1784)*, trans. and ed. Alfred J. Morrison (1911; reprint, New York: Bergman Publishers, 1968), 261-2.

⁴⁶ Peter J. Rabinowitz, ““With Our Own Dominant Passions”: Gottschalk, Gender, and the Power of Listening,” *19th Century Music* 16, no. 3 (spring 1993): 247.

⁴⁷ Quote reprinted in John S. Dwight, “Gottschalk,” *Dwight’s Journal of Music: A Paper of Art and Literature* 2, no. 20 (19 February 1853): 158.

⁴⁸ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 135.

At the other end of the spectrum is John Sullivan Dwight, for whom “the ideal performer would be an all-but-invisible person who merely transmits the Great Work to the audience.”⁴⁹ According to Dwight, (while praising Gottschalk’s contemporary Sigismond Thalberg), “the purity of the whole rendering” should not be “disturbed by any show of effect,” so that “the composition is before you, pure and clear . . . as a musician hears it in his mind in reading it from notes.”⁵⁰ Dwight believed performers should interpret the score in the “purest” way possible—but for Gottschalk performance was about communicating emotion and interacting with the audience, just as it is traditionally in Africa. Octavia Hensel records the audiences’ reaction to what would become Gottschalk’s final concert on November 24, 1869:

It was received with much manifestations of approval as one rarely witnesses in a life-time. When, towards the close of it, was heard the well-known strains of the national hymn, which were so beautifully interwoven with the original theme of the composition, the effect upon the audience was electrical. All sprang to their feet and the wildest enthusiasm prevailed . . .⁵¹

Gottschalk’s performances were filled with passion. Comparing Gottschalk to his contemporary and influence, Sigismond Thalberg, prima donna Clara Louise Kellogg would write:

Thalberg was marvelously perfect as to his method; but it was Gottschalk who could “play the birds off the trees and the heart out of your breast,” as the Irish say. Thalberg’s work was, if I may put it so, mental; Gottschalk’s was temperamental.⁵²

Gottschalk maintained a keen awareness of what his audiences wanted to hear, incorporating popular local melodies, local musical styles, and nationalistic references

⁴⁹ Ibid., 163.

⁵⁰ John Sullivan Dwight, “Thalberg in Boston,” *Dwight’s Journal of Music: A Paper of Art and Literature* 10, no. 15 (10 January 1857): 118.

⁵¹ Hensel, *Life and Letters*, 178.

⁵² Clara Louise Kellogg, *Memoirs of an American Prima Donna* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1913), 106.

into his music wherever he went. Even his manner of slowly removing his gloves one finger at a time after walking out on stage created strong emotions by building up anticipation, especially for female audience members. Gottschalk knew how to excite his audience. He himself suggests that many of the performance practices he became known for were intentionally used to make the audience active participants:

I am daily astonished at the rapidity with which the taste for music is developing in the United States. At the time of my first return from Europe I was constantly deploring the want of public interest for pieces purely sentimental; the public listened with indifference; in order to interest it, it became necessary to astound it; grand movements, tours de force, and noise had alone the privilege in piano music, not of pleasing, but of making it patient with it.⁵³

Furthermore, Gottschalk is also noted to have said that “The end and aim of art is to please, not to instruct or indoctrinate.”⁵⁴

The Romantic era, where musicians relied on the general public and not the aristocracy for support, created a greater need for performers to delight their audiences. Like his successful contemporaries, Gottschalk became an expert at gaining their approval. Unlike his contemporaries, however, Gottschalk would have first experienced performer and audience interaction in the very “Africanized” city of New Orleans.

Improvisation and Quoting

Many West- and Central- African musicians improvise by quoting. They quote by mimicking or replicating spoken language, proverbs, rhythms, melodies, and anything else they choose to add to the conversation they are having with those who are listening. The primary purpose for quoting was to communicate with the listener. Quoting becomes a way of gesturing to the listener and involving them in the performance by

⁵³ Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist*, 238-9.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Joseph Horowitz, *Classical Music in America: A History of its Rise and Fall* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 217.

evoking meaning. James Koetting notes that “the interlocking patterns of African drumming have been explained by noting their similarity to African conversational speech, in which the *listener* constantly interjects sounds as a way of showing that he or she is paying attention to the *speaker* [Koetting’s italics].”⁵⁵ Following intense study of West-African musical rhythmic structure, Agawu concludes that “language as an intensification of gesture, is the generator of *all* music [Agawu’s italics].”⁵⁶ Quoting is how musical communication works in Africa.

Like a master drummer, Gottschalk frequently quoted from popular material to communicate with his audiences. This technique was facilitated by the fact that Gottschalk’s composition style was, like an African master drummer’s, highly improvisatory. Gottschalk, however, had fewer restrictions in his improvisations because he was not as limited by the particular dance genre he was playing as a West- or Central-African musician would be. In improvisation, Gottschalk was free from some of the expectations of a traditional lead musician or master drummer in Africa because his audiences did not have the same expectations theirs did. When he chose an African-derived rhythm for the basis of a composition, he could break away from it without the same consequences such an action would have in an African dance genre.

Gottschalk often did not write down his improvisations. Doing so would have allowed others to steal them, and formalizing an improvisation by writing it down would detract from its inspired spontaneity. Gottschalk’s improvisations were experienced in the present moment. They could not be recreated without losing some of their essence,

⁵⁵ James Koetting, “What Do We Know About African Rhythm?” posthumously edited by Roderic Knight, *Ethnomusicology* 30, no. 1 (winter 1986): 61.

⁵⁶ V. Kofi Agawu, “The Rhythmic Structure of West African Music,” *The Journal of Musicology* 5, no. 3 (summer 1987): 418.

essence that was drawn from the immediate context in which they were created, essence that was drawn from interacting with his audiences.

Gottschalk frequently made changes to compositions he played as was typical of pianists of his day.⁵⁷ He even improvised when performing with the New York Philharmonic, freely substituting his own interpretations into Adolf Henselt's *Concerto in F Minor* (op. 16).⁵⁸ In Europe, Gottschalk quickly became known for doing things his own way also. Following a performance where Gottschalk played only his works, one reviewer commented, "He does not imitate anyone . . . his playing is neither that of Liszt nor Thalberg. It is still better—that of Gottschalk."⁵⁹ As S. Frederick Starr has noted, "Gottschalk was a great improviser and renowned for never performing his works twice in the same way. Every performance exuded a precision, rhythmic vigor, and emotional warmth that defied imitation."⁶⁰ An unidentified Chicago newspaper would also note that:

The charm of Gottschalk's playing is, that he rarely interprets the same piece twice in precisely the same manner. The main features, of course, are there; but the finer shades of sentiment and feeling depend upon the mood of the composer. We have often heard the same piece rendered by Gottschalk a second time with far more delicate tints and exquisite coloring than upon the first occasion.⁶¹

Sometimes Gottschalk had to make substitutions for glissando passages that he could not play because he had bitten his finger nails too short.⁶²

Gottschalk's tendency to improvise was so prevalent that it has created issues of how to write down his works when he did not perform them the same way twice. As a

⁵⁷ Schonberg, *The Great Pianists*, 224.

⁵⁸ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 242-3.

⁵⁹ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 98.

⁶⁰ S. Frederick Starr, "Louis Moreau Gottschalk: Almost Forgotten Celebrity," *The Instrumentalist* 53 no. 56 (September 1998): 72.

⁶¹ Unidentified Chicago newspaper, 13(?) December 1864, Scrapbook no. 4, *Gottschalk Collection*, New York: New York Public Library.

⁶² Schonberg, *The Great Pianists*, 224.

result multiple versions of some of his works have been published. For his two-piano works, it is likely that he scored the work in more than one way simply because of the wide range in abilities of his co-performers.⁶³ Starr has suggested that Gottschalk's main reason for writing down his composition was financial: "That he (Gottschalk) wrote down his compositions at all speaks more to the profitability of sheet music sales in that era than to any preference he had for formal composition over improvisation."⁶⁴

Gottschalk's preference for improvisation may have been further aided by the way he learned composition. In Paris, Gottschalk would study composition with Maledan, who would also instruct Camille Saint-Saëns. In his memoirs, Saint-Saëns describes Maledan's system of composition as:

. . . a wonderful tool with which to get to the depths of music—a light for the darkest corners. In this system the chords are not considered in and for themselves—as fifths, sixths, sevenths—but in relation to the place they occupy, and, as a result, certain things are explained which are otherwise, inexplicable.⁶⁵

Offergeld goes on to suggest that:

The liberating effect of this unorthodox approach to tonality may have had some bearing on Gottschalk's peculiar harmonic coloration, particularly its pre-Wagnerian chromatic adventurousness, as well as on his facility at improvisation.⁶⁶

Not only did Gottschalk grow up in a musical environment in New Orleans where African-derived musics that would have included improvisation were commonplace, but when Gottschalk did learn functional harmony, he learned it as an ongoing series of relationships, reinforcing music as a process.

⁶³ Robert Offergeld, "On the Trail of Louis Moreau Gottschalk," *Stereo Review* 24, no.3 (1970): 83.

⁶⁴ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 234.

⁶⁵ Offergeld, "The Gottschalk Legend," xv.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

Gottschalk's improvisatory approach to composition facilitated his ability to use quoting to communicate to his audiences. As already discussed in Chapter VII, Gottschalk filled his early Creole compositions with quotes from popular African-derived melodies. He incorporated them over African-derived and influenced rhythmic structure just as an African master drummer can incorporate a proverb spoken in a tonal language over a rhythmic timeline pattern. Gottschalk paralleled musically how improvised quoting happens in sub-Saharan Africa. He continued to incorporate local dance rhythms and quote familiar melodies as he traveled. Also like an African master drummer, Gottschalk used quoting to incorporate familiar melodies and rhythms his audiences knew. Local dance rhythms could excite them and nationalistic airs could fill them with pride. Gottschalk "talked" to his audiences as he played. Even when performing his compositions, Gottschalk's style was improvisatory. He could break away from his compositional "plan" at the slightest whim, such as when he burst into *God Save the Queen* in the middle of another composition in order to wake a British Major in the audience whom he had noticed was sleeping.⁶⁷

The Importance of the Sound

The sound of his playing was very important to Gottschalk. Regarding his choice of pianos, Gottschalk writes:

I play Chickering's, not because all others are bad, but because I like their tone, fine and delicate, tender and poetic, because I can obtain, in the modifications of their sound, tints more varied than those of other instruments. The sound is in the execution of the pianist what colors are in painting. We often see fine pictures admirably drawn that nevertheless appear cold to us. They are wanting in color. Many pianists whose thundering execution astonishes us still do not move us; they are ignorant of sound. Drawing and execution are acquired by labor. Color

⁶⁷ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 287.

and sound are born in us, and are the outward expressions of our sensibility and of our souls.⁶⁸

Chickering pianos were especially well suited to Gottschalk's compositions and performance style. They allowed him to maintain a solid and strong bass line, and clear rhythmic exactness in all voices:

Gottschalk was the last great exponent of the French school systematized by Professor Frederic Kalkbrenner of the Paris Conservatoire. This style, epitomized by Chopin himself, called for lightness, clean articulation, and a minimum of sustaining pedal, even in fortissimo passages. The Pleyel, Erard, and American Chickering pianos favored by Gottschalk all had triple-stringing in the bass. This facilitated a strong left hand but allowed the right hand to remain crisp at all tempos. This crispness and clarity coexisted with Gottschalk's generous use of rubato, in which he followed Chopin's lead.

By contrast, in the syncopated works Gottschalk played the eighth-note and dotted-quarter note figures with absolute precision, just as Scott Joplin later specified for his rags. As he performed these works, Gottschalk's left hand is said to have worked with strict metrical regularity, again as in later ragtime.⁶⁹

Gottschalk's insistence on having an instrument that would facilitate his desired sound is not unlike a master drummer who carefully selects and tunes his instrument, desiring a skin or head that can produce a clarity of tones and pitches as varied as the tonal language he imitates. Richard Crawford has also noted that "Gottschalk's belief in the primacy of sound distanced him from the outlook he called Germanic."⁷⁰ Gottschalk's emphasis on sound quality to provide clarity parallels that of professional West- and Central-African musicians.

Self-renewing Energy

Joseph Roach has noted that one fundamental characteristic of African-American performances, which is especially prevalent in the performances that saturate New

⁶⁸ Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist*, 244.

⁶⁹ Starr, "Louis Moreau Gottschalk: Almost Forgotten Celebrity," 70.

⁷⁰ Richard Crawford, *America's Musical Life: A History*, (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2001), 342.

Orleans, is a “self-renewing energy.”⁷¹ This same energy has been noted in West Africa where dancers appear not to tire and drummers acknowledge getting their energy from the drum. Gottschalk appears to have embodied this same energy while performing. He passed this energy on to his audiences. As a result, the present moment was of utmost importance in Gottschalk’s music, and when he was no longer alive to play his compositions they became part of the past and fell out of fashion.

Growing up in New Orleans Gottschalk would have heard African drumming, which can carry for miles outside. He would have heard how a lead drummer creates musical tension by stretching the beat, playing syncopations and filling in the spaces between the other musicians’ repeating patterns. He would have felt how this process of musical tension gradually built up and released, and while he did not play an African drum, he had the opportunity to take his knowledge of this emotional process and apply it to his own music and his interactions with his audiences. Gottschalk himself wrote that, “Music is a thing eminently sensuous. Certain combinations move us, not because they are ingenious, but because they move our nervous system in a certain way.”⁷²

Gottschalk would also come to embody the idea of grace under pressure, described as “coolness” among musicians and dancers in West Africa. Despite the hardships of his life, he would take the stage with considerable poise and with deliberation. Taking his seat at the piano, he would remove his white gloves one finger at a time while as the audience’s anticipation built. As the performance progressed, he

⁷¹ Joseph Roach, “Deep Skin: Reconstructing Congo Square,” chap. 5 in *African American Performance and Theater History*, ed. Harry J. Elam, Jr. and Davie Krasner (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 101.

⁷² Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist*, 75.

would breeze through virtuosic passages and brisk runs into the extreme high register of the piano, as if he could do so in his sleep.

Because of his New Orleans roots, Gottschalk would forever be attuned to popular dances wherever he traveled. His understanding of the potential for music to communicate allowed him to create a performance environment that in many ways paralleled traditional African performance spaces. Even Gottschalk's harshest critic, John S. Dwight, had to admit that "It is, then awarding no insignificant success to Mr. Gottschalk to say that he was able to break down the frigid barrier which has of late arisen between pianists and their audiences."⁷³ Gottschalk used music to connect with his listeners.

⁷³ John S. Dwight, "Mr. Gottschalk's Concert," *Dwight's Journal of Music: A Paper of Art and Literature* 2, no. 19 (12 February 1853): 154.

CHAPTER X

SIMILARITIES AND REACTIONS

Evidence of the presence of African influence in Gottschalk's works is reinforced by the similarities between his compositions and other examples of African-European hybrid musical styles. Furthermore, people's reactions to Gottschalk's music as he traveled help us to know how they compared his works with other contemporary music.

Parallels between Gottschalk's Music and African-European Hybrid Musics in the Caribbean and Latin America

In the Caribbean and South America, African and European musical traditions existed side by side much as they did in New Orleans, eventually evolving into a variety of hybrid genres that parallel Gottschalk's works. Due to circumstances in most of the United States, however, African musical traditions were incorporated into new styles. Some of these new styles are also structurally similar to Gottschalk's compositions. Though the mixing of musical traditions happened differently in former British colonies than it did in former French, Spanish, and Portuguese colonies, the musical end results share characteristics with each other and with Gottschalk's music. These commonalities are a direct result of their shared African and European musical roots.

In much of the Caribbean and Latin America, enslaved people were able to continue musical and cultural practices from Africa, while simultaneously being introduced to various musical traditions from Europe. In places under Spanish and Portuguese control, blending began early, as Richard Alan Waterman notes:

The fact that the music of Spain and Portugal had already, over a period of several generations before the beginning of the slave trade with the Americas, been influenced by African musical traits imported along with West African slaves,

was something that gave Euro-African musical syncretization in Latin America a head start, so to speak.¹

Enslaved Africans and colonists in the Caribbean and Latin America came from the same cultural groups as those who were brought to New Orleans. As a result, they shared similar experiences and musical material. While regional styles vary from one place to another, the resulting musical hybrids have similarities.

