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# An American in Paris: Musical Exoticism in the Solo Piano Works of Louis Moreau Gottschalk

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LOUIS MOREAU GOTTSCHALK

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MUSICAL EXOTICISM IN THE SOLO PIANO WORKS OF  
LOUIS MOREAU GOTTSCHALK

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Music in Music History

By

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College of the Ozarks  
Bachelor of Arts in Music, 2007

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University of Arkansas

## **Abstract:**

Louis Moreau Gottschalk was a nineteenth-century American piano virtuoso and composer. In 1841, at the age of twelve, Gottschalk left his native New Orleans to pursue a formal musical education in Paris. During his sojourn, Gottschalk gained fame for his piano music, in which he claimed to portray *creole* culture, more specifically the songs, dances, and rituals of Louisiana slaves. Nineteenth-century music critics were all too eager to crown Gottschalk as the first great American composer. In the present era, his music is still a source of national pride. I propose that Gottschalk's music is not necessarily an accurate representation of American musical idioms. Instead, it should be understood as a semi-authentic attempt by Gottschalk to market himself to the Parisian audiences and their craze for exotic cultures. To illustrate this argument, I look extensively at Gottschalk's *creole* compositions written while in Paris. In Chapter One, I focus on Gottschalk's *Bamboula: danse des nègres*, his first *creole* piece, which fueled the success of his early career. In Chapter Two, I discuss three prominent piano virtuosos performing in Paris during the 1840s. I show that Gottschalk modeled much of his career on the music of Frederic Chopin and that he was rather critical of Franz Liszt and Sigismond Thalberg. Gottschalk's compositions then reflect Chopin above the other Parisian virtuosos. In Chapter Three I examine the pieces Gottschalk composed after his return to the United States in 1853. This includes *The Banjo*, arguably his most famous work. My argument here is that the pieces composed during this period provide a more accurate picture of nineteenth-century American music than Gottschalk's earlier *creole* compositions. Gottschalk spent many years of his life traveling throughout France, Spain, the United States, and the Caribbean, and each of these locations influenced the composer in different ways. His music should not then be understood as specific to the United States, instead it should be seen as parallel to the cosmopolitan tendencies of other nineteenth-century exotic composers.

**This thesis is approved for recommendation  
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**Table of Contents:**

Introduction.....1  
Chapter One: Creole Music in Paris.....7  
Chapter Two: Gottschalk’s Parisian Contemporaries.....17  
Chapter Three: The 1853 American Concerts.....31  
Bibliography.....47

## Introduction

Musical exoticism experienced an explosion of popularity in Western culture during the nineteenth century. The obsession with the exotic influenced not only the subjects of operas and other theatrical productions, but also became prevalent in instrumental music. Musical exoticism became associated with a set of recurring musical idioms, such as pentatonicism, simplistic harmony, syncopation, and incorporation of unusual instruments or instrumental colors. These idioms had little to do with actual music and culture of the exotic locales and peoples they were meant to represent and instead stood for racial and cultural stereotypes created by the Westerners, often to facilitate their imperialist quests. Ralph Locke explains that “these meanings, though broadly shared at the moment of the composition and first performance, may today seem racist or, in some other way, socially regressive.”<sup>1</sup>

Only in recent decades has there been sufficient study of the subject and awareness of its implications. Throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s, Edward Said published a series of groundbreaking articles that opened new possibilities of how to deal with the Western cultural representations of non-Western societies.<sup>2</sup> Said redefined the term *orientalism*, a word which had typically been associated with what was considered innocuous portrayals by European artists of the Middle Eastern and Arab countries. *Orientalism* now came to denote the representation by Westerners of anything non-Western, as well as the political and social implications of such representation. The problem with such representations, Said observed, is that it inherently sees non-Western culture through Western biases and makes a qualitative distinction between

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<sup>1</sup> Ralph P. Locke, *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 17.

<sup>2</sup> A general overview of Said’s contributions can be found in Locke, 34-36.

cultures.<sup>3</sup> The construction and qualitative nature of this distinction is further explained in Derek B. Scott's discussion of the term "Far East;" he claims that it is "itself an ethnocentric label—it is far from *us*, and therefore the term relies upon a meta-geography for its meaning."<sup>4</sup>

As Locke points out, in their representations of non-Westerners Western artists operate with the distinction between the Western "Self" and the non-Western "Other," associating the exotic "Other" with numerous negative stereotypes.<sup>5</sup> The issues associated with the distinctions between "Self" and "Other" become more problematic when considering the cultural implications projected by exoticist music. Musical representation of differing cultures often magnifies the negative stereotypes. As Jonathan Bellman points out: "The very acknowledgement of difference carries within it an implicit comparison and judgment."<sup>6</sup> This judgment often expresses itself musically by use of simplistic compositional antics which enforces the notion of Western superiority and insinuates that other cultures are musically primitive.

Musical characterizations of exotic "Others" differ radically between compositions. However, they can be divided into two broad groups: the portrayal of exotic locations and characters seen in music-theatrical productions and the use of exotic musical idioms in instrumental music. Exotic elements in opera are perhaps the most explicit examples of musical exoticism. Nineteenth-century theatrical productions portray a huge variety of exotic locations. Opera-goers could be transported to ancient Egypt in Giuseppe Verdi's *Aida* (1871), Japan in Gilbert and Sullivan's operetta *The Mikado* (1888), or to ancient Sri Lanka in Georges Bizet's

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<sup>3</sup> Edward Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered," *Cultural Critique*, no 1 (Autumn 1985): 90.

<sup>4</sup> Derek B. Scott, "Orientalism and Musical Style," *The Musical Quarterly* vol. 82, no. 2 (Summer, 1998): 323.

<sup>5</sup> Locke, 72.

<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Bellman, "Introduction" in *The Exotic in Western Music*, ed. Bellman (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), xii.

*The Pearl Fishers* (1863). These are only a few examples of the many productions that promised their listeners a window into the world of the exotic “Other.”

Exotic operas clearly show the influence of exoticism on music. However, this distinction becomes murky when dealing with instrumental works. As Locke explains, “the question of whether, how much, and *how* instrumental repertoires engage in representing anything ‘extra-musical’—anything outside of ‘the music itself’—has been a central, perpetually vexing one throughout the history of Western music aesthetics.”<sup>7</sup> Because instrumental music is largely abstract, exotic ideas are based only on certain elements of the work, such as a suggestive title or written program notes. The listener then chooses to associate certain musical elements with the culture being represented. As a result, strict analysis of the score does not always reveal the “extra-musical” elements that point to the exoticist content of the music.

In order to fully understand the instrumental exoticism, Locke proposes what he refers to as the, “All the Music in Full Context” paradigm.<sup>8</sup> According to this model, compositions that did not consistently use exotically-tinged music often incorporated non-musical elements to portray exotic places or ideas. This is especially prevalent in the solo piano compositions of Louis Moreau Gottschalk, whose *creole* works frequently contained detailed programs and were ornamented with descriptive cover art, yet featured European musical idioms. Moreover, the works Gottschalk published while living in Paris proudly printed “*de la Louisiane*” after the composers name, thus highlighting the fact that this music was written by a non-European composer. These elements already suggested that the works were exotic, before even taking their musical features into consideration.

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<sup>7</sup> Locke, 18.

<sup>8</sup> Locke, 59.

In the modern era, Gottschalk is remembered as an early American composer. Yet, as I will show, his music does not consistently represent the American musical idioms or even American music sensibilities of the nineteenth century. Gottschalk received his formal training in Paris, leaving his native New Orleans when he was only twelve years old. Because of his early European training, Gottschalk's music should be understood as heavily influenced by his Parisian, not American, contemporaries and by his attempt to market his musical compositions to the nineteenth-century European audiences obsessed with musical exoticism.