Circumstances in the Caribbean facilitated the survival of African musical elements more than those in the United States. Dana Epstein elaborates:

The cultural heritage brought from Africa, common to the slaves both on the mainland and in the islands, met with less overt opposition in the islands and so was able to maintain itself freely and for a longer time. The conditions in the islands which were conducive to the preservation of African cultural patterns included absentee landowning, with an accompanying lack of interest in the leisure activities of the slaves; frequent influxes of new arrivals from Africa; and a very high proportion of blacks to whites, ranging from 5:1 to 25:1. The blacks on the mainland, relatively fewer in number and dispersed among a much larger white population, did not all come directly from Africa; slaves already “seasoned” in the West Indies were considered more desirable, since they could already understand some English or French and had become accustomed to plantation labor.²

Like early New Orleans, the Caribbean was heavily populated with Africans. Also like New Orleans, enslaved Africans in non-British colonies were more likely to establish and preserve family ties. In Spanish colonies, it was illegal to break up a family when enslaved people were sold. In British colonies, on the contrary, splitting apart families was common practice. In non-British colonies enslaved people also had the right under laws of manumission to buy their freedom. They earned money working on Sundays and

¹ Richard Alan Waterman, “African Influence on the Music of the Americas,” in *Acculturation in the Americas: Proceedings and Selected Papers of the XXIXth International Congress of Americanists*, ed. Sol Tax (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1967) 209-210.

² Dena J. Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War*, 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 24.

holidays, and if they could produce the designated amount, were by law free.³ This practice allowed for the growth of a non-enslaved, African-descended, culture.

Musical traditions were one of the central cultural elements retained by Africans and their descendents in the Caribbean and South America. Richard Alan Waterman identifies five basic “traits” of African music: the metronome sense, dominance of percussion, polymeter, off-beat phrasing of melodic accents, and overlapping call and response patterns. He then elaborates on their survival in music cultures of the Caribbean and South America:

In the Negro population of Brazil all traits of African music have been retained, and many songs are sung in West African languages. Negro songs of Dutch Guiana exhibit all the listed traits of West African music; they are, however, sung in a creolized language compounded, for the most part, of English vocabulary and West African phonetics and grammar. In Haiti, songs of the *Vodun* cult show all traits of African music, as do many secular songs. In Jamaica, both sacred and secular music of the Negroes of the Port Morant district frequently show the five “basic” African traits. Found here also is the use of a large African vocabulary, both in songs and in actual conversation. Negro music of the Island of Trinidad ranges from the religious songs of the Shango cult of Port-of-Spain, conceived in purely African style, through the various urban secular styles, including the “calypso,” in which all the basic African traits are to be observed, to the “reels,” “quadrilles,” “bongos,” and “beles” of the rural districts, in which European and African traits are commingled, although all the basic African traits are likely to appear. Most of the folk music of Puerto Rico is derived from Spain, although the style called “la bomba” is of purely African conception, while the popular urban Negro style, the *plena* (Puerto Rican equivalent of the calypso) sometimes shows all the African traits. Percussion instruments of African origin are used in connection with all the above styles.⁴ (Waterman’s parentheses)

Where African instruments and languages are retained, African influence is clear. This influence can become blurry during hybridization as some elements are replaced by European or entirely new components. Regarding the influence of African music during the slave trade and later, renowned Afro-Cuban music scholar Fernando Ortiz writes:

³ John Rublowsky, *Black Music in America* (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1971), 54.

⁴ Waterman, 215-216.

A curious phenomenon occurs whose consideration is indispensable to appreciating duly the influence, then and later, of black drums. The musical transcendence of blacks in the musical cultures and theaters of the whites manifests itself preferentially by the penetration and dissemination of the characteristic rhythms of their drums, but not by the adoption of those drums, except for those of military character. This social phenomenon in Europe has hidden much of the reality of African influence . . . and the invasion of the rhythms, which then penetrated the whites' music, has remained in large part unexplained.⁵

This same phenomenon has also hidden African influence in American music.

By the time Gottschalk toured the Caribbean and South America, African-European music hybrids were already well established, due in large part to cabildos. The *Sociedades de Tumba Francesa* played a key role in such developments. While some cabildos only admitted enslaved people of the same ethnic background, the Tumba Francesa societies admitted enslaved people from any ethnic group, thereby leading to the development of hybridized African musics. These developments were especially prominent on the eastern side of Cuba, particularly in Santiago de Cuba.⁶ Olavo Rodriguez notes that when hybrid music occurred in Cuba, it grew to include new material:

The historical development of the music of the *Sociedades de Tumba Francesa* in Cuba reveals that this music was not brought over from Africa, but generated within the Cuban context. It is also evident that while this music does contain discernible events and elements whose direct antecedents are to be found among the different African ethnic groups that participated in the development of the *Tumba Francesa*, as well as easily discernible elements of the musical culture of the French aristocracy of the times, it also contains elements that belong to none of the antecedents as these appeared at a later stage.⁷

⁵ Quote translated in Ned Sublette, *Cuba and Its Music: From the First Drums to the Mambo* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2004), 83.

⁶ Olavo Alén Rodríguez, "The Afro-French Settlement and the Legacy of Its Music to the Cuban People," in *Music and Black Ethnicity: The Caribbean and South America*, ed. Gerard Béhague (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1994), 110-112.

⁷ Ibid., 117.

As a result, a hybrid genre of Afro-Cuban or Afro-Caribbean music developed. It should also be noted here that in Tumba Francesa ensembles, the largest and lowest drum, the *premier*, provides virtuosic improvisations while the smaller, higher-pitched drums, the *segón* and *bulá*, typically play repetitive rhythms. The *segón* sometimes changes in response to the *premier*. In Cuban popular musics, these roles reverse, with the higher-pitched layers providing the improvisation and the lower voices providing accompaniment. Rodríguez suggests this is the result of the application of European musical models where the lower register accompanies the upper.⁸ In New Orleans, the historically established voicings of the Senegambian traditions, as well as those of the Kongolese and European traditions, would parallel those of the evolving African-European hybrids in Cuba.

When Gottschalk met the musicians of the Tumba Francesa in Cuba, musically, he could already relate. The group played melodies from popular European-derived dances such as contradanzas, quadrilles, and polkas, over African-derived rhythms like the *cinquillo*. Upon meeting these musicians, Gottschalk had found people who shared his musical roots.⁹

In Cuban piano music, Afro-Cuban syncopations first appeared in the popular Cuban dance genre, the *contradanza*, which developed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.¹⁰ It is the earliest Afro-Cuban dance genre to emphasize Afro-Cuban syncopations, and later popular Cuban dance styles would develop out of it

⁸ Ibid., 114-116.

⁹ S. Frederick Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 188-9.

¹⁰ See the works of Manuel Saumell, (1817-1870), the “father of the contradanza,” or Ignacio Cervantes, (1847-1905).

including the *danza*, the *habanera*, and the *danzón*.¹¹ Specifically, the contradanza was built on what would become known as the *habanera* rhythm and its variants. These same African-derived syncopations are found in hybrid genres in the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Puerto Rico, and Mexico among other countries.¹²

Gottschalk's *Bamboula* has been called a contradanza, and like a contradanza, it is built in interlocking rhythmic layers over the habanera rhythm. However, it is not likely that Gottschalk intended to compose a contradanza when he wrote it. Even if Gottschalk heard contradanzas in his childhood, he does not choose to call *Bamboula* a contradanza, but instead names it for the sound he is trying to invoke, that of the African bamboula drum. When Gottschalk first traveled to Cuba in 1854, he was formally introduced to the contradanza by Cuban composer and musician Manuel Saumell.¹³ It was not until Gottschalk spent time in Cuba that he began calling his works "danza" or "contradanza." Even *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* demonstrates how *Bamboula* could be heard as a contradanza:

Bamboula, with its bold syncopations, draws on West Indian songs that Gottschalk had assimilated at home from his Bruslé grandmother and her slave Sally, both from St. Domingue; this was the first of many works in which he transformed West Indian (Haitian and Cuban) *contradanzas* into compositions that prefigured ragtime.¹⁴ (Lowens' and Starr's parentheses)

Here is acknowledgement of just how similar one of Gottschalk's early works, Cuban contradanzas, and ragtime can sound. Manuel Saumell's works are also acknowledged to

¹¹ Gerard Béhague, *Music in Latin America: An Introduction* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1979), 100.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 184-5.

¹⁴ Irving Lowens and S. Frederick Starr, "Gottschalk, Louis Moreau," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed. vol. 10, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 2001), 200.

anticipate ragtime.¹⁵ What *Bamboula* and contradanzas share are their roots. The musical elements of both trace to Saint-Domingue and to Africa. Gottschalk composed works later that he actually called contradanzas, for example, *Ojos criollos*, op. 37.

Parallels between Gottschalk's Music and African-American Musics in the United States

The retention of African musical elements in the United States happened primarily through the reworking of these elements into new African-European hybrid styles of music. Gottschalk's use of syncopated rhythms, as a result of his exposure to African-derived musics, would foreshadow later developments in ragtime and jazz, styles that also share a connection to Africa. Nowhere is the hybrid of European and African cultures in the United States more obvious than in music. In order to understand how Gottschalk's music shares commonalities with many African-American musics in the United States, we must first take note of how African musical elements fared in the United States outside New Orleans.

Because drums were used in revolts like the Stono Rebellion near Charleston, South Carolina, in 1739, and because of the concerns of evangelical fundamentalists, in much of the southern United States enslaved people were prohibited from having "drums, horns, or other loud instruments which may call together or give sign or notice to one another."¹⁶ Religion also played a role in the suppression of African cultural practices. Christian Anglo-Americans found African spiritual practices to be at best pagan and at worst demonic. Because music and dance are integrally linked to African spirituality,

¹⁵ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 184-5.

¹⁶ Michael T. Coolen, "Senegambian Influences on Afro-American Culture," *Black Music Research Journal* 11, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 9-10.

they suffered the same consequence. As a result, “. . . other types of instruments took over from the drum orchestra in providing rhythmic drive.”¹⁷

Despite the hardships imposed on enslaved people, African musical concepts would survive. Gerhard Kubik describes how cultural heritage can be transmitted unconsciously through generations:

In a time of slavery and oppression, some specific cultural traits may be forced to disappear among their carriers. They do not really disappear. They only *retreat* to a safer area of the human psyche. For example, if you prosecute drumming in an African community and even burn all the drums of the people, what will happen? The drums will perhaps really disappear and the drum patterns will not be sounded again, but they will still remain—in a silent shape. The drum patterns will just retreat into the *body* of the people. And there inside they will remain like on micro-film. This has nothing to do with genetics, because the transmission is cultural, through human interaction. The drum patterns will be transformed into a set of *motional behaviour*; they will go back to their source. In this form they will continue to be transmitted from mothers and grandmothers to their children, from father to son during work, non-verbally, as an *awareness* of a style of moving. When a favourable moment in history comes, the drum patterns surface again, perhaps on some other instruments. Some young people suddenly “invent” something new.¹⁸ (Kubik’s italics)

Fortunately, there were opportunities for African musical traits to continue on plantations where they did not have to remain entirely silent. African rhythms and dance steps were transformed into new styles as time passed.

Africans on plantations retained some African cultural elements. Those who worked in the field lived closely together and continued African-derived practices when released from work on holidays. Newly arrived enslaved Africans reinforced the influence Africa continued to have as African-European hybrids emerged. While drumming was forbidden, enslaved people began playing European-derived instruments

¹⁷ John Miller Chernoff, “The Artistic Challenge of African Music: Thoughts on the Absence of Drum Orchestras in Black American Music,” *Black Music Research Journal* 5 (1985): 3.

¹⁸ Gerhard Kubik, *Angolan Traits in Black Music, Games and Dances of Brazil: A Study of African Cultural Extensions Overseas* (Lisboa: Junta de Investigações Científicas do Ultramar, 1979), 49-50.

and melodies while incorporating aspects of their own aesthetics and musical preferences. Furthermore, their owners were far more concerned with the productivity of enslaved people's work than with African Americans' cultural activities such as music and religion.¹⁹ As Portia Maultsby has mentioned,

Many slaves were allowed to conduct their own religious services during the latter half of the eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth centuries. When unsupervised by whites, they defied all rules, standards, and structures established by the various denominations and sects. . . . In the absence of whites, Blacks freely reinterpreted songs taught to them by missionaries and made them conform to their own musical aesthetics.²⁰

Circumstances such as these helped new musics to grow.

Black musicians were a central part of plantation life in the South, so much so that blackface white performers in minstrel shows imitated them through stereotypes. Yet the "authentic" African-American performers eventually replaced the white, still acting out the same stereotypes. As American popular culture grew to accept black performers, the doors were opened for true (not stereotypical) African-American musical styles such as ragtime and jazz to emerge.²¹ Ragtime music served as the accompaniment to a slave dance called the cakewalk that was popular on plantations.²² Ragtime became immensely popular beginning in the late 1890's; Scott Joplin's *Maple Leaf Rag* was published in 1899. In the syncopated melodic lines of ragtime, notes are "shifted" off the beat (the result of a tie or dotted note) just as they were in the banjo music that

¹⁹ Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1941), 131-8.

²⁰ Portia K. Maultsby, "West African Influences and Retentions in U.S. Black Music: A Sociocultural Study," chap. 2 in *More than Dancing: Essays on Afro-American Music and Musicians*, ed. Irene V. Jackson (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1985), 32.

²¹ Rublowsky, 114-115.

²² Eileen Southern, "New Needs and New Directions: Needs for Research in Black American Music" *College Music Symposium* 13 (fall 1974): 44.

accompanied minstrel shows or plantation dances.²³ Even prior to the emergence of ragtime in the nineteenth century, “ragging” a tune came to mean shifting it from straight to syncopated. Ragtime’s popularity showed the strong public appeal for genuine African-derived musics.

Prior to the Civil War, Louisiana had the largest slave plantations. Consequently, that state would have the most enslaved people fight in the Civil War and formerly enslaved people migrated en masse from Louisiana north along the Mississippi River following reconstruction. Migrants carried with them a proud and firmly established Afro-Creole culture that they would spread throughout the United States and eventually the world. African-American musicians also traveled up the Mississippi River performing on showboats, in minstrel shows, in choirs, and in marching brass bands. Prior to the advent of the recording industry, traveling musicians spread favorite tunes from place to place. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, ragtime and jazz were emerging from the south, especially from New Orleans.

Music was considered an acceptable skill for enslaved people and their descendants. Listings of enslaved people for sale often included their musical abilities, as musical talent increased their monetary worth. Enslaved people were even sold with their instruments.²⁴ As Olly Wilson has noted, during slavery and after the Civil War, African-American musicians were:

sought out for their peculiar ways of performing, especially for performing music for the dance. What this suggests is that the slave dance-musicians performed differently than their white counterparts, that they approached the instruments with a certain stylistic bias. I would suggest that this stylistic bias was a percussive polyrhythmic manner of playing which was part of their West African

²³ Peter Gammond, *Scott Joplin and the Ragtime Era* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1975), 20-21.

²⁴ Bill Wyman, with Richard Havers, *Bill Wyman’s Blues Odyssey* (New York: DK Publishing, Inc., 2001), 36-7.

tradition, that they adapted the European instruments and the English jigs that they probably played to an essentially African way of doing things. The adaptation of European instruments, from the violin to the electronic organ, has been a continuing process in the history of Afro-American music. It is well known that the performance technique a black jazz musician uses is not the same as that of his white symphonic counterpart and that this distinct manner of playing an instrument as if it were an extension of the voice has been a unique Afro-American feature throughout the history of black-American music.²⁵

After emancipation many African Americans turned to music, an area where it was permissible for them to excel, as a way of making a living.

Historically, the culture of New Orleans has been fundamental in the creation and shaping of numerous American music styles from ragtime and jazz to rock and roll and funk. In New Orleans black musicians continued to play African drumming traditions while simultaneously learning to play any European-style instruments they could obtain. New Orleans was a center for the manufacturing of wind instruments. Therefore, they were plentiful and inexpensive, making them very accessible to black musicians and facilitating the growth and popularity of black bands. Like their African ancestors, black musicians tended to play music by ear. Just prior to the beginning of the twentieth century a new generation of African-American musicians was emerging. They were born in the United States and grew up outside of the confines of slavery while still immersed in African cultural retentions. These musicians, and even most of their parents, did not remember Africa. Yet, this new generation took the ideas of Africa and transformed them into new popular forms.²⁶ African elements and processes continue to be reinterpreted.

²⁵ Olly Wilson, "The Significance of the Relationship between Afro-American Music and West African Music," *The Black Perspective in Music* 2, no. 1 (spring, 1974): 15.

²⁶ Janet Podell, ed., *Rock Music in America* (New York: The H. W. Wilson Company, 1987), 10.

Numerous researchers have already established multiple links between African and African-American music genres. Ghanaian ethnomusicologist J. H. Kwabena Nketia writes:

The creative role of African roots in the music of the Americas is most evident in musical expressions whose social and functional orientation are similar to those associated with traditional African music on the African continent: that is, music to which a large body of people are able to relate, whether performed by solo artists, small bands of professional, semi-professional or non-professional groups; music that provides a basis for the sharing of artistic and social values, whether performed in the village square, the streets, night clubs or ball room, during Carnival or a traditional African type of festival or during ceremonies and rituals; music which allows for performer-audience interaction.²⁷

Musician and composer Olly Wilson has also concluded:

Any musically sensitive person who has experienced both West African and Afro-American music is aware of the similarities of these musics simply on the basis of the empirical musical evidence. In addition, common sense informs us that the shared history of these peoples would probably be reflected in some cultural similarities. It was only the ethnocentrism of some Euro-American writers that prompted the notion of a tenuous relationship between African and black-American music.²⁸

The connection to Africa even extends to African-American dancing. Pearl Primus made the following conclusion based upon her extensive knowledge of African and African-derived dance:

In emotional impact, group reaction, rhythms, tempos, actual steps and the exact precision with which they were done, dance in the Southern Baptist Churches so closely resembles the dance in Africa as to leave no doubt in the mind that the American form emerged from the African.²⁹

Jazz research has especially noted the survival of African concepts. As early as 1927, upon hearing music in the Gold Coast in the 1920's, W. E. Ward observed that

²⁷ J. H. Kwabena Nketia, "African Roots of Music in the Americas: An African View," chap. 13 in *Ethnomusicology and African Music (Collected Papers)* (Accra, Ghana: Afram Publications (Ghana) Ltd., 2005), 323.

²⁸ Wilson, 3.

²⁹ Pearl Primus, "Primitive African Dance (and Its Influence on the Churches of the South)," in Anatole Chujoy, ed., *The Dance Encyclopedia* (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1949), p. 389.

“The cross-rhythms that are the most noticeable feature of jazz are the strongest characteristic of African musical rhythm.”³⁰ Richard Alan Waterman has provided a more in-depth synopsis:

. . . jazz depends, for its effect, largely on the metronome sense of its listeners and its players. Jazz terminology makes constant reference to this metronome sense. Musical terms like “rock” and “swing” express ideas of rhythm foreign to European folk tradition, and stem from African concepts . . . The development of a “feeling for the beat,” so important in jazz musicianship, is neither more nor less than the development of the metronome sense.

The tremendous importance accorded to complex percussion patterns is another basic trait of African music to appear in jazz. An appreciable proportion of African dance music is entirely drum music; the tradition of long drum solos appears in all jazz styles, and, in the United States, only in the jazz styles.

The overlapping call-and-response pattern has, in jazz, been reworked in accordance with jazz instrumentation and orchestration. Typically, a soloist plays the call phrases as an improvised variation on the melody, while an appropriate section of instruments plays, the chorus pattern, repeated with only those minimal changes forced by the changing harmonies, as a “riff.” Most jazz band records contain examples of this use of the riff; since it is a pattern which gives a good deal of “rock” to the music, it is frequently reserved for the last, hottest chorus.

The off-beat phrasing of melodic accents is a stylistic trait which functions in jazz in unusually clear-cut fashion perhaps because of the absence of polymetric formations, which tend to make the off-beats equivocal. Syncopation has often been spoken of as an earmark of jazz melodies; of importance here is the fact that, in addition, jazz makes constant use of the more extended off-beat phrasing patterns. It is these, rather than syncopation per se, which give to the melodic line of jazz its characteristic impelling rhythmic quality.³¹

As Waterman notes, it is the relationship of the melody to the accompaniment that creates cross rhythms and gives jazz its characteristic style, not just the syncopation of the melody. Following a similarly detailed, six-page chart acknowledging African survivals in jazz, Rudi Blesh offers this succinct conclusion: “African music is the key that unlocks the secrets of jazz.”³² He goes on to acknowledge just how much transculturation has occurred in jazz:

³⁰ W. E. Ward, “Music in the Gold Coast,” *The Gold Coast Review* 3, no. 2 (July-December, 1927): 216.

³¹ Waterman, 217.

³² Rudi Blesh, *Shining Trumpets: A History of Jazz* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946), 27.

Like so much of American music, jazz represents a synthesis, a coming-together of various musical traditions and styles. In this sense jazz is a musical hybrid, exhibiting an almost biological hybrid vitality. It drew upon all of the melodic and rhythmic resources of the New World. In jazz we can recognize traces of Baptist hymns and Elizabethan ballads; we hear echoes of black spirituals, of the blues and the old field holler. Jazz rhythms contain hints of the French quadrille along with the syncopated rhythm of ragtime; we can distinguish traces of the foot-tapping pulse of the country hoe-down and mountain reel of Scotch-Irish derivation, along with a memory of a complex and sophisticated African percussive tradition. All of these elements were assimilated and transformed in the formation of the musical flowering we call jazz.³³

Jazz grew out of a blending and a continuity of earlier African and European traditions.

As M. Robert Rogers noted, “rag-time and jazz are really the same thing in different stages of development.”³⁴ In 1913, Scott Joplin pointed out that “There has been ragtime music in America ever since the Negro race has been here, but the white people took no notice of it until about twenty years ago.”³⁵ Yet some of Gottschalk’s works anticipate ragtime. As researchers have noted, some of Gottschalk’s pieces have a similar structure to ragtime. In ragtime,

the left hand maintains a regular and steady fundamental beat against which the right hand plays a wide variety of syncopated phrases. It deviates from the strict accent on the first and second pulse common to marches and other European oriented music of the nineteenth century.³⁶

W. O. Eschwege, in his article “‘Ragtime’: As Old as the Hills,” compared the ragtime tune *At a Georgia Camp Meeting* with Gottschalk’s *Pasquinade*. Though writing from a biased perspective, Eschwege recognized that *Pasquinade* combined rhythms of southern

³³ Rublowsky, 120.

³⁴ M. Robert Rogers, “Jazz Influence on French Music,” *The Musical Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (January 1935): 53.

³⁵ Susan Curtis, *Dancing to a Black Man’s Tune: A Life of Scott Joplin* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1994), 173-4.

³⁶ Frank Gillis, “Hot Rhythm in Piano Ragtime,” in *Music in the Americas*, ed. George List and Juan Orrego-Salas (Bloomington: Indiana University Research Center in Anthropology, Folklore and Linguistics, 1967), 91.

African descendants with French and Spanish Creole melodies. He referred to both Gottschalk's composition and African musics as "rag time." Eschwege writes:

'Ragtime' sympathized singularly with his idiosyncracies as a composer, as is indicated clearly in every bar of his "Pasquinade," a composition deemed by leading pianists of the present day worthy to be included in programmes of a high order. The measures fairly dance with the wild, constant changes of rhythm which constitute the foundation of what we are pleased to call "rag time," probably a contraction of 'ragged time.'

To go much further into the past, it seems easy to trace the odd time under discussion to the early Africans. Robbed of its melody and tunefulness, the 'rag time' of the American negro of to-day [*sic*] resembled that which any of the African and kindred races produce and have produced for centuries on their barbaric drums, tomtoms and similar instruments. The peculiar rhythm, with its sudden and unexpected changes, is the same in them all. The African tribes that were on exhibition at the World's Fair in Chicago and others that are seen from time to time in museums and other places of amusement all play their instruments in 'rag time'

The deduction is, therefore, quite natural though it may seem strange that a man can hum "I Want Them Presents Back" or "Louisiana Loo" to the accompaniment of a band of savages of the Niger Valley or Soudanites [*sic*], beating an apparently nondescript tattoo on a lot of weird vessels that serve them as instruments. They, too, are musical, though not melodious. They are imbued with that wild rhythm of their native surroundings which, described in modern English, is 'rag time.'³⁷

Of all of Gottschalk's works, *Pasquinade* is the most frequently compared to ragtime.

Pasquinade contains rhythmic changes and a bass-line pattern with a low bass note on beats one and three and the other chord tones in a higher register on beats two and four, commonly known as the "oom-pah" pattern. Over this Gottschalk placed a more rhythmically active, lightly syncopated treble. These characteristics would later be typical of cakewalk, ragtime, and stride piano style.

³⁷ W. O. Eschwege, "Rag Time' as Old as the Hills," scrapbook 12, Gottschalk Collection, New York Public Library: 37-39.



Figure 52: *Pasquinade*, mm. 17-24.

The similarities between Gottschalk's compositions and ragtime have led some to suspect a direct link between the two. Gottschalk scholar John Doyle has wondered if Gottschalk's music may have influenced the development of ragtime.³⁸ It is more likely that they are similar because of shared roots.

Gottschalk's close friend and fellow pianist and composer Richard Hoffman (1831-1909), to whom Gottschalk dedicated *The Banjo*, op. 15, composed a work in 1861 titled *Dixiana: Caprice for the Pianoforte on the Popular Negro Minstrel's Melody "Dixie's Land"* that includes rhythmic parallels to Gottschalk's African-influenced compositions. The melody for *Dixiana*, which is based on Daniel Decatur Emmett's (1815-1904) popular tune *Dixie*, contains the habanera rhythm. Hoffman also includes an accompanying "oom-pah" bass line in the concluding section of his work.

³⁸ John Doyle, "Gottschalk: Nationalist Composer, Native Virtuoso," *Music Educators Journal* 56, no. 4 (December 1969): 30.

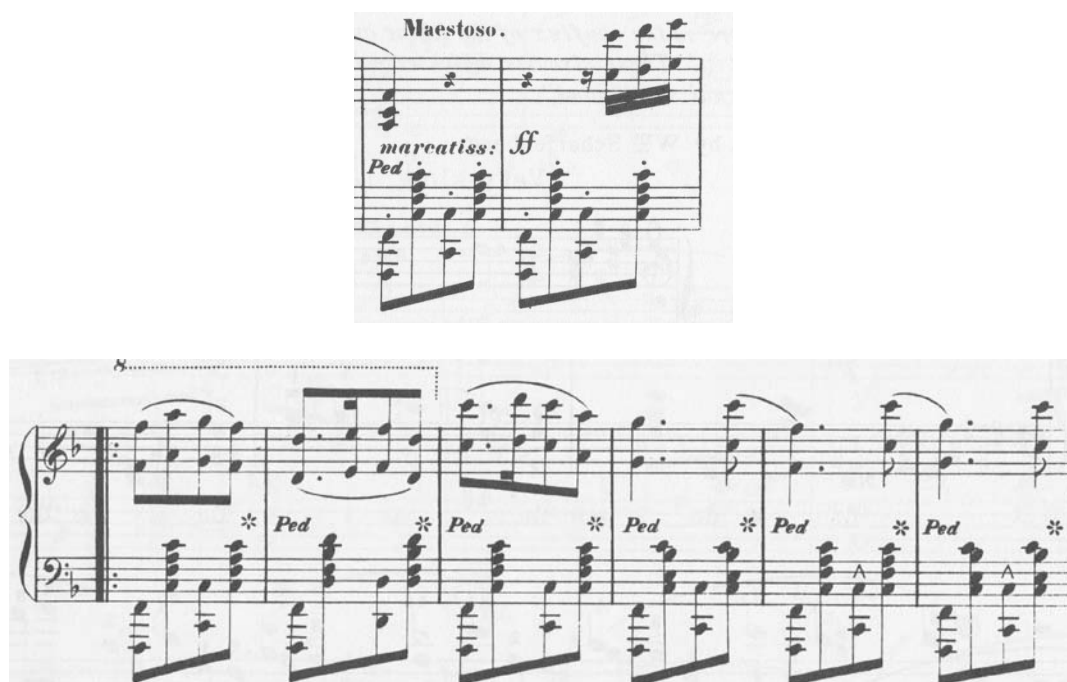


Figure 53: Richard Hoffman, *Dixiana*, mm. 130-137.

Like Gottschalk and Hoffman, minstrelsy blended African- and European-derived elements.

Gottschalk's music fell out of popularity soon after his death. In the United States, Minstrel shows remained popular and ragtime emerged in the late nineteenth century among musicians who learned by ear, rarely read sheet music, and most likely did not know of Gottschalk or his music. Because of their coincidental cultural circumstances, Gottschalk's works, along with French and Spanish contradanzas, merely had an earlier start than other American-grown musics did in blending African and European musical concepts.

Musical Exchange

Gottschalk's Receptions in Europe

In Europe, Gottschalk was loved because of his talent, improvisation, showmanship, the way he reached out to audiences, and his exotic-sounding pieces. All of these characteristics except his talent are directly linked to or parallel those of West and Central Africa. In combination, these factors made him especially appealing, in particular his approach to performing and new styles. Perhaps fellow composer and friend of Gottschalk, Hector Berlioz, said it best in his *Feuilleton, Journal des Débats*:

Mr. Gottschalk was born in America, whence he has brought a host of curious chants from the Creoles and the 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 in which the nonchalant graces of tropical melody assuage so agreeably our restless and insatiable passion for novelty.³⁹

In Europe Gottschalk became a celebrity, known for his remarkable stage presence and charm. As a teenager in Paris, Gottschalk's "remarkable musical gifts, and more especially his talent for improvisation, excited curiosity and admiration."⁴⁰ At Gottschalk's Paris debut in 1849, "for the first time an American performer was received as an equal of the European masters."⁴¹ Music critic Léon Escudier, writing for *La France musicale* in March of 1851, found Gottschalk to be "admirable, marvelous, immense. Since Liszt fell silent, I know of no other person more worthy of being carried triumphantly into the world of arts than he. . . . Gottschalk is now on the throne."⁴² Paolo Fiorentino, another music critic, writing for the *Corsaire* referred to Gottschalk noting:

As soon as he finishes, the audience yells "Encore!" and he starts again with perfect grace. If inspiration strikes, instead of repeating the previous piece he plays a new one more charming than the first. The public again cries "Encore!"

³⁹ Jeanne Behrend, prelude to *Notes of a Pianist*, by Louis Moreau Gottschalk, ed. Jeanne Behrend (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), xxxii.

⁴⁰ George Ferris, *The Great Violinists and Pianists*, (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1888), 267.

⁴¹ S. Frederick Starr, "Louis Moreau Gottschalk: Almost Forgotten Celebrity," *The Instrumentalist* 53 no. 56 (September 1998): 56.