Gottschalk became famous for his supposedly authentic portrayal of the culture of Southern Louisiana slaves in his so-called *creole* works. These consisted of a series of compositions, now referred to as the "Louisiana Quartet," that were published in 1849. Chapter One of my thesis deals with *Bamboula: danse de nègres*, the most famous composition of this series. This piece established a celebrity status for the nineteen-year-old composer which started in Paris but quickly spread throughout Europe. The piece claims to portray a native slave dance associated with a part of New Orleans called *Place Congo*. Although the piece does use an original *creole* melody for its first theme, the work does not accurately represent the music or the dance that would have been used at *Place Congo*. Instead, consistent with Locke's "All the Music in Full Context" paradigm, the music uses Western elements to express nineteenth-century Eurocentric stereotypes regarding African Americans. These stereotypes are confirmed by the written reviews of Gottschalk's *Bamboula* in *La France Musicale* as well as by the descriptions of the dances at *Place Congo* by non-*creole* observers. By comparing the reviews with Gottschalk's music, it becomes clear that Gottschalk was able to convey the stereotypical, racist ideas about African Americans even without producing music that is explicitly exotic sounding.

Chapter Two explores the musical scene in Paris during the 1840s when Gottschalk was studying there. Specifically, I focus on the three major piano composers and performers: Frederic Chopin, Franz Liszt, and Sigismond Thalberg. Gottschalk's opinion of all three composers comes forth in the article "La Música, el Piano, los Pianistas" (Music, the piano, and the pianists), written while living in Havana in 1862. In this article it becomes clear that Chopin was the composer whom Gottschalk most admired. Because of this, I argue that Gottschalk's music should be understood as closely related to Chopin's, rather than to music by Liszt, Thalberg, or Gottschalk's American contemporaries. A look at the biographies and career paths of each composer makes it clear that Gottschalk modeled much of his early career and compositional output on Chopin. The influence becomes even more obvious in my examination of Gottschalk's piano piece *Ricordati*, composed in 1856. This composition is clearly modeled on Chopin's nocturnes. In the final portion of the chapter I further contemplate the legacy of both composers and question why Chopin was readily accepted as a Polish composer, whereas Gottschalk's American legacy took longer to solidify.

My final chapter explores what I propose to be Gottschalk's most authentic "American" compositions. First I discuss his 1853 return from Paris to the United States and his harsh reception by certain American music critics. I specifically look into a series of critiques by the Boston music critic John Sullivan Dwight. Dwight compares Gottschalk's music to that by earlier European composers, especially Beethoven, and suggests that the title of "American composer" should be awarded only to composers who represent their country by producing music of the same quality. Such criticism made it difficult for Gottschalk to integrate himself into the American high art society and also caused him financial hardships due to his inability to sell concert tickets. This ensuing financial hardship was furthered by the death of Gottschalk's father

in October of 1853, which left the composer to pay for his father's debts. In light of these difficulties, Gottschalk was forced to reconsider his compositional approach. His music starts reflecting popular trends set by American composers of parlor songs, such as Stephen Foster, and by the popular Minstrel groups. Gottschalk's breakout "American" composition, *The Banjo*, proved to be his most important and successful piece written after his return from Paris, and my analysis shows its indebtedness to the American popular music of the time. I also use Gottschalk's composition *The Last Hope* to illustrate his reaction to the increasingly popular American trend of sentimental and religious music. Finally, this chapter considers the American resistance toward African-tinged music, both in Gottschalk's *creole* compositions, as well as the later resistance jazz idioms in the early twentieth-century. Because of this resistance, Gottschalk was never able to fully integrate himself into the American music culture. This is why I propose that Gottschalk should not be remembered only as an American composer, but instead should be thought of as a more cosmopolitan composer, absorbing and synthesizing influences from Europe, the United States, and the Caribbean regions.

## Creole Music in Paris

During the mid-nineteenth century, the European audiences' obsession with exotic sounding music provided an ideal way for composers to break through to the European public. In France this was partially a reaction to the social and political circumstances. French troops had seized portions of North Africa, and as such the portrayal of North African Arab music was of special interest. The exotic became the inspiration for such works as Meyerbeer's opera *L'Africaine* (written 1843), and the poems written by Victor Hugo, *Les Orientales* (1829).<sup>1</sup> This exoticist fever soon expanded far beyond the initial interest in North African orientalism. Instrumental composers found success writing exotic pieces as well. None were more prominent than Franz Liszt and Frederic Chopin, the two distinguished piano virtuosos living in Paris during the 1840s. Liszt wrote *Hungarian Rhapsodies* that claimed to portray authentically the culture of Hungary—although it in fact represented urbanized music performed by the Roma, not the Hungarians.<sup>2</sup> Frederic Chopin also made use of his native Polish folk dances in his *Mazurkas* and *Polonaises*.

Gottschalk was no stranger to the success of these exotic works and tried to emulate them in his own career. His Op.1 compositions featured two polkas and a series of *Mazurkas*, seeking to achieve the success of Chopin. He continued looking to various regions to provide exotic sounds, such as his *Danse ossianique* which attempted to emulate Scottish music. In 1847 he wrote a composition based on a French soldier song, *Partant pour la Syrie*, which, like numerous other popular Parisian compositions, portrayed the Arab North–African.<sup>3</sup>

However, it was his portrayal of Louisiana slaves that eventually gave rise to his celebrity status. Beginning in 1849, Gottschalk started publishing works that bore the name *creole*. Gottschalk

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<sup>1</sup> S. Frederick Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 71-72.

<sup>2</sup> Ralph P. Locke, *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 140.

<sup>3</sup> Starr, 71-72.

composed four *creole* compositions in quick succession in 1849, and these have become what modern musicologists refer to as the “Louisiana Quartet.”<sup>4</sup> Each piece had a unique title, followed by a descriptive subtitle, some of which invoked African-American culture and life: *Bamboula: danse des nègres*, *La Savane: ballade créole*, *Le bananier: Chanson nègre* and *Le Mencilier: serenade*. Already by looking at the titles, it is clear that Gottschalk combined his *creole* influence with Western traditions by juxtaposing European genres, such as *ballade*, *chanson*, and *serenade*, with words that portrayed the American South.

The thematic elements in the Louisiana Quartet provide further insight into how Gottschalk used the portrayal of the New Orleans slaves to market himself. Gottschalk claims to have based these pieces on several *creole* melodies he learned as a child, however further inspection proves that this was not always the case. For example, Gottschalk asserts in his program notes that the melody used in *La Savane* is based on a slave legend about a large oak tree that grew in the New Orleans swamps on the skeletons of former slaves. However, as Richard Taruskin points out, the theme is actually a minor version of the popular old English dance song, “Skip to my Lou, my Darling.”<sup>5</sup> Gottschalk would have been aware that the Parisian audiences, who were enthralled by exotic music, would have responded more favorably to a fantastic slave legend than an old English dance song. Some of the themes, as I will show in *Bamboula*, do reflect actual slave melodies. However the authenticity of this music being presented as *creole* should be met with skepticism.

Of the four compositions in the Louisiana Quartet, *Bamboula* proved to be Gottschalk’s first major hit and perhaps the most successful piece in his illustrious career. The piece is subtitled *danse de nègres*, and in the preface Gottschalk claims that the work conveys a slave ritual, associated with a

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<sup>4</sup> The term “Louisiana Quartet” was first coined in Gilbert Chase, *America's Music*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 315.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Taruskin, “Chapter 7: Self and Other,” in *Music from the Nineteenth Century*, vol. 3 of *The Oxford History of Western Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), <http://0-www.oxfordwesternmusic.com.library.uark.edu/view/Volume3/actrade-9780195384833-div1-007012.xml#actrade-9780195384833-note-215> (accessed March 10, 2012).

place known as *Place Congo*, sometimes called *Congo Square*, in the lower portion of New Orleans. The folk theme that Gottschalk incorporates into this piece is *Quand patate la cuite*. This theme, literally meaning “when your potatoes are done,” was a nonsensical set of words that were chanted at *Place Congo* while slaves danced the *Bamboula* dance.<sup>6</sup>

An article on *creole* music published in 1886 by George Washington Cable gives a colorful description of the dances that took place at *Place Congo*:

A sudden frenzy seizes the musicians. The measure quickens, the swaying, attitudinizing crowd starts into extra activity, the female voices grow sharp and staccato, and suddenly the dance is the furious *Bamboula*.... what wild, what terrible delight! The ecstasy rises to madness; one-two-three of the dancers fall-bloucoutoum! Boum!—with foam on their lips and are dragged out by arms and legs from under the tumultuous feet of crowding new-comers.<sup>7</sup>

Cable's portrayal of *Place Congo* provides a good model for analyzing Gottschalk's musical approach to the dance. Gottschalk's music is filled with elements that suggest primitivism and paint a clear picture of Cable's descriptive scene. Specifically Gottschalk's erratic music can be seen as reinforcing Cable's notion of sudden frenzy, quickening measures, and the furious dancing of the *Bamboula*. In fact Cable praised Gottschalk for his compositions in this article, specifically the *Bamboula*.

Cable's article continues by discussing the folk theme *Quand patate la cuite*, the theme used as the basis of Gottschalk's composition:

The musicians know no fatigue; still the dance rages on: “*Quand patate la cuite na va manger li!*” And all to that one nonsense line meaning only, “when that 'taters cooked don't you eat it up!”<sup>8</sup>

Gottschalk's use of this theme is not an exact representation of the dance as Cable describes it. Instead of showing how the participants chant the simple melody while the “musicians show no fatigue” and the “dance rages on,” Gottschalk's theme is harmonized in a light, whimsical, and simple texture.

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<sup>6</sup> George Washington Cable, “The Dance at Place Congo,” *Century Magazine*, February 1886, 523.

<sup>7</sup> Cable, 524.

<sup>8</sup> Cable, 524.

Moreover, the theme is quickly stated before being cut off by the two other themes which formulate the opening A section of the piece. Already from this beginning, it is clear that Gottschalk was not striving for an accurate depiction of the actual ritual, aiming instead for a representation that would be more accessible to European audiences.

Cable's description enforces racial stereotypes by representing the dancers in an animalistic manner, highlighting their inability to even walk, being forced to be dragged off by their arms and legs because of the ecstatic dancing, and even describing foam coming from their mouths. This colorful article illuminates how nineteenth-century images and descriptions associated with Louisiana slaves were skewed to the tastes of Western audiences. Gottschalk makes no exception of this in his *Bamboula*. Musical elements used in this composition are comparable to other nineteenth-century exotic pieces, which usually portrayed their subjects in negative stereotypes. This, as I will show, is due to the simplistic harmonization of the original *creole* melody, the lack of a traditional formal structure, the abrupt modulations, the use of a constant drone, and the percussive syncopations.

The music begins with low D-flat octaves marked *fortissimo*, possibly representing the low drums which signaled the start of the dance. The actual bamboo drum, for which the dance was named, was called a *Bamboula*. From the very opening of the piece the D-flat operates as a drone, which likely represented the *Bamboula* drum's presence throughout the dance. Although the drone is most prominent only at the beginning and gradually becomes less audible, remnants of it do come back throughout the piece. The use of a drone was a very popular element in European exotic music. This was generally associated with folk or peasant music and did not present its subjects in a positive light, instead suggesting that their music was primitive.

Melodic figures do not appear until m. 5 and even then the four note statement is a fragmented, seemingly incoherent bit of what will become the main theme. This theme is the original *Quand patate la cuite* melody associated with the *Place Congo* dance and is fully stated in m. 15. Gottschalk's

harmonization of the theme is simplistic, shifting between I and V chords for the entirety of the theme, m. 17-32. In this way, it seems that Gottschalk insinuates that the slaves are unable to use complex harmony, and thus are inferior to Europeans.

Like the dancers associated with *Place Congo*, who purportedly only react to the music in an incoherent manner, Gottschalk uses abrupt modulation to distant key areas to suggest that this music is erratic, spontaneous, and often unintelligible. This can be seen by his treatment of the original *creole* melody. Within the A section, there are three smaller themes, the first being the *Quand patate la cuite*. This theme is the least developed of the three and is the least harmonically complex. The second theme, for example, modulates to B-flat minor, the relative minor of D-flat. This theme explores new tonal areas which eventually cadence in F-minor. This is a considerable contrast to the simplistic harmonic approach used during the first theme which only shifts between I and V. The third of these themes is stated in F-sharp major, the enharmonically respelled IV of the original D-flat. This theme, like the *Quand patate la cuite*, is folk-like and tuneful. Yet even within this folk-like context, Gottschalk uses more complex harmony shifting back to the original D-flat.

Several other harmonic procedures further illustrate the purported primitivism and lack of rationality of the slaves. In m. 55, for example, there is a perfect authentic cadence in the key of F-minor which closes the second theme. Immediately afterwards the piece abruptly shifts back into D-flat, the flat-VI of F-minor. Although this is diatonic in F-minor, it is still a distant key, and an abrupt modulation to the flat-VI would not be typical in traditional Western music. The F-minor cadence is restated in m. 61, only this time the tonal area abruptly modulates to the key of F-sharp major and begins the third theme. The abrupt shift to a distant key area further enforces the notion of primitivism and erratic irrationality. Moreover, Gottschalk's decision to spell the key enharmonically as F-sharp instead of G-flat would not have been typical in other Western compositions.

In addition to harmonic abruptness, Gottschalk also uses formal inconsistencies to present the

people he depicts as primitive. The larger A-B-A' form of *Bamboula* is unique because the elaborate B section could function as a stand-alone composition. This expansive section overtakes the piece and is in direct contrast to the abrupt and erratic A section. When the A' section material finally returns, it does not start with the *Quand patate la cuite* any more, instead it focuses on the F-sharp theme that was heard in the second portion of the original A section. The original *creole* theme finally returns in m. 337, this time with a decorative triplet above the melody. Furthermore, the theme is presented with syncopations in the accompaniment line that distort the original sixteenth-note melody. Adding these triplets and syncopations makes the theme unclear and confusing, and consequently the music only continues for nineteen measures. All three themes are abruptly restated with syncopation, all three are abbreviated, and lack any type of continuity within their original statements.

It is clear that Gottschalk intended the B theme to be the primary focus of this piece dedicating more than half of the composition to this section. This is interesting, considering the original *creole* melody, for which the piece is purportedly based, only appears in the opening A section. The B section is also the most developed and harmonically complex portion of the piece. Gottschalk here modulates into the sub-median, B-flat minor. He uses a longer, lyrical, and less fragmented melodic figure and develops it. These portions can be thought of as lush and even sensual, perhaps suggesting the moment in which the dancers have lost all control of their inhibitions and are completely absorbed in the *Bamboula*. Maybe this portion could even be thought of as the moment in Cable's description when "ecstasy rises to madness."<sup>9</sup>

The B section's lyricism and harmonic complexity make the piece very similar to the music being composed by Gottschalk's Parisian contemporaries, especially the *nocturnes* by Chopin. This is seen specifically in Gottschalk's use of a single note melodic line over a harmonically developed and demanding accompaniment. Furthermore, Gottschalk uses explicit dynamic, pedal, and other technical

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<sup>9</sup> Cable, 523.

markings, such as *tempo rubato*, which only further enhance the similarities of his music to Chopin. Given that this portion is the most “Western” sounding section of the piece and that it is the most prominent part of the whole composition, Gottschalk might be providing commentary on the superiority of Western music over the *creole* slave music.