⁴² Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 90.

with gusto. . . . I would not dare to analyze so original a talent as his, so poetic and so marvelous.⁴³

But, a few weeks later, Fiorentino does just that:

This year's favorite in the salons, concerts, and public and private gatherings is Gottschalk. . . . He has in his countenance and talent an indescribable note of melancholy, as well as the grace of Chopin. His compositions are distinctive, original, and charming, and are generally of a coquettish brevity. His execution displays finish, brilliance, neatness, rapidity, and stunning zest. Just as he seems to drench you with a soft melody of almost imperceptible finesse, his fingers unleash a storm of notes with admirable force and sonority. . . . Gottschalk's talent is of a high and serious nature. He possesses honest and true inspiration, the reflection of an intimate and vividly felt poetry.⁴⁴

The *Paris Bulletin Musical* of 1848 found Gottschalk to be just as amazing:

Among the virtuosi who have appeared within the last few years, Gottschalk, born in Louisiana, merits a place apart. Original in talent, *exceptionnel*, he has grown, since his first introduction to the Parisian world, to an immense popularity. No one knows better than this artist all the resources of the piano, all the secrets of its mechanism; and no one exhibits in his play more of precision, of surety, of ease, and of elegance. But Gottschalk is not merely a performer of a marvelous facility, he possesses also an organization which is eminently poetic. Under his hands the piano becomes an instrument of life, and gives expression to all of life's sentiments, to all of life's passions. But the talent of the pianist constitutes but a small part of the talent of Gottschalk; his productions, remarkable for their originality, place him among the best of modern composers. *Le Bamboula*, or the dance of the negroes, is a work replete with fascination, with fire, and an enthusiasm which would alone have made the reputation of its author.⁴⁵

Gottschalk's audiences were entranced with "exotic" pieces. Following a second concert at the Pleyel in the same season as Gottschalk's Paris debut, a critic for the *Parisian*

Journals wrote:

A young pianist of a most promising future, M. Gottschalk, whom the Saloons so readily received into their protection, has just performed publicly in the *Hall Pleyel*. Born upon the banks of the Mississippi, he seems to have brought to the old world songs which he had gathered in the virgin forests of his country. Nothing can be more original, or more pleasing to the ear, than the compositions

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Henry Didimus, *Biography of Louis Moreau Gottschalk, the American Pianist and Composer* (Philadelphia: Deacon & Peterson, 1853), 8-9.

of this young Creole. Listen to the *Bamboula*, and you will comprehend the poetry of a tropical clime. Gottschalk's execution is marvelous! It possesses a force, a grace, an abandonment, which carries you away in spite of yourself, and compels you to applaud like a simple *claqueur*. The piano is no longer the dry and monotonous instrument with which you were acquainted, and you find springing from beneath the creative fingers of the artist all the *timbres* of the orchestra, *tous le soupirs des instruments à vent*.⁴⁶

Gottschalk's unbridled popularity in Europe continued as he travelled out of France.

Gottschalk was immensely popular in Switzerland. Following a benefit concert he had given for the poor, a contemporary Parisian journal stated that:

Gottschalk's visit to Switzerland . . . has been one series of triumphs. No artist was ever received with an equal enthusiasm. In every town he has visited he has found troops of admirers . . .⁴⁷

The journal adds that Gottschalk's reception in Geneva was especially welcoming.

Gottschalk's first concert in Lausanne drew rave reviews and the hall was "crowded to excess" well before his second performance.⁴⁸ People

from the neighboring towns pressed forward in troops; and when M. Gottschalk presented himself the enthusiasm of the audience burst forth in frenzied applause. It is impossible to describe what one felt while listening to the compositions of this young American; to the *Ossianic Ballads*, to *La Savane*. The soul was transported to times and to lands to us unknown, and surrendered itself to the witchery of an indefinable power. Sylphs and shades passed before you, like unquiet spirits, in mysterious dance, lamenting, complaining, still moving, and bathed in the wild melancholy . . . M. Gottschalk has taken his place among the masters of his art, and opened for it a new way as pure as it is elevated. He possesses the first requisite and the surest proof of genius . . .⁴⁹

After one of his concerts in Geneva, one concertgoer stated, "As his notes sprang from the piano, each one asked of his neighbor if it was indeed real, or were they the dupes of

⁴⁶ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 17.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 13.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 14.

a delicious dream, of an illusion, as subduing as it was deceitful.”⁵⁰ Of Gottschalk’s

concerts in Switzerland, French music critic Léon Escudier wrote:

He has played more than fifty times in concerts, and every time he has been, so to say carried off in triumph. . . . A banquet was presented to him at Lausanne. At Neufchatel a ball was organized in his honor. . . . I should never finish if I were to enumerate all the ovations which have marked in Switzerland the appearance of this eminent artist. He has carried away enough crowns, flowers and wreaths to carpet a whole concert hall.⁵¹

Gottschalk’s success in Spain would parallel his successes in France and Switzerland. The King of Spain gave Gottschalk the diamond cross of Isabella la Catholique and Queen Isabel II named him a Knight of the Royal Order.⁵² The Duke of Montpensier gave him a sword of honor.⁵³ But the craze in Madrid was just beginning. A letter Gottschalk wrote to his mother following the premier of *El Sitio de Zaragoza*, a 300-page, “grand fantasy” for ten pianos, tells it best:

Another triumph, my dear mother! . . . and I am still to-day half crazy about it. The house was filled to excess with people in full costume, while the queen’s ministers occupied their box. The success of the concert was unprecedented. The ‘*Bananier*,’ the ‘*Souvenirs de Bellini*,’ ‘*La Danse Ossianique*,’ the ‘*Carnival de Venise*,’ were all encored; and when at last the moment arrived for the performance of the piece I had composed for ten pianos, and I came upon the stage at the head of my ten young aids-de-camp, the applause burst upon us like the roar of water. You know that of the siege of Saragossa was born a story of national heroism most cherished in a Spaniard’s heart.

The first part of the piece was frequently interrupted; the second was not finished when it was encored from all sides; and, in the third, where the pianos pour forth the drum and trumpet march of triumph, the whole crowded audience rose spontaneously to its feet—men and women—with an enthusiasm which it is impossible to describe. The Minister of Agriculture, unable to restrain his emotion, cried out ‘*Viva la Reina*,’ and the shout that followed almost deafened us; then came ‘*Bis*,’ ‘*Bis*,’ from every quarter of the house, and we were compelled to play the concerto over again. We did so, but amid interruptions so frequent that my own excitement become oppressive; and when the last notes died

⁵⁰ Ibid., 16.

⁵¹ William Smythe Babcock Mathews, “Gottschalk.—A Successful American Composer,” *Music* (June 1892): 121-2.

⁵² George Ferris, 268-9; Clyde W. Brockett, “Gottschalk in Biscay, Castile and Andalucia: A Man for All Classes,” *Revista de musicologia* 15 (1992): 830-2.

⁵³ George Ferris, 268-9.

upon the ear, a wreath of laurel, of oak, and of flowers, was thrown to me, bearing this inscription—‘To Gottschalk—the people of Madrid, at his concert of 13th of June, 1852.’

On leaving the theatre, I found a procession of more than three hundred persons waiting to receive me. They accompanied me home, whither, to my great wonderment, many of the most aristocratic ladies of Madrid had preceded me, and where they were introduced to me, and paid me the prettiest and most flattering compliments. Then suddenly, from, beneath my windows, rose the first strains of my ‘*Danse Ossianique*.’ I was crazy. Imagine two bands playing my own favorite composition; add to that the hour, a Spanish night and sky, the illumination, the enthusiastic crowd of spectators, the brilliantly dressed women who surrounded me, my friends who came forward every minute to congratulate me—I was crazy! It was a veritable ovation. Called for by the crowd in the street, I finally took courage and made a little speech in Spanish, *à la America*. I was not so bad for the first effort, for the general enthusiasm, which was already at fever heat, thereupon boiled over, and I was taken up bodily and carried down into the midst of my warm-hearted audience, and embraced, and passed about from one to another, as if I had been a petted child!⁵⁴

The audience’s pandemonium foreshadowed future reactions to Gottschalk’s monster concerts. In a review in *La Epoca actual* the day following the concert is the following animated response:

Mr. Gottschalk managed, with his admirable execution, with his exquisite cleanliness, to open the gates of heavenly regions and carry souls up toward them, transporting them on wings of sublime harmony. He has a fiery imagination; God has given him the faculty of expressing what he is feeling on the piano, whose keys, it seems, come to life beneath his fingers, and the spirit, docile at the eloquence of music, which eloquence is also in music, cannot resist his mysterious communication and admire and applaud with enthusiasm when it is, who knows [how], put in motion with his divine language, his faculties and his passions. This is what Gottschalk does, and here is what explains his triumph.⁵⁵

Dramatic reviews such as these would follow Gottschalk throughout Europe.

Gottschalk’s popularity would extend to sheet music sales and performances by others, prompting one French journalist to point out that

⁵⁴ Didimus, 20-21.

⁵⁵ Clyde W. Brackett, “Gottschalk in Madrid: A Tale of Ten Pianos,” *The Musical Quarterly* 75, no.3 (autumn 1991): 287.

It has been a long time since we have seen such a success as has been attained by [*Le Bananier*,] *Bamboula*, and *La Savane* . . . To find a comparable example, one would have to reach back to the successes of Chopin's first works.⁵⁶

S. Frederick Starr adds that in Paris "On one evening alone *Le Bananier* was programmed simultaneously at three different concerts."⁵⁷ A description on an 1863

William Hall publication of *Le Bananier* states:

It may be questioned whether any piece has ever been so much played or so much applauded. Gottschalk alone has played it at fifteen hundred concerts in Europe. Gloria, Ravina, Prudent, Madame Pleyel, etc., etc., adopted it in their programmes. Transcribed for the violin by Leon Reynier, and for the violincello [*sic*] by Offenbach, it became proverbial in the music trade for its enormous and universal sale. A single publisher in Paris realized 250,000 francs with this little piece alone, and at the end of two years sold the copyright to another publisher for 25,000 francs more. . . .⁵⁸

Gottschalk himself marvels in his successes. In a letter home to his father in May of 1850, Gottschalk wrote:

All the publishers declare that no piece ever met with such success as has greeted the *Bananier*. Already, more than two thousand copies have been sold in Paris alone. It has been pirated in Mayence, Leipzig, Berlin, London, Brussels, and Milan; and here, a second edition is about being struck off.⁵⁹

French reviewers and critics would continue to rave. For example, ballet and opera composer Adolphe Adam, writing for *L'Assemblée nationale*, covered Gottschalk's benefit concert for the Pleyel piano factory following a horrible fire on March 25, 1851.

Gottschalk was encored four times in a row. Adams elaborates on the secrets of Gottschalk's success:

Mr. Gottschalk has become the man *à la mode*, the indispensable pianist. . . . The secret of his unheard-of success is that he is an *entertaining* performer. The combination of this noun and adjective may be surprising, yet never has such an

⁵⁶ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 82.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Robert Offergeld, "The Gottschalk Legend: Grand Fantasy for a Great Many Pianos," in *The Piano Works of Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 5 volumes, Vera Brodsky Lawrence, ed. (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), xvii.

⁵⁹ Didimus, 9-10.

alliance of two words been more justified. Mr. Gottschalk's music has all the grace of Chopin but with more arresting forms; he is less magisterial than Thalberg but has perhaps more warmth; he is less severe than Prudent yet plays with more grace and elegance. For the best way to please is not to want to please too long.⁶⁰ (Adam's parentheses)

Gottschalk's celebrity would extend beyond his ability to entertain as he performed.

Adding to Gottschalk's popularity in Europe was Europeans' perception of him as "exotic," and therefore very *en vogue* at the time. Referring to *Le Bananier*, Irving Lowens and S. Frederick Starr write that "This exotic *morceau* made Gottschalk a household name in Europe."⁶¹ Gottschalk was an exotic foreigner, and he put his exotic flavor into his early Creole works. His virtuosic displays and talent were especially obvious while he improvised. Audiences would project onto him and his playing an air of melancholy that was fashionable at the time. The *Gazette de Lausanne* would report on the "sadness and simplicity" of Gottschalk's American pieces, adding that Gottschalk's face was "very pale, his eyes cast down. His physiognomy expresses melancholy and there is in all his features a trace of pain and sadness."⁶² Critic Théophile Gautier would write:

Mr. Gottschalk, still very young, has been able to acquire the originality that escapes so many others thanks to solid studies and then to having allowed himself to wander adventurously in the aromatic savannas of his country, whence he brings us perfumes and colors. . . . All his songs of the New World have an originality that is full of melancholy, energy, and suaveness and which carry you deep into fantasy and dreams.⁶³

It comes as no surprise that amongst this raving over Gottschalk, the Geneva periodical *Le Nouvelliste vaudois* would describe Gottschalk as "pyramidal."⁶⁴ Whether this critic

⁶⁰ Quoted in Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 89-90.

⁶¹ Lowens and Starr, 200.

⁶² Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 87.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

intended to reference Egypt specifically with this comment is not known, but it certainly would have been consistent with the times.

At a time before the recording industry familiarized the public with new musics, Gottschalk was attracting immense attention. At age nineteen, Moreau had been performing *Bamboula* at Countess Merlín's salon. She had been born in Havana and was a dedicated patron of Caribbean musicians and writers. Gottschalk would perform numerous times at her salon, thereby popularizing the piece. As a result, *La France musicale* would make mention of the work before it had even appeared in print.⁶⁵ After imagining an elaborate scene, one writer goes on to praise Gottschalk, even making sure readers know how to pronounce his name:

Who does not know the 'Bamboula'? Who is there who has not read the description of that picturesque, exciting dance which gives expression to the feeling of the negroes? Joyful or sad, plaintive, amorous, jealous, forsaken, solitary, fatigued, ennuied, or the heart filled with grief, the negro forgets all in dancing the 'Bamboula.' Look down there at those two black-tinted women, with short petticoats, their necks and ears ornamented with coral, *le regard brulant*, dancing under the banana tree; the whole of their bodies is in movement; further on are groups who excite and stimulate them to every excess of fancy: two negroes roll their active fingers over a noisy tambourine, accompanying it with a languishing chant, lively or impassioned, according to the pose of the dancers. Little negroes, like those on the canvas of Decamps, are jumping around the fiddlers; it is full of folly and delusion. The 'Bamboula' is at its height.

This attractive dance has frequently furnished a theme for instrumental compositions, which, however, have not obtained all the success that we expected from them. The Creole airs transported into our salons lose their character, at once wild, languishing, indescribable, which has no resemblance to any other European music; some have thought that it was sufficient to have the chants written down, and to reproduce them with variations, in order to obtain new effects. Not so; the effects have failed. One must have lived under the burning sky from whence the Creole draws his melodies; one must be impregnated with those eccentric chants, which are little dramas in action; in one word, one must be Creole, as composer and executant, in order to feel and make others understand the whole originality of 'Bamboula.'

⁶⁵ Clara Gottschalk Peterson, "Biographical Sketch," in *Notes of a Pianist* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1881), 37-8.

We have discovered this Creole composer; and American composer, *bon Dieu!* Yes, indeed, and a pianist, composer and player of the highest order, who as yet is only known in the aristocratic salons of Paris, and whose name will soon make a great noise. We have German pianists, Hungarian, Russian, Italian pianists. We have ended by discovering French pianists; and now we have an American pianist. His name is Gottschalk. Close the lips, advance the tongue, appear a little like whistling, and you will have the key to the pronunciation. Gottschalk is already a marvelous pianist; his school is that of Chopin, Thalberg and Prudent united together. He has taken from one his lightness, grace and purity; from the others their unrestrained passion and their attractive brilliancy, and I can assure you that for a long time a pianist so original, so sympathetic, has not been seen.⁶⁶

Professor Marmontel of the Paris Conservatoire even asked Gottschalk to judge his (Marmontel's) students as they played *Bamboula* as part of their examinations.

Ironically, Gottschalk would do so while sitting next to fellow judge, Professor Pierre Zimmerman, who had previously refused to even hear his audition.⁶⁷

Gottschalk's "exotic" sound differed in one critical way from that of later composers in Europe who used African features in their music. While others were imagining what foreign cultures were like, Gottschalk was depicting his own. When later European composers included African-derived rhythms in their compositions, they usually did so to depict "the orient" or "the primitive." For example, Bizet (who as already mentioned had Gottschalk compositions in his personal library) used the habanera to depict Gypsy life in *Carmen*.

Gottschalk's Receptions in the Caribbean and Latin America

As in Europe, Gottschalk would enjoy considerable popularity though people's perceptions of him would differ. While he was popular in Europe for being unique and

⁶⁶ Mathews, 118-119.

⁶⁷ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 80.

“exotic,” when he traveled the Caribbean and South America he was accepted as one of their own.

Gottschalk first visited Cuba in 1854, not long after returning to the United States from Europe. Not only did the Cubans already find Gottschalk and his music to be familiar, Gottschalk himself had reasons to feel at home:

In Havana, he was fully accepted into the fraternity of Cuban pianists and composers. He played such a prominent role in the musical life of Cuba, and composed and performed so fluently in the Cuban musical idiom, that it might be appropriate to speak of him as a Cuban composer. And he played a key role in the penetration of Cuban style into the American musical mainstream.