This idea of superiority is reinforced by the fact that the one short statement of the *Quand patate la cuite* theme within the B section is unable to match the musical qualities of the previous theme and therefore, abruptly returns to the main thematic material which appears in the B section. Despite the fact that the lyrical melody is only sixteen measures long, the thematic material is developed extensively, spanning ms. 150-317 (with the exception of the statement of the *Quand patate la cuite* theme in m. 224). The abruptness Gottschalk chose to associate with the main *creole* melody re-enforces the fragmented, unintelligible nature of the slaves, before dissolving into another development of the B theme.

The orientalist, demeaning depiction of the *creole* slaves exhibited in the written description by Cable and in Gottschalk’s music is very much in line with how the Paris audience perceived *Bamboula*. Although these claims may seem extreme, looking into the published reviews of Gottschalk’s performances provide some evidence to support them. Perhaps the most significant concert in Gottschalk’s early career was a performance at the *Salle Pleyel* salon in 1849. The concert was reviewed in the magazine *La France Musicale* and the reviewer described Gottschalk’s *Bamboula* as a

. . . 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 brûlant, 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.<sup>10</sup>

It appears as though Gottschalk was able to communicate specific extra-musical imagery through the

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<sup>10</sup> Editorial, *La France Musicale*, January 21, 1849.

compositional antics used in this piece. The slaves are perceived as sensual and absorbed in their dancing, as well as musically ignorant with their “noisy” banging of the tambourine. This description of the *Bamboula* dance seems to have been inspired solely by Gottschalk’s piece. In spite of his lack of familiarity with New Orleans *creoles*, the reviewer’s description of the *Bamboula* scene for the readers of *La France Musicale* is very similar to that by the eye-witness account by Cable from a few decades later. The similarity in the two descriptions clearly illustrates both the obsession with stereotypical portrayals of exotic cultures, as well as the receptiveness by nineteenth-century concertgoers and critics to such portrayals, even when presented through abstract instrumental music. Concepts like abruptness, repetition, erratic movement, and spontaneity are seen very clearly in this written review, and therefore must have resonated with the concert-goers expectations of what exotic music should sound like.

The composition certainly resonated with contemporary French concerns about slavery. A mere few months before its publication, the French had abolished slavery in their West Indian colonies on April 27, 1848. The French revolutionaries of 1848 believed that slavery was an attack on human dignity and should be eradicated.<sup>11</sup> Yet in spite of the abolitionist movement, views of the former slaves as primitive and inferior remained widespread. The Parisian audience were then likely curious about the cultural traditions of their former slaves and possibly were also looking for a confirmation of the commonly held racial stereotypes. And Gottschalk himself promised to give them an opportunity to have a peek into the lives of these former slaves by adding a suggestive title to his piece.

However, calling Gottschalk’s composition an accurate representation of slave traditions is problematic, especially because he himself would probably not have had access to the cultural scene at *Congo Square*. Edward Gottschalk, Louis Moreau’s father, was a wealthy investor in the emerging real-estate market in New Orleans. Edward Gottschalk had moved to New Orleans from London in the early 1820s to make his fortune, and his wife, Aimeé, and the rest of the family resided in the wealthier

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<sup>11</sup> Starr, 73.

portions of the city. *Congo Square* was in the poorer part of the city, where the lower-class residents and slaves lived, a place that the wealthy rarely frequented.<sup>12</sup>

It does therefore seem plausible that Gottschalk was exposed to authentic *creole* melodies, associated with *Congo Square*, but may have never actually witnessed the rituals he claims to portray in this composition. What enforces this point further is the fact that none of Gottschalk's journals, the writings of his sister Clara, or other firsthand biographical accounts ever places him physically in *Congo Square*. The earliest account of Gottschalk's biography was an article written by H.D. Didmus in the 1853 edition of *Graham's Magazine*, and this article dedicates a large portion to *Bamboula* and the scene at *Place Congo*.<sup>13</sup> Frederic Starr is careful to point out that despite his extensive writing about the rituals taking place at *Congo Square*, Didmus completely ignores the issue of whether or not Gottschalk had physically been there.<sup>14</sup>

The piece is not only problematic because Gottschalk claimed to convey a ritual he likely had not observed, but also because the music was marketed as American. Moreover, Gottschalk had been living in Paris for his entire adult life and received his formal musical training there. In addition, this "American" label was given despite the fact that the slaves he claimed to portray were not considered equal citizens of the United States at the time when he wrote the piece. The slaves of *Bamboula* belonged to a very different social caste, one with which Americans of Gottschalk's background hardly ever associated.

Because of his different social upbringing, Gottschalk must be remembered for what he actually was, a Parisian who was born in New Orleans. Musicologist Carl E. Lindstrom describes it best when he says that "Gottschalk was a Parisian before he was an American. He heard the patter of salon applause and the ovations of the *Salle Pleyel* before Illinoisians whistled their approval at

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<sup>12</sup> Starr, 75.

<sup>13</sup> H.D. Didmus, "Louis Moreau Gottschalk," *Graham's Magazine*, 1853.

<sup>14</sup> Starr, 74.

Bloomington.”<sup>15</sup> Still the reviews praised Gottschalk as a truly great American composer based on his “authentic” representation of the American South which was seen through the eyes of New Orleans slaves. A later portion of the review in *La France Musicale*, quoted earlier, proudly proclaims:

We have discovered this Creole composer; an 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.<sup>16</sup>

From the debut of *Bamboula* on, Gottschalk’s music was loved. And his version of *creole* music introduced the American sound to audiences of all European countries.

Gottschalk’s “creole” music, like his earlier mazurkas, polkas, ossianic pieces, or the North African soldier song, can be seen as a means to find success in the salons of Paris, possessed with the craze for the exotic. The musical elements used to achieve this “creole” sound do not necessarily represent the African slave culture. Instead, they play into existing stereotypes about New Orleans slaves, based solely on speculations by a white composer of French and Jewish descent as well as ideas by other, non-“creole” commentators. Gottschalk’s compositions should then be remembered as a reaction to the musical culture in Paris, not an early representation of American music.

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<sup>15</sup> Carl E. Lindstrom, “The American Quality in the Music of Louis Moreau Gottschalk” *The Musical Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (July 1954), 366.

<sup>16</sup> *La France Musicale*.

## **Gottschalk's Parisian Contemporaries**

When Louis Moreau Gottschalk arrived in Paris in 1841, the music scene there was dominated by three virtuoso pianists: Frédéric Chopin, Franz Liszt, and Sigismond Thalberg. Although all three of these pianists influenced Gottschalk in different ways, he admired Chopin the most. Perhaps because of this admiration, Gottschalk's music and career bear close similarities to Chopin's. Despite the close connections, Chopin and Gottschalk's legacies are remembered quite differently. Chopin has been viewed as the great Polish nationalistic composer, while Gottschalk has been mainly discussed in terms of his American qualities, not in terms of his indebtedness to European, and especially Eastern-European, piano music.

There are several reasons for these distinctions. In this chapter, I will first consider Gottschalk's impressions of the leading composers and performers in Paris in the 1840s, and then I will discuss Gottschalk's reasons for emulating the career and success of Chopin. I will also explore the reasons why Chopin was remembered as a nationalistic composer and Gottschalk's music did not immediately find its place in the annals of American music history. Additionally, I will consider the elements both composers incorporated into their music in order to cater to the mid-nineteenth century obsession with exotic sounds.

Gottschalk's opinions concerning all three famed composers appear in an article he wrote in 1860, in which he reflects on his time spent in Paris. In his article "La Música, el Piano, los Pianistas" (Music, the piano, and the pianists), published posthumously in 1880 by his friend and early biographer Louis Ricardo Fors, Gottschalk spells out his own predilection towards the

music of Chopin.<sup>1</sup> He especially appreciates that Chopin's music does not display the intense theatrics and flashy compositional techniques of Liszt, yet maintains a level of innovation not seen in the conservative music of Thalberg.

Gottschalk spends a large portion of the article criticizing Thalberg, which is not surprising, given Gottschalk's interest in musical representation of the exotic. Unlike Thalberg, Liszt and Chopin relied heavily on the use of exotic elements in their music; Liszt marketed Hungarian music and Chopin made use of his Polishness. Thalberg, by contrast, composed music that did not exhibit exotic trends. In the article, Gottschalk points out his distaste for Thalberg's style of composition and performance and accuses him of being boring and pompous. Gottschalk claims, for example: "[Thalberg's] talent seems to have been impregnated with the atmosphere of his courtly life: pompous, noble, elegant, it is at times a little cold, and seems to disdain transports of passion as signs of weakness incompatible with the serene majesty of the beautiful."<sup>2</sup>

By critiquing the conservative, cosmopolitan elements of Thalberg's style Gottschalk stresses his own interest in the popular exotic musical idiom of Liszt and Chopin. However, this is not to say that Gottschalk always looked favorably on these composers' extravagant practices. The garishness of Liszt's performances was actually bothersome to Gottschalk. Gottschalk's article shows a strong dislike for Liszt's theatrical antics:

When Liszt played, the movement of his head, his arms, the contractions of his enormous fingers, made him seem like a fakir in the throes of an ecstatic convulsion, ever leaning backwards, eyes closed, the mouth tense, shaking his immense locks, ever hurling himself upon the keyboard like a wild beast over its prey, flooding it with the surge of his

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<sup>1</sup> Louis Moreau Gottschalk, "La Música, el piano, los Pianistas," in Louis Ricardo Fors, *Gottschalk* (Havana: La Propaganda Literaria, 1880), 305-321.

<sup>2</sup> Gottschalk, "La Música," 316.

hair, which tangled with his fingers on the suffering keys, seemed to be struggling like the ancient pythoness, in the embrace of an invisible god.”<sup>3</sup>

That Liszt’s aggressive showmanship, expressed to the point of “ecstatic convulsion,” was extremely vexing to Gottschalk is somewhat surprising considering Gottschalk’s own predilection for intense theatricality. Several images from the era caricature Gottschalk’s showmanship, depicting him, for example, as he aggressively attacks the keys of the piano with as many as six hands.<sup>4</sup> It could be that Gottschalk felt threatened by the daunting task to match the intense level of Liszt’s showy virtuosity. This would explain why Gottschalk’s critique of Liszt is far harsher than his thoughts concerning Thalberg.

Gottschalk’s criticism goes even farther as he attacks the physical appearance of Liszt, referring to him as a “wild beast.” Also Liszt’s hair seems to have bothered Gottschalk quite a bit, as he frequently refers to it as a “dog tail” throughout the article. He even claims that “Liszt had not ever allowed any profane scissors to the wavy mane that fell into a hot blonde on his shoulders.”<sup>5</sup> This description suggests that an aura of an almost biblical reverence surrounded Liszt’s hair, and that the mane, similar to that of Samson, represented a source of supernatural strength. Gottschalk here further mocks Liszt’s performances suggesting that the virtuoso’s physical appearance often took precedence over his artistic expression. This notion is enforced later in the article when Gottschalk claims that the difficult technical passages in Liszt’s music do not contribute to its quality, but, instead, their only purpose is to challenge the technical ability of other pianists.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Gottschalk, “La Música,” 318.

<sup>4</sup> One such caricature can be seen in S. Frederick Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 340.

<sup>5</sup> Gottschalk, “La Música,” 318.

<sup>6</sup> Gottschalk, “La Música,” 318.

The only Parisian concert pianist whom Gottschalk showered with praise was Chopin, in whose music Gottschalk often detected “the divine inspiration of . . . genius.”<sup>7</sup> Gottschalk describes Chopin’s music as being fully poetic and beautiful, as music that is able to reach the heart. At one point, Gottschalk highlights the heart-wrenching effect he perceived in Chopin’s music:

His Nocturnes and his Ballades are like so many poems full of tenderness, soaked in tears, forever whisper to the heart of those who have loved, and suffer the two harmonies that made up the lyre of the poet of the piano.<sup>8</sup>

Gottschalk’s praises continue later in the article as he defends Chopin from any critics who would question his music. He even scolds the listeners who would hear this music and not immediately understand its power. The people who would perhaps even let out a yawn during a performance, Gottschalk says, are incapable of understanding beauty.<sup>9</sup>

Given Gottschalk’s harsh critique of the other two prominent pianists, it is somewhat surprising that he would have chosen to emulate and praise the successful career and the musical style of Chopin. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss the reasons that might have accounted for Gottschalk’s preference. It is clear that Gottschalk admired Chopin more than the rest of his virtuoso contemporaries, and his musical output bears testament to the reverence he had for this composer.

There are many similarities between Chopin’s career and Gottschalk’s early career that shed light on the reasons why Gottschalk may have chosen Chopin as the composer he would emulate. Both composers left their home country at a young age and successfully marketed themselves as representatives of their native lands to audiences in Western Europe. Chopin grew

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<sup>7</sup> Gottschalk, “La Música,” 318.

<sup>8</sup> Gottschalk, “La Música,” 319.

<sup>9</sup> Gottschalk, “La Música,” 319.

up in Warsaw and was born to a Polish mother and French father. At an early age he showed a natural gift in his studies in piano, so much so that when he was older he was asked to study piano and organ at the High School for music in Warsaw. After his studies he began a series of concerts that started in Vienna and ended with a permanent move to Paris at the age of twenty-one. Chopin gained his reputation in Paris by playing in the salons and marketing his native Polish folk music to the French audiences, who were all too eager to hear the music of another culture.

Chopin's musical journey in many ways reflects what would later happen to Gottschalk. He too showed a great deal of promise at the piano from a young age, and his parents sought out further training for him. However, unlike Chopin, who completed his studies in his native Warsaw, Gottschalk left for Paris at age twelve and received his formal education there. Since he was denied admission to the Paris Conservatory, Gottschalk began his private studies with Camille Stamaty and later Frédéric Kalkbrenner. Like Chopin's, Gottschalk's fame was discovered in the Parisian salons. The *Salle Pleyel* was a salon that proved especially important in both composers' early careers. Chopin, with the help of Kalkbrenner, chose the *Salle Pleyel* as the location of his 1831 Paris debut.<sup>10</sup> Eighteen years later, in 1849, Gottschalk premiered *Bamboula* in this same salon.

It was also at the *Salle Pleyel* that Gottschalk's career crossed the path of Chopin's in 1845, when Gottschalk was just fifteen-years old. Camille Stamaty planned the event as a free concert to bring awareness to his otherwise unknown American pupil and help propel Gottschalk's early career. Gottschalk's mother Aimeé, along with all of Gottschalk's siblings,

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<sup>10</sup> Kornel Michałowski and Jim Samson, "Chopin, Fryderyk Franciszek," in *Grove Music Online* (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1980), [http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.library.uark.edu/subscriber/article\\_citations/grove/music/51099?q=chopin+&search=quick&pos=2&\\_start=1](http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.library.uark.edu/subscriber/article_citations/grove/music/51099?q=chopin+&search=quick&pos=2&_start=1) (accessed March 25, 2012).

made the trip to Paris late in the previous year to be present at the event. Stamaty made sure to invite both Chopin and Thalberg to the concert, so that they might hear the young prodigy. The invitations read, “Young Moreau Gottschalk of New Orleans.”<sup>11</sup> Such an invitation must have sparked interest by the Parisian audiences who would have likely been curious about the young American pianist.