Gottschalk did not merely stay in Havana and visit other composers. He traveled the length and breadth of the island, listening to provincial orchestras and attending the Carnival of 1854 in Santiago de Cuba, where he heard the drummers of the tumba francesa playing in a comparsa. Santiago must have seemed like home to a French-speaking Louisianian; though Gottschalk spoke Spanish, he noted in his journal that ‘even in many parts of the island of Cuba, French Creole is spoken in preference to Spanish.’⁶⁸

French Creole was spoken in parts of Cuba as well as New Orleans because of the great number of colonists who immigrated to both places while fleeing the slave revolt in Saint Domingue. Gottschalk also understood the musics he encountered. When Gottschalk toured the West Indies and South America, he was not criticized for excluding the piano classics as he had been by Dwight in the United States. “There he was adored almost without reservations . . . Creole by tradition and temperament, he felt an affinity with Latin American tempos and was keenly perceptive of their nuances.”⁶⁹

Gottschalk received warm receptions in Cuba:

At Santa Clara he had been induced to enter the town riding a white Andalusian steed. After his concert at Trinidad (Cuba), we are told, a hidalgo brushed aside the coachman to conduct Gottschalk’s carriage on foot through the adoring crowd.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Sublette, *Cuba and Its Music*, 13.

⁶⁹ Behrend, prelude to *Notes of a Pianist*, xl-xli.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, xli.

In Puerto-Príncipe, Cuba, the musicians and townspeople formed a procession as Gottschalk left the concert hall, chanting “Glory to Moreau.”⁷¹ When Gottschalk’s first symphony, *La Nuit des tropiques*, premiered in Havana, Cuba, in February 1860, the audience’s response to it was overwhelmingly positive.⁷² Gottschalk’s popularity continued in Central and South America. After a *gran festival* in Santiago, Chile, on August 12, 1865, Gottschalk received what can only be described as tremendously zealous, exuberant, and mob-like response: “The immense crowd leaped to its feet, and by the finale the President, ministers, and entire public were waving their handkerchiefs. Men threw their hats into the air. Women wept.”⁷³ The crowd’s response was so overwhelming that Gottschalk ended up repeating the entire performance. Afterwards he was greeted at the stage door by 250 musicians playing his *Gran Marcha solemne*. He marched to the beat of over forty drums at the head of several thousand people gathered in a torch-lit procession back to his room. The crowd yelled “Viva Gottschalk,” and only dispersed for the night after Gottschalk bid them farewell from his window.⁷⁴ A Santiago newspaper proclaimed that Gottschalk was “the best pianist in the universe.”⁷⁵ In Santiago, Gottschalk also received various pins, plaques, dolls, and medals, including a “grand gold medal” from the government, at a series of banquets and receptions.⁷⁶

In Peru, Gottschalk was treated like royalty. President Pérez invited him to his home and the opening of parliament, seating him with the ambassadors from the United

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 287.

⁷³ Ibid., 395.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 395-6.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 394.

⁷⁶ Ibid.; Ferris, *The Great Violinists and Pianists*, 281-2.

States and France.⁷⁷ While in Peru, Gottschalk gave sixty concerts.⁷⁸ Following a concert on January 2, 1866, he was presented with a pearl-encrusted gold medal at a banquet that lasted until five in the morning.⁷⁹ In his journal entry for December 13, 1865, Gottschalk remarks on two concerts in Lima, where, despite the high ticket price of two dollars, the second concert was still necessary due to the demand of the audience. He reports that at both concerts his works *Banjo*, *Murmures éoliens*, and *Charmes du foyer* were encored, and he even had to play *Ojos criollos* four times!⁸⁰

Gottschalk's notoriety continued in Brazil. In the spring of 1869, tickets to Gottschalk's concerts in Rio de Janeiro were selling for top price and Dom Pedro frequently invited him to be a guest at the palace.⁸¹ In a letter from Brazil in May of 1869 to his friend F. G. Hill in Boston, Gottschalk wrote,

My concerts here are a perfect *furore*. All my houses are sold eight days in advance. Boxes in the hands of speculators (you may judge if they are alive) bring seventy-five dollars premium, and single seats twenty-five dollars.

The emperor, imperial family, and court never missed yet one of my entertainments.

His Majesty received me frequently at palace. He is very kind to me, made me sit near him. We chatted last time over an hour and a half. The *Grand Orient* of the masonry of Brazil gave me a solemn reception. A deputation was appointed to wait on me.

The enthusiasm with which I have been received is indescribable. At the last concert, I was crowned on the stage by the artists of Rio, headed by my dear and much-talented friend, the great Portuguese pianist, Arthur Napoleon . . .⁸²

The pandemonium of Gottschalk's audiences in Brazil reached its height at his monster concerts. Though Gottschalk was only in Brazil for the final seven months of his life, he

⁷⁷ Ibid., 394.

⁷⁸ Ferris, 281.

⁷⁹ Robert Murrell Stevenson, "Gottschalk in Western South America," *Inter-American Music Bulletin* 74 (November 1969):10.

⁸⁰ Louis Moreau Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist*, ed. Jeanne Behrend, with a foreword by Frederick Starr (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 358-9.

⁸¹ Ferris, 282.

⁸² Octavia Hensel, *Life and Letters of Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (Boston: Oliver Ditson and Company, 1870), 170-1.

had become so much a part of the community that crowds for Gottschalk's funeral closed the city of Rio de Janeiro for several days.⁸³ For years after Gottschalk's death, the playing of his music was the criterion by which pianists were judged in Rio de Janeiro. Gottschalk's monster concerts would continue as well, including one in December of 1871 that involved 896 performers.⁸⁴

Gottschalk's early and later works show similarities with other African-European musical hybrids in the United States and the Caribbean, especially ragtime and Cuban contradanzas. These similarities occur with musics that evolved in places where African traditions were able to continue, as well as in places where such traditions were reinvented. This continuity suggests all these musics, including Gottschalk's, have shared African structural and conceptual roots. The depth of the connection to Africa in Gottschalk's music is reinforced by the differing responses Gottschalk received in Europe, where African-derived musics were rare at the time, and in Latin America where such musical hybrids were plentiful. While Europeans tended to describe him as "original," "unique," and "exotic," Gottschalk's audiences and fellow musicians in the Caribbean and South America welcomed him as one of their own. Had there not been African influences in Gottschalk's earliest works, it is likely Gottschalk would have sounded more familiar to his European audiences. Likewise, had Gottschalk not already been composing African-European hybrid music when he first arrived in Cuba, it is doubtful that he and his music would have seemed so familiar there. Gottschalk's connection to Africa is evident in how he was received in Europe, the Caribbean, and Central and South America.

⁸³ Starr, "Louis Moreau Gottschalk: Almost Forgotten Celebrity," 66.

⁸⁴ Jeanne Behrend, postlude in *Notes of a Pianist*, by Louis Moreau Gottschalk, ed. Jeanne Behrend (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), 407.

CHAPTER XI

CONCLUSION: GOTTSCHALK'S PLACE IN THE MUSICAL HISTORY OF THE
UNITED STATES

Long before Gottschalk's birth, his maternal ancestors were living in the village of Petite Rivière d'Artibonite in Saint-Domingue where mulatto orchestras were adding Afro-Caribbean beats to French dance tunes.¹ In the United States, however, similar processes would not happen until the second half of the nineteenth century, beginning in New Orleans. By incorporating both African and European musical concepts into his compositions, Gottschalk offered the first glimpse of these later developments.

Gottschalk's Receptions in the United States

Although Gottschalk was lionized throughout Europe, he was much less noticed in the United States. Only New Orleans maintained an interest in Gottschalk after he went to Europe. Despite the broader public's lack of awareness of Gottschalk while he was in Europe, things quickly began to change when he returned to the United States. When Gottschalk made his debut in New York City after returning to the United States from Europe, variety shows were the norm. Beethoven's works could appear on the same program with popular ballads or various types of comedy. The idea of a separate "high culture" did not yet exist, and audiences frequently conversed during performances.² Gottschalk's audience's response at his New York City debut was overwhelmingly positive. Although the public was supposedly growing tired of piano virtuosos, they

¹ S. Frederick Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 26.

² Ibid., 128; Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988), 181.

welcomed Gottschalk with great enthusiasm.³ In the *Home Journal*, February 19, 1853, one witness described just how passionately the crowd responded to Gottschalk:

Mr. Gottschalk, the American pianist, made his *debut* at Niblo's Saloon on Friday, the 11th instant. We mention the date, because we are convinced that the musical history of the country will require that it should be preserved. To say that his success was of the most unequivocal description can convey to the reader's mind no idea of the *frenzy* of enthusiasm which his performance excited. His playing is precisely of the kind which most palpably hits the popular taste. His effects are strong and powerful. He dashes at the instrument as Murat charged the enemy, and has command of its most latent possibilities. His playing has the effect of an orchestra, and the modulation of a single instrument. He is the only pianist we have yet heard who can electrify and inflame an assembly. He produces the same sort and the same degree of effect as that which oratory sometimes has in times of public commotion. This is not exaggeration, as every one will bear witness who has heard him perform; but a simple statement of facts. A sober judgment of his powers as compared with those of other eminent pianists we are not prepared to give; since it was impossible not to be carried away with the enthusiasm of the occasion. But we hope to hear him again at an early day, and to consider his performance more coolly. The feeling of the audience was well expressed by a distinguished lady who attended the concert, who remarked, 'Gottschalk has the dexterity of Jaell, the power of De Meyer, and the taste of Herz.'⁴

After this same concert, "One newspaper, which arrogated special strength and good judgment in its critical departments, intimated that after such a revelation it was useless any longer to speak of Beethoven!"⁵ The audience was equally moved following Gottschalk's second concert; "At the pianist's second concert, Feb. 17, 1853, his playing won if possible even more applause."⁶

Gottschalk's popularity and recognition would continue to grow. About Gottschalk's first five years of touring and concertizing the United States, George Ferris writes:

³ Ibid., 135.

⁴ Quoted in Octavia Hensel, *Life and Letters of Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (Boston: Oliver Ditson and Company, 1870), and Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 53-4.

⁵ George Ferris, *The Great Violinists and Pianists*, (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1888), 271.

⁶ Hensel, 56.

In the series of concerts given by Gottschalk throughout the United States, the public generally showed great enthusiasm and admiration, and the young pianist sustained himself very successfully against the memories of Jaell, Henri Herz, and Leopold de Meyer, as well as the immediate rivalry of Thalberg, who appealed more potently to a select few. The hold the American pianist had secured on his public did not lessen during the five years of concert-giving which succeeded. No player ever displayed his skill before American audiences who had in so large degree that peculiar quality of geniality in this style which so endears him to the public. This characteristic is something apart from genius or technical skill, and is peculiarly an emanation from the personality of the man.⁷

Written in 1881, Ferris' assessment not only demonstrates Gottschalk's popularity and acceptance among the general public, but how closely his success was tied to him. He was not just writing music people loved. Gottschalk was just as essential to his performances as his compositions were. A clipping from *Lippincotts Magazine* echoes this sentiment, stating, "Gottschalk in his day, had a strong hold upon the heart of the public, both as pianist and composer. His popularity and success were more distinctly personal than those of others."⁸

In his day, Gottschalk received wide recognition and praise from various sources. New York music critic Henry C. Watson called Gottschalk "the most original and inspired writer for the pianoforte since Chopin."⁹ In Philadelphia, Gottschalk was called the "King of Pianists" following a performance where he inserted *Yankee Doodle*, *The Star Spangled Banner*, and *Hail, Columbia* into his *El Sitio de Zaragosa*.¹⁰ Chicago music critic George P. Upton referred to Gottschalk as a "charmer at the piano and a fascinating human being," adding,

⁷ Ferris, 273.

⁸ Reel 10, *Gottschalk Collection*, New York: New York Public Library.

⁹ Richard Jackson, "More Notes of a Pianist: A Gottschalk Collection Surveyed and a Scandal Revisited," *Notes*, 2nd ser., 46, no. 2 (December 1989): 364.

¹⁰ Robert Offergeld, "The Gottschalk Legend: Grand Fantasy for a Great Many Pianos," in *The Piano Works of Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 5 volumes, Vera Brodsky Lawrence, ed. (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), xxii.

All his music was either sensuous or sentimental, for he was tropical by nature, -- a wayward, passionate creature, who delighted in reveries and wild, strange rhythms. He had an extremely delicate touch, and a singing quality which I have never heard excelled. And yet he had great power when it was needed, for he was a very strong man, notwithstanding his delicate appearance.¹¹

The San Francisco *Daily Alta California* proclaimed

Each and every time we hear our American genius, the more apparent his great merits appear. There is a delicacy even in his force, and a poetry in improvisation at his command, which no other artiste, to our knowledge, has ever evinced.¹²

Even President Lincoln attended several of Gottschalk's concerts.¹³

Not everyone would view Gottschalk with favor, however; Gottschalk's most prominent critic was John Sullivan Dwight (1813-1893). Dwight began his *Dwight's Journal of Music* in 1852 with the hope of educating the public about "good" music. Dwight's early response to Gottschalk's premier in New York City is mild, the majority of the criticism falling upon the general public.¹⁴ Dwight found Gottschalk's audience too easily pleased and the hype that preceded him overinflated, yet he still acknowledged Gottschalk had some merits:

If we were unfortunate enough not to find full justification for all this extravagance of admiration, we could not fail to see that Mr. Gottschalk is a pianist of very rare abilities; one who, although he has not long written himself man, has attained a mastery over the resources of his instrument which seems almost the difficult task of a life time. . . . His command of the mechanism of his instrument is so vast, so unerring, that it seems as if it ere impossible that mere practice and mere will could enable a man to do all that he does with his fingers. In this respect he has few rivals, perhaps no superior in the world. He annihilates difficulties: they fall around him, heaps upon heaps. They are not always of tremendous proportions, for he has as much delicacy of finger as power of arm and firmness of touch, and many of his triumphs seem to be the result of fineness

¹¹ George P. Upton, *Musical Memories: My Recollections of Celebrities of the Half Century: 1850-1900* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1908), 76-7.

¹² Jackson, "More Notes of a Pianist," 366.

¹³ S. Frederick Starr, "Foreword" in Louis Moreau Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist*, ed. Jeanne Behrend (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), xii.

¹⁴ John Sullivan Dwight, "Mr. Gottschalk's Concert," *Dwight's Journal of Music: A Paper of Art and Literature* 2, no. 19 (12 February 1853): 154-155.

of organization. He is ambidexter; and reversing the old saying, his thumbs are fingers.¹⁵

Yet by October of 1853, the highbrow Bostonian Dwight is already criticizing Gottschalk for not playing the piano classics. As Starr has pointed out, “Gottschalk’s sins, Dwight charged, were that he refused to play the classics and that his own compositions quoted too generously from lowbrow American popular music of the day.”¹⁶ Responding to the latest performance by Gottschalk, Dwight writes:

. . . It *was* great execution. But what is execution without some thought and meaning in the combinations to be executed? . . .

Skillful, graceful, brilliant, wonderful, we own his playing was. But players less wonderful have given us far deeper satisfaction. We have seen a criticism upon that concert in which it was regretted that his music was too fine for common apprehension, ‘too much addressed to the *reasoning* facilities,’ &c. To us the want was that it did *not* address the reason, that it seemed empty of ideas, of inspiration; that it spake little to the mind or heart, excited neither meditation nor emotion, but simply dazzled by the display of difficult feats gracefully and easily achieved. But of what use were all these difficulties? . . . Why all that rapid tossing of handfuls of chords from the middle to the highest octaves, lifting the hand with such conscious appeal to our eyes? To what end all those rapid octave passages? Since, in the intervals of easy execution, in the seemingly quiet impromptu passages, the music grew so monotonous and commonplace: the same little figure repeated and repeated, after listless pauses, in a way which conveyed no meaning, no sense of musical progress, but only the appearance of fastidiously critical scale-practising [*sic*].