The event was well attended and after the concert Chopin approached Gottschalk on stage. There is a good deal of debate as to what Chopin actually said to the fifteen-year old, but in the preface to the publication of Gottschalk’s journals, *Notes of a Pianist*, Gottschalk’s sister, Clara Gottschalk Peterson, claims that Chopin placed his hands on Gottschalk’s head and stated: “I predict that you will become the next king of pianists.”<sup>12</sup> Such an enthusiastic response must have left a strong mark on the impressionable young composer. Chopin’s blessing on Gottschalk, as remembered by Clara, marked the beginning of a successful career in Paris. Yet this was just one small example of the many ways Chopin influenced Gottschalk.

One direct result of Chopin’s influence was Gottschalk’s use of exotic and folk elements in his music. However, the way the two composers arrived at these elements and incorporated them in their compositions differed radically. As explored in the previous chapter, Gottschalk’s ethnic background (he was born to a Jewish father and a French mother) did not fit easily with his attempts to give an “authentic” musical portrayal of New Orleans *creoles*.<sup>13</sup> This was not the case with Chopin, who did have a Polish mother and began his formal studies in his native Warsaw. The respective ages when the two composers left home should also be taken into

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<sup>11</sup> Starr, 59.

<sup>12</sup> Clara Gottschalk Peterson, “Biographical Sketch,” in *Notes of a Pianist* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1964), 16.

<sup>13</sup> Ralph P. Locke, *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 106.

consideration. It seems unlikely that Gottschalk would have been able to absorb an American folk tradition by his twelfth year, whereas Chopin was able to absorb Polish folk traditions by the age of nineteen.

Gottschalk's decision to market native folk dances bears striking similarity to Chopin's compositional choices in his early career. Yet, upon further inspection, the two composers' approach to rituals and dances depicted in their early compositions was highly divergent. Gottschalk's *creole* songs were based on slave dances, a tradition he would have never been able to actually take part in. Gottschalk probably learned these folk melodies secondhand, most likely from his nurse Sally, a slave brought to New Orleans by his grandmother.<sup>14</sup> Musical features of the *creole* dances, moreover, are difficult to specify. The music was generally highly percussive and certain melodic figures were passed down orally, and, as a result, there are no detailed written records as to what this music would have actually sounded like.

Chopin's traditional Polish folk dances, by contrast, followed a tangible formula which can be analyzed and their characteristics can be seen in the written score. The *mazurka* is taken from a tradition started in the Mazovian plains of central Poland and features distinct rhythmic and modal patterns. The major distinctions of these dances are the use of triple meter with emphasis on the second and third beats, and a higher, often chromatic melody, accompanied by some type of drone.

Gottschalk did include traditional *creole* folk melodies in his dance pieces, such as the *Quand patate la cuite* used in *Bamboula* and discussed in the previous chapter. But the harmonization of these melodies would have likely been so different from the actual dances that they would have been unrecognizable to the slave dancers of New Orleans. Moreover, these

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<sup>14</sup> Starr, 74.

pieces contained elaborate portions unrelated to the original theme. Unlike Chopin, whose Polish influence can be seen throughout the entirety of his *Mazurkas*, Gottschalk's folk melodies only served as a small thematic element for portions of his compositions. The area of consistency in Gottschalk's *creole* music was his use of syncopation, which likely was meant to represent the drumming patterns used in the slave dances. However, because there are no written records of these dances, there is no way to verify the authenticity of these rhythmic patterns.

What makes these dances even more complex is that Gottschalk chose to market this music as "American." American music in and of itself is a difficult term to define because of the many different cultural influences throughout the nineteenth-century operating within the United States. The music traditions developing in New York, for example, would have likely been very inconsistent with the *creole* music being developed in certain parts of southern Louisiana.<sup>15</sup> It is then problematic to classify Gottschalk's self-proclaimed *creole* pieces as a representation of nineteenth-century American music because such an all-encompassing title could not have existed. The national classification would have been much more appropriate for Chopin's music. Unlike the United States, a recently established, developing country that covered broad demographics and a large land mass, Poland was a smaller country with longstanding folk traditions. Chopin's native folk traditions from the Mazovian plains represent a much more specific cultural marker than Gottschalk's *creole* music.

Chopin's influence, however, went well beyond the exotic elements found in Gottschalk's folk dances. Chopin's highly romantic and lyrical styles actually became the model

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<sup>15</sup> Descriptions of music in the United States during Gottschalk's career can be found in: Richard Taruskin, "Chapter 7: Self and Other," in *Music from the Nineteenth Century*, vol. 3 of *The Oxford History of Western Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), <http://0-www.oxfordwesternmusic.com.library.uark.edu/view/Volume3/actrade-9780195384833-div1-007012.xml#actrade-9780195384833-note-215> (accessed March 10, 2012).

for many nineteenth-century piano composers. An examination of Gottschalk's piece *Ricordati* suggests that Gottschalk may have consciously modeled his non-exotic pieces on Chopin. In his article titled "Chopin and his Imitators," Jonathan Bellman has shown that in this piece Gottschalk was relying heavily on Chopin, specifically Chopin's *nocturnes*.

Understanding the *nocturne* is challenging in its own right because it is not characterized by a set formal structure. In an attempt to classify this genre, musicologist Jeffrey Kallberg has argued that *nocturnes* should be seen as a special kind of "communication" between the performer and audience.<sup>16</sup> In other words, elements associated with this genre communicate in a manner that is not conveyed solely on the basis of an analysis of the score. As such, characteristics of the *nocturne* are often inconsistent. Even within Chopin's *nocturnes* specific formal structures are not consistent.<sup>17</sup> This makes examining the influence of the genre on other composers, such as Gottschalk, complicated. James Parakilas offers further insights on this subject by suggesting that the *nocturne* should be examined as a primarily vocal genre, in which a melodic figure above the accompaniment replaces the actual singer.<sup>18</sup> This parallels Kallberg's notion of an unwritten communication between performer and audience. Clearly there is no singer, but the lyrical melodies associated with the genre convey the notion of a vocalist to the audience.

What becomes clear in both Parakilas and Kallberg's arguments is the realization that these pieces are highly lyrical and that they communicate something "extra-musical" to the

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<sup>16</sup> Jeffrey Kallberg, *Chopin at the Boundaries: Sex, History, and Musical Genre* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 4.

<sup>17</sup> Jonathan Bellman, "Chopin and His Imitators" *19th-Century Music* 24, no. 2 (Autumn, 2000):149.

<sup>18</sup> James Parakilas, "'Nuit plus belle qu'un beau jour': Poetry, Song, and the Voice in the Piano Nocturne," in *The Age of Chopin*, ed. Halina Goldberg (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 204.

listener. Because of the emphasis on “extra-musical” qualities, neither of these assessments provides specific guidelines for analyzing the written score and comparing the genre to other compositions. However, the “extra-musical” concepts can be associated with certain musical ideas, such as free treatment of form and unpredictability, which give the music an improvisatory quality.

These classifications become helpful when comparing Gottschalk’s music to Chopin’s *nocturnes*. When examining *Ricordati*, the first thing to notice is the loose treatment of formal structure. The piece could be viewed as a larger ABA form, but the sections offer little contrast to each other. Moreover, there is an extended coda passage after the final A section which continues for a lengthy portion of the work, essentially distorting any easily identifiable formal structure. Although the piece does begin with a short melodic figure, which is then repeated at various moments throughout the work, these moments appear to lack any specific order. The theme is also being constantly embellished, often to an unrecognizable state. Harmonically the piece is relatively simple and repetitive. The use of repetitive harmony, with embellished melodic lines, contributes to the improvisatory feeling of the piece. The effect of the loose treatment of form and the generally improvisatory feel invite the listeners to read “extra-musical” features into this composition. These “extra-musical” associations are furthered by the use of a highly lyrical melody, pointing to vocal music.