We seriously doubt if Gottschalk’s forte is composition. . . . and it promises well for him that in his second programme he announces his determination to play *classical* music, from Beethoven, Onslow, &c. We shall rejoice to forgive and forget all hitherto, if with his splendid execution, he will evince the soul and fire and judgment also for the interpretation of such works.¹⁷ (Dwight’s italics)

Dwight would even call Gottschalk’s music “trivial,” stating that Gottschalk’s compositions “bear no more comparison [with the great masters like Liszt, Thalberg, and

¹⁵ John Sullivan Dwight, “Mr. Gottschalk’s Concert,” *Dwight’s Journal of Music: A Paper of Art and Literature* 2, no. 19 (12 February 1853): 154-5.

¹⁶ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 160.

¹⁷ John Sullivan Dwight, “Gottschalk,” *Dwight’s Journal of Music: A Paper of Art and Literature* 4, no. 3 (22 October 1853): 22.

the poetic Chopin] than the lightest magazine verses with the inspired lyrics of the great bards.”¹⁸ Musicologist William Mowder concluded that

While for Dwight the goal of music was to lead the listener to God or the Ideal through the stimulation of the intellect, for Gottschalk, it was to produce a similar result through the stimulation of emotion.¹⁹

Gottschalk responded creatively to Dwight’s criticism. At one concert he substituted a work by Beethoven for one of his own. Dwight did not recognize it and judged it inferior.²⁰ Unbeknownst to Dwight, Gottschalk also arranged

to write reviews of his own concerts and submit them to his arch-enemy in Boston, John Sullivan Dwight, for publication in the highbrow *Dwight’s Journal of Music*. That he actually succeeded in this ruse on at least two occasions is testimony to Gottschalk’s professional competence as a writer, as well as to his boundless self-confidence.²¹

Gottschalk would even make light of Dwight’s criticisms, writing in his journal “...the horror which I have for drunkenness not being equaled except by that which Mr. D[wight] has for my music.”²² Starr summarizes Gottschalk’s position:

Gottschalk, a practicing Catholic and true son of tolerant New Orleans, loathed Puritanism, and especially the strain of post-Puritan secular perfectionism epitomized by the Boston music critic John Sullivan Dwight.²³

Gottschalk was perhaps not expecting the Germanic and Puritanical criticisms he encountered in the United States, having only known New Orleans and its vicinity prior to going to Europe. As musicologist William Mowder has pointed out, Dwight’s musical tastes and criticisms of Gottschalk were “decidedly Germanic in tone.”²⁴ Gottschalk

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ William Mowder, “Gottschalk and Dwight: America’s First Composer vs. America’s First Critic,” *Journal of American Culture* 4, no. 4 (winter 1981): 164.

²⁰ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 160.

²¹ Starr, “Foreword” in Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist*, x-xi.

²² Louis Moreau Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist*, ed. Jeanne Behrend, with a foreword by Frederick Starr (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 178.

²³ Starr, “Foreword” in Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist*, xv.

²⁴ Mowder, 163.

found himself needing to please two quite different audiences, that of the general public, and that of the music critics. Jeanne Behrend elaborates:

Gottschalk, whose musical formation had taken place in the Paris of the 1840's after childhood in a French milieu, now found himself in an increasingly German-dominated country. Although mainly successful he encountered more difficulties in pleasing the public in the United States than anywhere else. He had to walk a tightrope over a terrain of widely divergent tastes. His own salon pieces and opera transcriptions, too trivial for listeners demanding Beethoven and Mendelssohn, were too advanced for some of the simple folk in outlying communities, who were asking for a tune they could follow.²⁵

The culture of New Orleans was musically much more diverse than that of most of the rest of the United States at the time. Because Gottschalk did not share the perspective of his critics, some, such as George Upton, would suggest that Gottschalk's different views reflected another time period. Upton comments, Gottschalk was

of a school not far removed from an earlier epoch, when the ability to compose and improvise had been a criterion by which a performer was judged. Others were better qualified to play the classics, he said candidly and with reason, but nobody could play his own works as well as he could. Besides, he added, the public liked them, and what difference would it make a thousand years hence, anyway?²⁶

Gottschalk harbored strong views on music and frequently elaborated on them in his private journals. On June 3, 1862, he wrote:

Gave a concert alone at Worcester (Massachusetts). Brignoli, Amodio, and Madame de Lussan are in Boston; they gave a concert there last night; the whole weight of the concert thus fell on my shoulders. Played the Prelude in D flat of Chopin, under the name of *Méditation religieuse*, *Last Hope*, *Banjo*, *Union*, *Trovatore*, and *Murmures éoliens*. Recalled several times. A crazy amateur, having a book of Beethoven's sonatas under his arm, came to seek me between the first and second parts of my performance, asking me to play an andante by Beethoven. I consented by playing that in A flat of the '*Sonata pathétique*.' I had the satisfaction of seeing my amateur while I played, with his eyes fixed on the text, in the English style, to see if I made a mistake. Of all the absurdities practiced by the Anglo-Saxon race in matters of art, this is what makes

²⁵ Jeanne Behrend, prelude to *Notes of a Pianist*, by Louis Moreau Gottschalk, ed. Jeanne Behrend (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), xxxviii.

²⁶ Upton, 77.

me suffer the most. Their manner of playing music is wholly speculative; it is a play of the wits. They like to see such and such chords resolved. They delight in the *episodes* of a second repetition. 'They comprehend music in their own way,' you will tell me; but I doubt if it is the right one. Music is a thing eminently sensuous. Certain combinations move us, not because they are ingenious, but because they move our nervous system in a certain way. I have a horror of musical Puritans. They are arid natures, deprived of sensibility, generally hypocrites, incapable of understanding two phrases in music. They never judge until they are assured that it is proper, like those tasters who do not esteem a wine until they have seen the seal, and who can be made to drink execrable wine imperturbably, which they will pronounce excellent if it is served to them in a bottle powdered with age. These Tartuffes of sound often commit deplorable mistakes. It is the Englishman before a picture, his look perfectly indifferent; seeking the number in his little catalogue, he takes care not to compromise himself by an impromptu judgment. He admires only when he is perfectly sure. His catalogue says 'chef-d'œuvre of Rubens'; he then lets go in all confidence the trigger of his false enthusiasm. He thinks, in good faith that he understands the chef-d'œuvre because it is placed under his notice by a consecrated judgment.²⁷

Gottschalk clearly did not lack an opinion regarding the views and practices of his critics.

Having grown up experiencing music in an entirely different way, he was not afraid to disagree with them. Musically, Gottschalk preferred eclecticism to an enforced canon of masters. He writes:

Those whose taste is not eclectic have no more right to govern criticism than a man with a jaundice or green spectacles to decide upon the coloring of a picture. I admire the beautiful wherever I find it, never bothering myself to demand its passport.²⁸

In his journal, Gottschalk sums up best his critics' reactions to his compositions:

'He plays only his own music.' Of all the criticisms of which I am the object on the part of the impotent and jealous who, like thorns and barren bushes, encumber every avenue of art in America, I avow that this is the one that I am the least disposed to accept. If I had never been able to compose, no doubt the poorest of musical pretenders who had manufactured a polka or a valse would have thrown it in my face that I played only the music of others. If my compositions had failed in originality, 'They are copies' would not have failed to be said; but I compose, and what I compose is unfortunately my own, and, further, the public seems to like my music; hence their rage. I understand it, but what I cannot understand is

²⁷ Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist*, 75-6.

²⁸ Scrapbook 6. *Gottschalk Collection*. New York: New York Public Library.

that, after taking a great deal of trouble to find fault with me, they make into a crime what in me really is a merit.²⁹

Gottschalk did share some of his critics' appreciation of European composers. In large cities like New York he included works by Beethoven, Mozart, Chopin, and Liszt in his performances. He even played Liszt's arrangement of the Sermon and Benediction from Berlioz's *Benvenuto Celini*, perhaps one of the earliest performances of a work by Berlioz outside of Europe.³⁰ Gottschalk also pushed boundaries with the general public. While Beethoven's piano sonatas were typically reserved for small parlor settings, due to the increasing popularity of the piano in the United States, Gottschalk was able to successfully program them on large concerts. In his *Memories of a Musical Life*, Gottschalk's friend William Mason wrote that

No pianist ever dreamed of playing Beethoven's sonatas in public in those days. They were reserved for the parlor; and one, or two, at most, were enough for an evening. The mental absorption of this amount was sufficient. Lighter pieces filled out the program.³¹

Despite his ongoing disagreements with Dwight, and his early impressions of Boston, Gottschalk would eventually come to know and appreciate the culture of New England. As Starr has noted,

By the mid-1860s he [Gottschalk] had made contact with other New Englanders, however, especially the literary and educational elite of Boston, whom he came to revere and who in turn accepted him as one of their own.³²

Gottschalk, it seems, was able to move past his views of Dwight.

The variety of responses to Gottschalk are especially visible in the range of reactions to his death. Upon learning of his death, newspapers in New York, Boston,

²⁹ Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist*, 174-5.

³⁰ Behrend, prelude to *Notes of a Pianist*, xxxviii-xxxix.

³¹ William Mason, *Memories of a Musical Life* (original ed., The Century Co., 1901; New York: AMS Press, 1970), 226.

³² Starr, "Foreword" in Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist*, xv.

Philadelphia, and New Orleans printed news of Gottschalk's death with mixed moods. *L'Abeille*, the French-language newspaper in New Orleans, longingly reminisced of Gottschalk's return to the city from Europe.³³ The *New York Times* noted the "sad news," remarking that "Few men enjoyed greater popularity, and none more numerous and cordial personal friendships, than the dead pianist. His reputation was world-wide."³⁴ Gottschalk's former acquaintance and piano student, Amy Fay, would express the sentiment felt by many young American women of the time:

I was dreadfully sorry to hear of poor Gottschalk's death. He had a golden touch, and equal to any in the world, I think. But what a romantic way to die!—to fall senseless at his instrument, while he was playing *La Morte*. It was very strange. If anything more is in the papers about him you must send it to me, for the infatuation that I and 999,999 other American girls once felt for him, still lingers in my breast!³⁵

American opera tenor William Castle responded by recalling his first interaction with Gottschalk, one that shows Gottschalk's personality as well as the audience's determination to hear him. In an interview following Gottschalk's death, Castle remarked:

My first appearance was with the late L. M. Gottschalk, pianist, in New York. Gottschalk was a wonderful performer and a splendid gentleman. We were to give a concert in Syracuse. Gottschalk was an inveterate billiard player, and before the entertainment we were playing a game, entirely forgetting about the assembling audience, when his valet rushed in, all excitement. 'Come, it is half-past eight, and the house is packed and raising the mischief; hurry.' Gottschalk looked up. 'Tell them to wait until I finish my game.' And the audience waited.³⁶

³³ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 8.

³⁴ "Death of Gottschalk." *New York Times*, 21 January 1870:5.

³⁵ Amy Fay, *Music-Study in Germany From the Home Correspondence of Amy Fay*, (original ed., Jansen, McClurg & Company, 1880; New York: The MacMillan Company, 1922), 42.

³⁶ George Ade Davis, "The Requiem of a Grand Opera Pioneer," *Theatre Magazine* 10 (August 1909): 68.

Dwight, on the other hand, treated notice of Gottschalk's death almost as an afterthought, allotting him one paragraph at the bottom of the last page of his January 29, 1870 issue.

It reads as follows:

The last Brazilian mail steamer brings news of the death of Louis Moreau Gottschalk, the celebrated American pianist. It appears that during a concert at Rio Janeiro, while playing one of his newest compositions, called "La Morte," he fell senseless. He was taken to Tiqua, where, after lingering three weeks, he died on the 18th of December. He was about forty years of age, having been born in New Orleans in 1829. He was educated in Paris, and made his first public appearance as a pianist in April, 1845. He travelled for several years in Europe, giving concerts, and in January, 1853, gave his first one in America, at New York.³⁷

Despite their criticisms, even Gottschalk's critics would acknowledge his virtuosity, even if they did so as if it were a liability. Starr elaborates:

Over the years, comfortably employed historians have been quick to dismiss Moreau Gottschalk as "merely" a virtuoso, as if he had prostituted his true calling in favor of keyboard pyrotechnics and musical hucksterism. How much better, they imply, had Gottschalk settled down in some quiet place and dedicated his life to composition. Gottschalk, they would have us believe, was not really 'serious.'³⁸

In fact, Gottschalk's virtuosity is often one of the first things cited when he is given credit for being a gifted musician, as in this example written by scholar T. P. Currier:

Louis Moreau Gottschalk may justly be regarded as the first one to put piano playing on a distinctly higher footing than it had ever had in the United States. . . . His technical command enabled him to play music popular in character with a brilliancy, beauty and charm hitherto unheard in this country.³⁹

Gottschalk's virtuosity fascinated his audiences, who were sometimes as interested in seeing him play as hearing him:

³⁷ John Sullivan Dwight, "Death of Gottschalk," *Dwight's Journal of Music: A Paper of Art and Literature* 28, no. 23 (29 January 1870): 184.

³⁸ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 96.

³⁹ T. P. Currier, "American Pioneers of Modern Piano Playing and Their Successors," *The Musician* 17 (December 1912): 810.

Gottschalk was actually a fine musician, and a superb pianist, but Americans were mostly interested in seeing how fast his fingers could move over the keys. He was idolized by the women of his audiences, who, like the twentieth-century bobby-soxers, would rush up to the piano and tear to shreds his white gloves, which he always wore onto the stage. In his home town of New Orleans, the ladies would line the steps up to the second floor where he practiced, hoping to hear and see their idol.⁴⁰

Gottschalk's virtuosity would even become the subject of several caricatures depicting him with excessive fingers and hands. Following a concert in Washington D. C., Gottschalk was approached by a local professor of physiology, who, having just witnessed how quickly Gottschalk could play, hoped to prove his rival wrong by confirming that Gottschalk could make more than twenty-five percussions in a second. While Gottschalk referred to the man in his journal as an "ignoramus" for thinking of him as a human motor, this encounter shows, nonetheless, just how incredible Gottschalk's abilities were.⁴¹ Yet Gottschalk's virtuosity reveals more than a crowd-pleasing visual effect; it shows the extent of his technical capabilities. In regards to Gottschalk's virtuosity, John Godfrey Doyle elaborates:

Keyboard figurations used by Gottschalk are evidence of his exceptional virtuosity as a pianist and manifest his knowledge of the instrument. His virtuoso compositions abound in difficult octaves, often coupled as interlocking passages divided between the hands. The piano is covered with thickly textured chords in all registers, achieving a kind of orchestral sonority. Other manifestations of virtuosity are seen in the abundance of trills, cadenzas, brilliant passages and formidable combinations of double notes. The composer is fond of the sonorous middle register of the piano where he introduces his melodies embellished with ornamental passages and arpeggios. Finally, Gottschalk's keyboard figurations are pianistic and lie well under the hands in spite of their often undoubted difficulty.⁴²

⁴⁰ John Tasker Howard, and George Kent Bellows, *A Short History of Music in America* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1967), 118.

⁴¹ Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist*, 55.

⁴² John Doyle, "The Piano Music of Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829-1869)," (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1960), 119.

Those who overlooked Gottschalk's more hidden musical feats, did so out of a lack of awareness.

American Identity, Gottschalk's Significance, and Africa's Legacy in the Music of the United States

Gottschalk does not fit neatly into existing categories. He had roots in both classical and popular traditions yet openly criticized both the popular minstrel shows and the "bilious effusions" of contemporary advocates for serious classical music. For those who did not realize how significant his blending of African and European musical concepts was it was easy to leave him on the sidelines. In the 1890 edition of Sir George Grove's *A Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Gottschalk's entry appears not in one of the main volumes but in the appendix of volume 4 (of four volumes). The author, Mons. Adolphe Jullien of Paris, sums up his entry of barely one column in length by stating:

Gottschalk himself is only remembered as an exceptionally gifted virtuoso, whose successes were considerable, but who was not a great artist in the highest sense of the term, since he was never connected with the classical school, and his compositions owe their worth entirely to the charm, freshness, and variety of his playing.⁴³

The newest entry, now within the main body of the 2001 edition of *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, still fails to recognize fully Gottschalk's genius:

Although Gottschalk was by no means an 'advanced' composer, even in terms of his own day, his sensitivity to local colour enabled him to forecast, with uncanny prescience, American musical developments that did not actually take place until the end of the 19th century.⁴⁴

⁴³ Adolphe Jullien, "Louis Moreau Gottschalk," *A Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Sir George Grove, Vol. 4 (London and New York: Macmillan and Co., 1890), 652-653.

⁴⁴ Irving Lowens and S. Frederick Starr, "Gottschalk, Louis Moreau," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed. vol. 10, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 2001), 201.

Gottschalk's strength is downplayed while his inability to measure up to the established 'classics' is emphasized. Gottschalk and his music were, and to some extent still are, considered lighter than his European contemporaries and their compositions. In 1908, musicologist William Sherwood offered this opinion despite titling his article "An Appreciation of Gottschalk as a Composer":

It is a pity that Gottschalk did not apply a higher standard of criticism, in some respects, to his compositions. It is said on good authority that he was sufficiently well educated in music and sufficiently conversant with the works of the great masters to have done so. His claim that the public did not want anything of a more classical quality is a somewhat selfish one, showing that he was apparently too easily satisfied with the applause of the masses, and not at all inclined to make a martyr of himself for the sake of the highest ideals, thereby to uplift his listeners, instead of pandering merely to their amusement and pleasure. . . . In my opinion Gottschalk could have combined all those great qualities with which his nature was endowed along with some of the intellectual peculiarities shown in the works of those who have written fugues and sonatas in such a manner as to have lost none of his popularity, but to have helped along the cause of good music in his time, and thereby to have won for himself a more exalted and permanent position among the great composers.⁴⁵

Sherwood, like some of his contemporaries, failed to recognize the possibility of more than one set of criteria for judging the quality of a composition. Writing for the *Nation* in 1882, Henry T. Finck declared that Gottschalk had

accommodated himself, to a certain extent, to the demands of the public, and in so doing he partly sacrificed his artistic principles, he deserves credit, on the other hand, for the work of a pioneer [in using his own compositions to encourage uneducated audiences to familiarize themselves with classical music.]⁴⁶

Finck does not acknowledge that Gottschalk's "sacrifice" might be better viewed as a reliance on a different set of cultural practices, those Gottschalk first learned in New Orleans. Women's infatuated responses to Gottschalk may also have played a role in why he was marginalized and considered "lowbrow," as suggested more recently by

⁴⁵ William H. Sherwood, "An Appreciation of Gottschalk as a Composer," *The Musician* 13 (October 1908): 441.

⁴⁶ Henry T. Finck, "Gottschalk's Tour in the United States," *Nation*, (5 January 1882): 16.

musicologist and literary scholar Peter J. Rabinowitz.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, what Gottschalk's audiences' reactions clearly demonstrate is that Gottschalk was a master at reaching out to them and eliciting a response.

Much of Gottschalk's popularity died along with him. As Offergeld notes:

Neither the indigenous American flavor nor the French textural elegance of his piano pieces was of interest to the crowds of German musicians who emigrated to the United States after the 1860's.⁴⁸

Renewed interest in him has arrived slowly, with only sporadic recognition. On October 13, 1908, the notable periodical the *Musician* devoted an entire issue to Gottschalk.⁴⁹ In a September 23, 1956 article for the Sunday *New York Times*, music critic Harold Schonberg reminiscently wrote:

Gottschalk's music is American music all the way through. It is the music of a young and naïve American, it is old-fashioned and one can easily poke fun at some of it. Yet it has an individuality of its own and a vitality too, and it is typical of the music which America listened to and loved for several generations—only it is better than anything being composed here at the time. Gottschalk, whether by accident or design, was a genuine pioneer. For nobody else in America was writing this kind of nationalistic music, nor was anybody going to until Charles Ives came along about fifty years later. And not until MacDowell did an American composer handle the piano with equal certainty.⁵⁰

In his 1965 work, *Music in a New Found Land*, Wilfrid Mellers, referring to Gottschalk's incorporation of Creole melodies from his childhood into his early compositions, wrote:

This was originally intended as a serious artistic gesture; Gottschalk would create a New World complement to European nationalism, using the dances he had heard in childhood in the same way as Chopin had used Polish mazurkas, or Liszt used Hungarian czardas. In effect, however, Gottschalk produced something quite different, partly because of the way he treated it. Chopin's mazurkas are poetic commentaries, by a spiritually isolated artist, on folk material, and are in that sense romantically introverted. Gottschalk's dances are, in their

⁴⁷ Peter J. Rabinowitz, "'With Our Own Dominant Passions': Gottschalk, Gender, and the Power of Listening," *19th Century Music* 16, no. 3 (spring 1993): 242-252.

⁴⁸ Offergeld, "The Gottschalk Legend," xiv.

⁴⁹ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 445.

⁵⁰ Harold Schonberg, "Gottschalk Piano Works Recall Vanished Age," *The New York Times*, 23 September 1956.

exhibitionism, extroverted, recreating in pianistic terms the communal vivacity of their prototypes. They are “people’s music” in that there is a minimum intrusion of personal sentiment; and Gottschalk’s genius lay in seeing how this “child-like” Negro vitality could reflect one aspect of his white America.⁵¹

Mellers has started to realize that Gottschalk was capturing the culture of his childhood environment.

As jazz critic Eric Thacker has acknowledged, “Gottschalk’s contribution to American music was not accorded any real weight until mid-twentieth-century.”⁵²

Beginning in 1969, the one-hundred-year anniversary of Gottschalk’s death prompted a gradual resurgence of interest in him. Vera Brodsky Lawrence published *The Piano Works of Louis Moreau Gottschalk* in five volumes, making many of Gottschalk’s works again readily available.⁵³ Robert Offergeld would publish his catalog of Gottschalk’s works in 1970.⁵⁴ On June 7, that same year, Dillard University in New Orleans hosted the First Louis Moreau Gottschalk Competition for pianists, drawing competitors from Cuba, Chile, Argentina, and the United States. It has taken until the late twentieth century for Gottschalk to regain more widespread positive acknowledgement and recognition in his home country. John Doyle published his exhaustive bibliography of the composer in 1983.⁵⁵ James Perone’s would follow in 2002.⁵⁶ In his extensive and thorough biography of Gottschalk first published in 1995, regarding Gottschalk and his music, S. Frederick Starr concludes:

⁵¹ Wilfrid Mellers, *Music in a New Found Land: Themes and Developments in the History of American Music* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), 251.

⁵² Eric Thacker, “Gottschalk and a Prelude to Jazz,” *Jazz & Blues* (March 12, 1973): 10.

⁵³ Vera Brodsky Lawrence, ed., *The Piano Works of Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 5 volumes, with a biographical essay by Robert Offergeld (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969).

⁵⁴ Robert Offergeld, *The Centennial Catalogue of the Published and Unpublished Compositions of Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (New York: Stereo Review, 1970).

⁵⁵ John Doyle, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk 1829-1869: A Bibliographical Study and Catalog of Works*, *Bibliographies in American Music*, vol.7. (Detroit: College Music Society, 1983).

⁵⁶ James E. Perone, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk: A Bio-Bibliography* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2002).

Even the very contradictory quality of Gottschalk's legacy has proven enduring. His music today evokes the same expressions of regret over an opportunity lost that were heard a century ago, the same frustration, condescension, and even indignation. But in other quarters its lyricism and distinctive textures call forth the full range of emotions to which a diverse and many-sided culture gives rise and crystallize those deeper feelings of vitality and pathos that flow directly from the American experience. In both his achievements and in his shortcomings, Gottschalk was an American original.⁵⁷

While Starr never fully expands upon the importance of African influence on Gottschalk and his music, he does grant Gottschalk great respect and recognition.

The gradual recognition of Gottschalk's significance in American music leaves us to wonder what he would have accomplished had he lived longer. Ned Sublette identifies one large absence that reflects both Gottschalk's struggles in the United States and his unfinished business:

When 'Mr. Gottschalk'—no first name necessary—returned to New York from Havana by steamship in 1862, the *New York Times*, in noting his arrival, matter-of-factly referred to him as 'this eminent artist—the greatest and most original that America has yet produced.' In four and a half months of that year, he gave eighty-five concerts in the United States; by the time he left in 1865, he had given many more, including a performance for President and Mrs. Lincoln. But Gottschalk never staged one of his monster concerts in his home country. So possibly the most revolutionary American concert music of the entire nineteenth century—a work combining the sonic legacy of Berlioz with what would in the future be called multiculturalism—was performed in Havana and not in New York. *La Nuit des tropiques* would not be performed in the United States until 1955, and then only in an abbreviated version with a cut-down orchestra—which is to say, it was not heard at all.⁵⁸

Even in New Orleans, the United States was never privy to one of Gottschalk's monster concerts. Furthermore, as Starr points out,

⁵⁷ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 454.

⁵⁸ Ned Sublette, *Cuba and Its Music: From the First Drums to the Mambo* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2004), 152-3.

Not one of his [Gottschalk's] orchestral scores has been issued in an authoritative edition. . . . The most commonly performed edition of his symphony *Noches de los Tropicos* (*A Night in the Tropics*) was reconstructed from a piano reduction.⁵⁹

At the time of his death, Gottschalk had finished at least six opera scores that he had planned to take to Europe for production.⁶⁰ Musicologist George Ferris speculates what Gottschalk could have done had he lived longer:

Louis Moreau Gottschalk was an artist and composer whose gifts were never more than half developed; for his native genius as a musician was of the highest order. Shortly before he died, at the age of forty, he seemed to have ripened into more earnest views and purposes, and, had he lived to fulfill his prime, it is reasonable to hazard the conjecture that he would have richly earned a far loftier niche in the pantheon of music than can now be given him.⁶¹

In the final years of Gottschalk's life in the United States, his *Pasquinade*, which was quite similar to ragtime, was especially popular. *Ojos criollos*, which was even more like ragtime and was loved even in rural America, was among his most frequently programmed compositions in the United States.⁶² This information suggests that had Gottschalk lived longer he had the ideas and the audience to transform American music. Instead the transformation was delayed.

Owing to the shortness of Gottschalk's life, editorialist William Anderson recognized that the United States lost more than Gottschalk. In a November 1974 column for *Stereo Review*, he wrote:

The music of Louis Moreau Gottschalk is, I believe, just such an essential trace element, a peculiarly American compound whose late absence from the sounding air has caused our national music to lose its sense of direction. It is not the fault of Gottschalk or his music that he is no longer on the menu, but of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century critics who found him lacking in essential 'seriousness,' and of performers who refused to risk joining him under the same

⁵⁹ S. Frederick Starr, "Louis Moreau Gottschalk: Almost Forgotten Celebrity," *The Instrumentalist* 53 no. 56 (September 1998): 56-72. First published in *Clavier* 35, no. 8 (October 1996): 58.

⁶⁰ Ferris, 284.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 347.

brush. Gottschalk's timing was bad, of course. He came along at a time when our young country, having survived the rigors of the revolution of independence and a civil war as well, was desperately trying to join the community of nations, to gain its attention and earn its respect, and hayseed provinciality simply wouldn't do. What would do was a very conscious Teutonization of American musical culture, a *serious* project planned and directed from Athenian Boston by John Sullivan Dwight and his decorous *Journal of Music*. The project was less bold than it might appear, for the musical community was then comparatively small and easily manipulated. And it didn't work, either, as a glance at the infinitely various, far from monolithic structure of American music today amply demonstrates. But it did manage to shove Gottschalk (and a number of other domestic worthies) down below the salt. He might possibly have been forgiven for being American (he had, after all, traveled and played widely in Europe), but he was *popular*, and everyone knows that you cannot be both popular *and* 'serious.'⁶³ (Anderson's italics)

While Gottschalk's untimely death leaves us wondering what more he could have done, it should not be allowed to cause us to lessen our appraisal of what he did.

The United States of America owes its musical identity to Africa as well as Europe. Music styles such as jazz, rock and roll, rhythm and blues, and rap (to name a few) all have strong musical links to West and Central Africa. In the United States we tend to be familiar with the European cultures that contributed to our musical and cultural make-up but fewer of us know about the Mali Empire, the Yoruba, the Ashanti, or the Kongo. Perhaps this lack of awareness of the African cultures that influenced Gottschalk has also contributed to why he is not better known today.

From the European angle, Gottschalk would list his three biggest pianistic influences as Chopin, Liszt, and Thalberg, in that order.⁶⁴ Yet, Gottschalk would express repeatedly that he felt most at home in New Orleans, and in parts of the Caribbean where similar mixes of European and African cultures and musics were the norm. While he would absorb musical ideas and influences wherever he went, he held a special affinity

⁶³ William Anderson, "Editorially Speaking: Musical Nutrition," *Stereo Review* 33, no. 5 (November 1974): 6.

⁶⁴ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 54.

for African-derived musical traditions. Nowhere is this more apparent than when he went out of his way to have the Tumba Francesa musicians brought from Santiago to Havana for the premier of his first symphony. Gottschalk knew specifically what sounds he wanted to incorporate into his compositions.

Though the depth of Gottschalk's internalization of diverse musics is downplayed when it comes to African-derived influences, it is readily accepted regarding his Spanish compositions. Gottschalk did not merely copy what he heard when he reflected Spanish music into his works—he learned the material so well that he was able to take creative liberties with it without going so far as to make it unrecognizable. Regarding Gottschalk's *Capricho español*, Starr points out that:

Capricho español was no mere documentary presentation of Spanish music, for Gottschalk had freely recomposed his material, extending phrases at will, dropping whole sections of pieces, and interposing original melodies of his own. And for the first time in European classical music, he attempted to replicate the sound of a Spanish guitar, a technique that he was to bring to fruition in *The Banjo*. He thus accomplished for Spanish music the same transformation that he had achieved in his earlier Creole pieces. Both Glinka and Liszt had used the *jota*, but neither went as far as Gottschalk in celebrating the specific textures of the Spanish dance.⁶⁵

Note in particular that Starr implies that Gottschalk had replicated the textures and sounds of Creole music in his earlier works. In other words, Starr recognizes that the four pieces which he calls the Louisiana Quartet (*Bamboula*, *Danse de nègres*; *La Savane*, *Ballade créole*; *Le Bananier*, *Chanson nègre*; and *Le Mancenillier*, *Sérénade*, originally subtitled *Marche Nègre*,) are not merely borrowed melodies or rhythms but full incorporations of the structure of the music Gottschalk was choosing to utilize on the piano. Starr is suggesting that Gottschalk knew the African-derived musics of his childhood home so well that he could create new material that followed the same

⁶⁵ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 102.

structure while composing as a teenager. Though Starr does not go into the full implications, specifics, and significance of this ability of Gottschalk's, he nevertheless is aware of what Gottschalk could and did do.

Why then is it so readily accepted that Gottschalk could create new music in Spanish, Cuban, and American folk idioms, while his ability to do the same with African-derived material is so quickly glossed over? As I have shown in Chapter VII, Gottschalk's ability to replicate African-derived melodies and rhythms in his works has been documented. What the Caribbean and American styles in which Gottschalk composed share is a structural connection to African-derived musics. It is this shared underlying factor that facilitated Gottschalk's ability to adapt so readily to each style as he encountered it. This entire process was set into motion when Gottschalk learned to internalize African-derived musical structure as a child in New Orleans. His early exposure to African-derived musics, combined with his phenomenal memory and talent, ensured that a hybridized African-European musical language would become a primary component of Gottschalk's musical language. To understand fully the music of Gottschalk, New Orleans, and the United States, we need to give credit to Africa as well as to Europe.