Bellman goes even further in that he sees the Gottschalk piece as related not only to the genres of *serenade* and *nocturne*, but more specifically to Chopin.<sup>19</sup> *Ricordati* is filled with lyrical passages, over lush accompaniment, with free treatment of rhythm, usually marked *rubato*, and explicit attention to dynamic markings and details. After looking into these

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<sup>19</sup> Bellman, 153-54.

possibilities Bellman states that, “These affinities and the fact that Gottschalk’s Parisian contemporaries often compared his pianism to Chopin’s strongly suggest that there was a conscious modeling on Gottschalk’s part.”<sup>20</sup>

Gottschalk himself, however, was not too eager to acknowledge Chopin’s influence during his lifetime. In fact, Gottschalk’s personal journal entries suggest that he did not look favorably on Chopin’s emulators. *Ricordati* was published in 1857 and was likely written in 1856. If Gottschalk did in fact consciously model his pieces on the music of Chopin, then his opinions on emulating Chopin would have greatly changed by the early 1860s. In the April 17th, 1862 entry Gottschalk addresses the issue of Chopin’s emulators directly:

What I deplore is the frightful abuse that is made of Chopin’s formulas. There is not a small pianist-composer who does not think himself called upon to make Chopin mazurkas, Chopin nocturnes, Chopin polonaises, it has become an epidemic in the United States. They have become masters of Chopin’s processes and employ them without discernment in the most trivial melodies.<sup>21</sup>

As explored throughout this paper, Gottschalk clearly modeled elements of his compositional output on Chopin. This brings an immediate contradiction to his claims in this journal entry. It could be that he was frustrated with the way in which Chopin’s influence was being modeled by other composers, but that he took exception to that problem in his own music.

Another possible explanation for Gottschalk’s contradictory attitude could be related to the circumstances surrounding the journal entry. Gottschalk was traveling throughout the Caribbean during this portion of his career and his compositions dealt with subject matters different from those in his early *mazurkas* and *creole* dances. Pieces from this era, such as *Souvenir de Porto Rico* (1857), still featured the syncopations for which the composer is best

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<sup>20</sup> Bellman, 154.

<sup>21</sup> Louis Moreau Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1964), 269.

known, however these influences were now based on the Latin rhythms he learned while living in places like Havana. The Caribbean musical elements found in these compositions strongly contrast with the compositional antics he developed while living in Paris. This could be the reason why Gottschalk was so willing to dismiss the emulators of Chopin, despite the fact that, as Bellman points out, he too was clearly imitating these pieces earlier in his career.

Although Gottschalk and Chopin had similar early career paths, and although Gottschalk modeled much of his music on Chopin's, the two composers left very different legacies. Chopin had established a national Polish tradition of music, playing in the same salons in Paris, and, like Gottschalk, received great acclaim during his life-time. Well after his death, articles regarding Chopin's Polish music continually praised the efforts of this nationalist composer. One such article by Zdzislaw Jachimecki was written in 1920, seventy-one years after Chopin's death. This article attempts to create an exhaustive history of Polish music and concludes that Chopin's music is the crowning achievement of their culture:

Based on the musical culture of several centuries, Polish music at last bore a fruit amazing in its magnificence, in the first part of the nineteenth-century. It is the work of Frédéric Chopin. It is the blood and bone of our national life, the most universal expression of the Polish spirit, a lyric compliment of the Polish literature, a brilliant diamond and precious pearl in the crown of our art. Thanks to the universality of music, Chopin became spiritual property of the world.<sup>22</sup>

Jachimecki's words clearly illustrate the lasting bond that many Polish critics and historians perceived between Chopin and Polish music. This was written well after Chopin's death and shows that the perception of nationalistic qualities in his music only grew in prominence.

Similar to Chopin, Gottschalk's status as an icon of American music started to be constructed during his early career. After the success of *Bamboula* in 1849, Gottschalk gained

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<sup>22</sup> Zdzislaw Jachimecki, "Polish Music," *The Musical Quarterly* 6, no. 4 (October 1920): 563.

international renown and this created a demand for his music in America. In 1853, the year Gottschalk returned to the United States, H.D. Didmus wrote an article in which he praised the young composer: “And now comes young Gottschalk, to give new renown to the American mind; to add a new and brilliant chapter to the story of its labors.”<sup>23</sup> Didmus later elaborates and expresses excitement at finding a national composer:

We propose to give a short biographical sketch of the American whose name [Gottschalk] heads this article; a name of which his country should be proud, as adding a new excellence to its intellectual glory.<sup>24</sup>

Didmus points to Gottschalk as the first great American composer, but he also constantly refers back to the fact that as a country the United States is young and has yet to find their national music tradition.

The uncertainty about what American music really is might have also been detrimental to Gottschalk’s image after his death. Some critics during the twentieth century had a hard time accepting Gottschalk as a preeminent nineteenth-century American composer, although he was hailed as such during his lifetime. Instead Gottschalk’s music experienced a change in perception after his death. Numerous critics were quick to rescind Gottschalk’s iconic status in order to crown the next “American” composer. Some of these critics also started to question the “American” qualities of Gottschalk’s music. One such critic, Carl E. Lindstrom, claimed that Gottschalk was, “really a Parisian before he was an American.”<sup>25</sup> Lindstrom’s article tries to find American qualities in Gottschalk’s music and instead claims that, with the exception of *The Last*

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<sup>23</sup> H.D. Didmus, “Louis Moreau Gottschalk,” *Graham’s Magazine*, 1853, 61.

<sup>24</sup> Didmus, 61.

<sup>25</sup> Carl E. Lindstrom, “The American Quality in the Music of Louis Moreau Gottschalk” *The Musical Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (July 1954): 357.

*Hope*, Gottschalk should be remembered in the same context as other Parisian composers of the mid-nineteenth century, specifically Chopin.

The two articles about Gottschalk highlight the difficulty in defining accurately what the main features of American music were in the nineteenth century, a difficulty that did not as pronounced in smaller countries with longer cultural traditions, such as Chopin's Poland. It might appear surprising at first that critics such as Didmus and Lindstrom would have such contrasting perceptions of Gottschalk's Americanism. A possible explanation arises when one considers the unstable, multifaceted, and multicultural nature of American music in the nineteenth century, as discussed earlier. Additionally, the doubts some critics had about Gottschalk's Americanism can be explained by looking at the composer's sources of creative inspiration. Gottschalk spent many years of his life traveling throughout France, Spain, the United States, and the Caribbean, each of these locations influenced the composer in different ways. Just as Gottschalk clearly emulated Chopin while living in Paris, it seems as though his cosmopolitan career gave his music a quality which is difficult to assign to any one of the places he resided.

### The 1853 American Concerts

Gottschalk's illustrious performances during his European travels took him well beyond Paris. His final concerts before returning to the United States were held in Madrid and won him high acclaim from Queen Isabel II of Spain. The success of these concerts was so impressive that when Gottschalk left for New York in February of 1853, he was already famous throughout Europe. Gottschalk must have anticipated an equally successful performing and composition career upon his return to the United States. This was not the case. Instead, mounting debts due to undersold concerts and unfavorable reactions by North-American critics forced Gottschalk to re-design his compositional style.

As a result of his need to address the popular tastes of American audiences, Gottschalk composed what many have seen as his most authentic "American" music. This chapter explores two radically different pieces Gottschalk wrote during the first decade after his return from Europe and the ways these pieces incorporate American popular styles. *The Banjo*, written in 1853, was a reaction to the craze for traveling minstrel groups and folk traditions found in pieces by composers like Stephen Foster. *The Last Hope*, by contrast, is one of the many pieces Gottschalk wrote in response to the sentimental tastes of American audiences in the mid-1850s. This period was one of his most prolific periods and sentimental music was in high demand.

Like his earlier attempts to market to the taste for exotic music in the salons of Paris, Gottschalk quickly became familiar with the trends in American music and wrote compositions influenced by popular culture. The decision to write popular music was initiated in the first few months after Gottschalk's return to the United States, especially by the negative reviews of his

concerts in New York and Boston. Gottschalk's return to his native New Orleans provided the esteem he had anticipated coming back to his home country and this positive reception appears to be yet another source of inspiration for his shift toward writing in the more popular idiom.