Ghanaian ethnomusicologist Nketia asserts that what Africa gave the United States went beyond isolated remnants. Africa offered the United States a process that was open to new ideas:

. . . viewed from the perspective of Africa, one may see only a bundle of fragments of old Africa and inevitable simplifications of African music in the Americas. From the viewpoint of the Americas, however, it appears that the primary value of what exists of Africa is that it provides a basis for the development of tradition, for exploring new directions without loss of musical identity. Africa, therefore provides a source of strength. That is why African

roots must be viewed in terms of creative processes that allow for continuity and change.⁶⁶

Some Americans were able to see Africa's significance earlier than others. Writing in 1946, jazz and ragtime scholar Rudi Blesh recognized the need for greater awareness of African roots in the music of the United States:

Detailed study of African music emphasizes its strangeness as the product of a culture remote in spirit from our own. Yet, since it has become, through Afro-American music, a part of our culture, it remains a language which we need to learn.⁶⁷

In Gottschalk's time, European musical traditions, and especially those of the German and Viennese masters, dominated American academies. Other musical styles were quickly shunned for being too sentimental or light, or for not being "serious." More than one hundred years after Gottschalk's death, American-grown music has still not received equal treatment or footing with the European traditions in American academia.⁶⁸ While ethnomusicologists frequently study a variety of American musics, musicology departments are more common and often focus on European-derived art music. In Europe, Gottschalk would not disappear after his death to the extent that he did in the United States. Jack Sullivan elaborates:

As composer and prophet, Gottschalk was more a force in Europe than in America. After his death, he practically vanished from American culture (and to this day remains obscure); a few pieces such as *A Night in the Tropics* (though only the rhumba finale, which is wrenched out of context) are occasionally resurrected for pops concerts and by pianists specializing in American music. This sad neglect, so typical of Americans in regard to their most important artists, continues even in New Orleans, where it is difficult to find a Gottschalk recording and where promoters of New Orleans music display an appalling ignorance of their city's first important composer.

⁶⁶ J. H. Kwabena Nketia, "African Roots of Music in the Americas: An African View," chap. 13 in *Ethnomusicology and African Music (Collected Papers)* (Accra, Ghana: Afram Publications (Ghana) Ltd., 2005), 335.

⁶⁷ Rudi Blesh, *Shining Trumpets: A History of Jazz* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946), 45.

⁶⁸ Thacker, 11.

In Europe, the energies Gottschalk set loose were stalled after his death but not killed. Half a century later, Coleridge-Taylor, Debussy, Ravel and other Europeans revived the rhythmic swing that Gottschalk had brought to the Old World from New Orleans, Cuba, and South America when they began experimenting with rags, rhumbas, fox-trots, tangos, bamboulas, and anything else that could energize the square rhythms of the post-Wagnerian establishment. These were largely parallel developments rather than direct influences, but in the cases of Debussy and Ravel, the Gottschalk connection was direct. Jacques Durand, Debussy's publisher and lifelong correspondent, was a Gottschalk devotee, as was Ernest Giraud, Debussy's teacher in the conservatory (and composer of the *Carmen* recitatives) and a native of New Orleans, for whom Gottschalk had served as mentor. According to Barbara Fischer-Williams, Giraud shared not only music with Debussy but 'billiards, cigarettes, and nocturnal rambles.' Debussy knew Gottschalk's legacy, even though scholars generally assume that his interest in ragtime idioms was derived from minstrel shows and circus bands.⁶⁹

Ravel, it seems, appreciated Gottschalk and his place in American music. In a 1928 interview during his United States tour, Ravel would remark,

You Americans take jazz too lightly. You seem to feel that it is cheap, vulgar, momentary. In my opinion it is bound to lead to the national music of the United States. Aside from it you have no veritable idiom as yet. Most of your compositions show European influences, either Spanish, Russian, French or German—rather than American individuality. Nor do I believe that those who claim that this is due to the admixture of foreign peoples who comprise the American people. *Pas du tout. C'est ridicule, ça.* [Not at all. That's ridiculous.]

Look at the *mélange* we have in France. In one section you will find Frenchmen who resemble Germans, in another some who resemble Italians more closely than the French. Besides we have Arabs, Algerians, expatriated Americans and intermarried Americans. Still who would deny that our music is characteristically French?

I could sit down and play you some French music written about 1849 that you would take for jazz, so characteristic is it, so syncopated in rhythm, *néanmoins* [nevertheless], it retains a French flavor. What is more, it is considered as classical music.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Jack Sullivan, *New World Symphonies: How American Culture Changed European Music* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 198-9.

⁷⁰ Quoted in Arbie Orenstein, ed. and comp., *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence: Articles: Interviews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 390.

The classical jazz Ravel was referring to was Gottschalk's.⁷¹ Ravel could see both the French influence in Gottschalk's music, as well as an additional syncopated "flavor" similar to jazz. Regarding Americans, Ravel would also state, "I think you have too little realization of yourselves and that you still look too far away over the water."⁷² To Ravel, Americans were still looking to Europe for America's musical identity while ignoring the rich hybrids in their own culture.

A reluctance to give credit to Africa as a part of American musical identity is nothing new. Take for example this response to scholars' ongoing debate over whether Milhaud's *La Création du monde* was written before Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*:

In the 1990s, scholars did another flip. Carol Oja initiated a new controversy, accusing earlier critics of having seriously erred in their assertion that *La Création* preceded Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* by a year, when in fact it had been written only a few months earlier, and of hyping Milhaud's importance at the expense of Gershwin, whom, in the late twentieth century, critics had anointed the Great American Composer. One might ask what difference it makes: if Milhaud's piece preceded Gershwin's by only a day, it still came first. Both these reactions are variations on a chronic nervousness that Americans exhibit concerning their musical identity. They both miss the point, one that should be comforting; it was American popular culture that had the epoch-changing power and impact. The real source of this extraordinary energy was neither Milhaud nor Gershwin, but black America. It all started in Harlem clubs, no matter who expropriated it first.⁷³

As Gottschalk toured the United States, he would become for the general population their first exposure to the syncopated rhythms from hybrid musics from New Orleans and the Caribbean at a time before recorded music and the internet. Gottschalk was not a reformer—he gave the public what it wanted.⁷⁴ He was not trying to change

⁷¹ Sullivan, 199.

⁷² Orenstein, 458.

⁷³ Sullivan, 206-7.

⁷⁴ Behrend, prelude to *Notes of a Pianist*, xxxvii-xxxviii.

American culture—he shows us what it was and still is even though our institutions have yet to fully reflect this. Charles Hamm writes:

In the century and a half since Gottschalk wrote *Bamboula*, so many pieces have made use of syncopated, Afro-Latin rhythms against reiterated melodic fragments that his piece, using these devices for probably the first time, has not received its proper due . . . the opening of *Le Bananier*, with its insistent drumming of octaves and open fifths, and the structure of *La Savane*—a simple diatonic melody repeated for the duration of the composition against changing harmonizations and textures—remind us of many later pieces. But contemporary audiences found these things new and exciting.⁷⁵

Gottschalk introduced them to New Orleans and its residents liked what they heard.

Why does Gottschalk continue to be overlooked as a central figure in American music? Ashenafi Kebede suggests that African influences on African-American culture in the United States have not received their due credit for several reasons including a lack of awareness of African cultural accomplishments throughout history, unfavorable portrayals in the media, and the continuing minority status of African-Americans in the United States.⁷⁶ Perhaps Gottschalk fell victim to some of these same attitudes as a result of his African-derived musical roots. Gottschalk is often trivialized, treated as a curiosity, or completely overlooked in music dictionaries, encyclopedias, and American music textbooks.

At the time of Gottschalk's New York City debut, a great debate was going on over what the United States' musical identity should be.⁷⁷ Some would argue that we still have not answered this question, but the evidence included in this study suggests that Gottschalk answered it for us if we would only acknowledge him. Here we have the epitome of musical genius and multiculturalism, a musical hybrid that began with diverse

⁷⁵ Charles Hamm, *Music in the New World* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1983), 223-4.

⁷⁶ Ashenafi Kebede, *Roots of Black Music: The Vocal, Instrumental, and Dance Heritage of Africa and Black America* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1982), 128-9.

⁷⁷ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 132.

cultures mixing in the Americas and continued to spread globally as technology allowed for further exposure to diverse ideas and practices.

Music critic William Henry Fry (1813-64) concluded that the United States must embrace its own music geniuses rather than those of other countries (i.e. European classical traditions.)⁷⁸ Fry even compared Gottschalk's works with those of Haydn and Beethoven, fueling a fiery debate.⁷⁹ Sublette contextualizes what a trail blazer Gottschalk was:

Gottschalk spent much of his life traveling and concertizing—not only in the United States, where he played some 1,100 recitals, but in the Caribbean and South America, where he listened to the local music and incorporated elements of it into his work. After visiting and absorbing the musics of the southern black United States, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Venezuela, Peru, Argentina, Chile, and Brazil—on top of his Parisian training—Gottschalk must have been the most musically erudite American of his day. Even to realize the value of these as yet unanthologized regional musics was avant-garde. At the time when culture in America was something that came from Europe, when the concept of folklore as an object of study did not yet exist in America, and slavery was still a fact, Gottschalk's commingling of the music of Negroes with his conservatory training in a high-toned popular spectacle was unheard of.⁸⁰

It seems that the United States just cannot make up its mind regarding Gottschalk and his identity, or American musical identity. Today American popular culture openly acknowledges the legacy of Africa, yet our academic programs in music remain predominantly focused on European-derived traditions. Of himself, Gottschalk would say:

I was the *first* American pianist, not by my artistic worth, but in chronological order. Before me, there were no piano concerts except in peculiar cases—that is to say, when a very great name arriving from Europe placed itself by its celebrity before the public, which, willing or unwilling, through curiosity and fashion rather than from taste, made it a duty to go and see the lion. Now piano concerts are chronic, they have even become epidemic: like all good things they are

⁷⁸ Ibid., 133-4.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 136.

⁸⁰ Sublette, *Cuba and its Music*, 148.

abused. From whatever cause the American taste is becoming purer, and with that remarkable rapidity we cite through our whole progress.⁸¹

When Gottschalk was preparing for his New York City debut, some argued about whether he could claim to be American. Because Gottschalk spent so much time abroad, many Americans regarded him as a foreigner.⁸² Having been born in New Orleans and lived so long in France, some saw his habits and mannerisms as entirely French in nature while others argued that his mannerisms and behaviors were decidedly American.⁸³

Charles Burkhardt of the *Albion* would suggest that Gottschalk was the beginning of a new American school of music.⁸⁴ Doyle agreed:

Gottschalk was the first American to use the folk idiom and rhythm of this hemisphere in serious composition. Had other composers followed his lead, an American school might have resulted much earlier.⁸⁵

Gottschalk was the first prominent American to bridge the musical gap between Europe and Africa in the United States—this is where his significance lies. Furthermore, Gottschalk would “obliterate the line between high and popular art” because there was no line for him growing up in New Orleans.⁸⁶ Frederick Starr claims that what made Gottschalk such a significant figure in American music was that

Aside from his own inborn talent, he (Gottschalk) was shaped from the earliest age by a cultural environment in New Orleans that was second to none in the Americas with respect to the quantity, quality, and diversity of music performed there.⁸⁷

Furthermore, musicologist Daniel Kingman adds that Gottschalk

⁸¹ Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist*, 239.

⁸² John Tasker Howard, *Our American Music*, 3rd ed. (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1946), 205.

⁸³ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 132.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁸⁵ John Doyle, “Gottschalk: Nationalist Composer, Native Virtuoso,” *Music Educators Journal* 56, no. 4 (December 1969): 25.

⁸⁶ Lowens and Starr, 200.

⁸⁷ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 34.

would have been an outstanding figure whatever his origin, but his importance is all the greater because he was an American. He was, in fact, the first American musician to rank unquestionably with the greatest in Europe in his time.⁸⁸

Regardless of how Gottschalk appears in hindsight, it is clear that his hometown lent him significance. When Gottschalk first returned to New Orleans in 1853 following his time in Europe, he wrote in his diary:

My fellow citizens received me in triumph. I was at that time the only American artist who had received the sanction of the European public, and, national self-love assisting, I was received with an indescribable enthusiasm by the Louisianians, less, without doubt, because I deserved it—I already have said that—but because I was the first celebrated in Paris under the name of the ‘*pianist compositeur louisianais*.’⁸⁹

On just his second night back, the St. Charles Theater’s orchestra serenaded Gottschalk outside his room at the St. Charles Hotel. Two nights later the Masons would host a grand banquet in his honor.⁹⁰ At his third of ten concerts in New Orleans, Gottschalk premiered his *Bamboula*. Following that concert, the audience flooded the stage with as many as 370 bouquets.⁹¹ Following Gottschalk’s eighth concert, the city’s mayor, A. D. Crossman, presented him with a sixteen-ounce medal of solid gold, and following his tenth and final debut concert in New Orleans, the ladies of the city gave him a crown, a pin, and a diamond ring.⁹²

Our reluctance to acknowledge American musics in academia seems to parallel our nation’s response to the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in August of 2005. While the French Quarter and many of the city’s historic buildings survived, the African-American community was widely dispersed. Without financial resources to rebuild, only

⁸⁸ Daniel Kingman, *American Music: A Panorama* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1979), 338-9.

⁸⁹ Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist*, 46-7.

⁹⁰ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 141.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 103.

a small portion of this community and its collective knowledge have been able to return.

As researchers Robert Bullard and Beverly Wright have discovered,

Since Katrina, the New Orleans African-American population has plummeted by 57 percent, while the white population has fallen less, by 36 percent. African Americans now make up 58 percent of New Orleans compared to 67 percent before the storm.⁹³

As the boarded-up windows on the upper level of this shop in the French Quarter show, the ravages of six significant hurricanes since 1999, combined with a lack of resources and concern for rebuilding the city and its culture, have had their toll. This shop offers passers by a direct reminder of how much the city has suffered by displaying the names and years of each of the previous six hurricanes.



Figure 54: New Orleans, French Quarter, corner of Royal and Orleans, October 2008, three years after Hurricane Katrina.

⁹³ Robert D. Bullard and Beverly Wright, "Race, Place, and the Environment in Post-Katrina New Orleans," chap. 1 in *Race, Place, and Environmental Justice after Hurricane Katrina: Struggles to Reclaim, Rebuild, and Revitalize New Orleans and the Gulf Coast*, edited by Robert D. Bullard and Beverly Wright (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press), 30.

Only time will tell if this culture which has given the United States so much will ever recover. Interest in New Orleans from Hurricane Katrina did, however, prompt the re-publication of *Notes of a Pianist*.

Summary

Gottschalk foreshadowed later developments in American music because musically he shared the same blended African and European roots. He grew up in New Orleans where diverse musics permeated the city and his home. As a result, his compositions, learning, and performance processes and practices reflected this variety. While the European aspects in Gottschalk's music are immediately apparent, those from Africa are hidden behind European instrumentation and a Caucasian face.

Upon close inspection and analysis, Gottschalk's compositions suggest the extent to which he absorbed African musical concepts. His compositions are highly rhythmic, often built over repeating rhythms, and frequently include specific African-derived dance rhythms. Gottschalk built his African-influenced compositions in rhythmic layers, using the different registers of the piano to provide clarity. These layers often interlocked rhythmically and even overlapped, much as polyrhythms in an African ensemble frequently do. Gottschalk would not have learned how to use African-derived rhythms in a way that parallels their use in West and Central Africa through his formal classical training. Instead, he would have acquired this knowledge in a way that parallels the oral tradition learning systems of sub-Saharan Africa. He learned African-derived musical concepts through ongoing exposure to African and African hybrid musics in his own home and in the city of New Orleans.

Gottschalk learned an African-European hybrid as his first musical language. His cultural foundation would become his musical foundation, facilitating his acquisition of additional African-European hybrid musics such as the Cuban contradanza as he traveled later in life. Similarities between Gottschalk's early and later compositions and other African-European hybrid musics such as ragtime further reinforce the likelihood that African influence is present in the structure of Gottschalk's works. Gottschalk performed in ways that paralleled African performance styles as well, communicating with his audiences and encouraging their participation. Because of his ability as an entertainer, he mesmerized his audiences. Europeans found Gottschalk "exotic," and American critics found him to not be serious enough, while audiences in New Orleans and Latin America welcomed him as one of their own. Their reactions all suggest to whom he was most understandable. To appreciate and understand Gottschalk fully, one must be aware of the general concepts of both African and European musical traditions because in Gottschalk's music we find a mixture of the two.

Had he lived longer, Gottschalk might have transformed American music. As a result of his early death, almost half a century would pass before newly-evolved African-European musical forms of entertainment would revolutionize American music. Perhaps with a better understanding of Gottschalk and his music, we can come to a greater awareness musically of ourselves as Americans. Our musical foundation and Gottschalk's are both built upon the confluence of music traditions from Europe and Africa.

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