Gottschalk's debut performances in New York during February of 1853 were met with indifference by the general public. Despite high acclaim and a good deal of publicity, Gottschalk's concerts were often only half-sold. At this point in time, New York had yet to find its own unique high art culture and as such, certain critics harshly lashed out against the inter-mixing of high and low art on concert programs, something that was happening with increased regularity. Frederick Starr provides an insightful description of the artistic scene in New York in the mid-nineteenth century:

Like the city itself, the performing arts of New York presented indescribable contrasts, bewildering diversities, and eclecticism such as only a booming and chaotic entrepôt could offer... Just as millionaires and beggars, poets and pawnbrokers, all rubbed shoulders along the sidewalks outside Broadway theaters, so also did Beethoven and bawdy ballads, Schiller and slapstick, appear on programs within. High culture did not yet seek for itself a separate realm.<sup>1</sup>

This environment did cater well to Gottschalk's style, as he was fond of playing his own *creole* compositions, yet he frequently also played the works of the European masters, specifically Beethoven and Chopin. On his very first concert in New York Gottschalk included his own compositions but also played numerous pieces by Chopin, including mazurkas, nocturnes, preludes, waltzes, and sonatas. After over an hour of Chopin's music, Gottschalk ended with a well-received performance of *Bamboula*.<sup>2</sup> Despite the fact that this concert was well received, Gottschalk soon realized that the celebrity status he enjoyed while living in Paris would not carry over to the concert halls in New York.

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<sup>1</sup> S. Frederick Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 128.

<sup>2</sup> Starr, 129.

While living in Paris, Gottschalk made use of exotic elements in his pieces. These exotic gimmicks, discussed in the previous chapters, seem to have been less successful in the United States, especially during Gottschalk's concerts in New York and Boston. Critics were divided in how to handle Gottschalk's music. For example, after Gottschalk's New York performance, several journalists sought to make known the newly returned American composer, none more influential than the Philadelphian H.D. Didmus who wrote Gottschalk's earliest biography in *Grahams Magazine*, discussed in Chapter Two. Another critic praised Gottschalk's mastery of the piano, describing him as "a pianist who made the instrument sing and imparted to it the fluidity of a violin."<sup>3</sup>

Other critics, such as John Sullivan Dwight, sought to expose the composer as inferior to the European masters. Dwight's criticism was connected to Gottschalk's performance in Boston. The influential reviewer took it upon himself to launch a campaign against Gottschalk in his journal, *Dwight's Journal of Music and Art*. He compared Gottschalk's music to Beethoven and suggested that if there is to be an American composer, his music should be on the same level of the great German masters. John Tasker Howard described Dwight as the self-appointed guardian of German classicists and Romantics.<sup>4</sup> Dwight's demands for traditional European, and specifically Germanic music, clashed with the exotic, folksy elements of Gottschalk's compositions.

Gottschalk retaliated later that year when he performed a Beethoven piece in his next Boston performance, having listed his own composition in the program. Dwight's review of the concert was published in the October edition of the journal and aggressively criticized the

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<sup>3</sup> Starr, 129-130.

<sup>4</sup> John Tasker Howard, "Louis Moreau Gottschalk, as Portrayed by Himself," *The Musical Quarterly* 18, no. 1 (January 1932): 128.

composition, unbeknownst of the fact that it was Beethoven, not Gottschalk, whom he was criticizing.<sup>5</sup> In this manner, Gottschalk made the point that in spite of his criticism, Dwight did not understand music. Given this scrutiny, it is not surprising that Gottschalk began to view the reviewers with an increasing amount of resentment. This review also provides commentary on the American music critic's obsession with European music as a foundation for concert repertoire.

Starr comments on the impact of Dwight and other critics: "The protracted conflict eventually touched on an extraordinary range of issues, among them the nature of art and music, the value of European heritage in America, the role of cultural hierarchies in a democracy, and, above all, the character of American music and civilization."<sup>6</sup> The complex interactions between different cultural traditions in North America must have had a significant impact on Gottschalk's musical thought and can be seen as part of the reason why his musical output from this period contrasts the works published in Paris and why he decided to write in the vein of American popular music.

When he later reflected on this stage of his career in his journal, Gottschalk spoke kindly of most members of the press, but still appeared to hold a great deal of animosity towards Dwight:

Thus far the press of the United States have treated me with great kindness, with the exception of two newspaper writers, one of them an old minister, who does not understand music, and the other an obscure writer who uses his pen in the service of his personal antipathies.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> John Sullivan Dwight, *Dwight's Journal of Music and Art*, Oct 29, 1862.

<sup>6</sup> Starr, 161.

<sup>7</sup> Louis Moreau Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1964), 123.

Since Dwight had originally been a minister, who received his training at Harvard and later was ordained at Divinity School, it is likely that he is the first critic Gottschalk mentions. Dwight had never had a formal training in music and this would have definitely called his authority on the subject to question in Gottschalk's mind. The second critic is described only vaguely, but the reference to him does highlight the fact that Gottschalk had other critics who, like Dwight, caused a great deal of difficulty in his concert career.

Despite the substantial amount of publicity—both positive and negative—Gottschalk still had trouble filling the concert halls of New York and New England. Consequently, he took on a hefty amount of debt, which was detrimental to his financial circumstances. To make matters worse, the once wealthy Edward Gottschalk incurred quite a bit of his own debt and when he died that October in 1853, Louis Moreau became responsible for that debt. He also became the main provider for his mother and five sisters, a responsibility that left him a pauper in his later years. In a rather personal journal entry, written on February 15, 1862, Gottschalk recalls this period of personal and artistic crisis:

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 that my youth, my independent position, the education I had received, and a certain originality in the compositions 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 resources other than my talents to enable me to perform the sacred duties bequeathed by him.<sup>8</sup>

The entry highlights Gottschalk's tremendous success in Europe and the surprising backlash he received while in the United States. At a later portion of the same day's journal Gottschalk hints

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<sup>8</sup> Gottschalk, 47.

at a glimpse of optimism: “Nevertheless, my brilliant success in Europe was too recent for me not to perceive a near and easy escape.”<sup>9</sup>

Clearly the exotic elements that worked so well in Parisian salons were not of interest to concert goers in New York and Boston, who already in the early 1850s had experienced the virtuosity of Jenny Lind, the spectacle and shock of P.T. Barnum’s museum, and the ever more popular minstrel and folk song traditions they encountered in the music of Stephen Foster. Unlike Gottschalk’s *creole* pieces, which were composed by inter-mixing European and North-American folk elements, Stephen Foster’s folks songs were able to tap into the mainstream of American popular culture by providing simple, tuneful, and easily identifiable melodies. And it was precisely this style that Gottschalk embraced in several of his pieces written soon after his return to the United States.

In the late spring of 1853, the twenty-four year old Gottschalk returned to his Native New Orleans and received the hero’s welcome he had anticipated when he returned from Paris. The concert series in New Orleans proved extremely important because it solidified Gottschalk’s decision to market his music to the broader public instead of trying to appease the critics. During the three weeks Gottschalk spent concertizing in New Orleans he placed less emphasis on playing compositions by European composers and instead focused on his own *creole* compositions. The April, 9 *New Orleans Daily Picayune* described the sensational reaction Gottschalk received at his first New Orleans concert at Odd Fellows Hall:

He was called out after every piece, and bouquets and applause were literally showered on him. He received them all modestly and quietly. At the end of the first part his father thanked the audience for their kindness, and introduced the son, who, in a few happy words in French, expressed his warm affection for this city and his native country and his gratitude for the warm welcome given him.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Gottschalk, 47.

<sup>10</sup> Editorial, *New Orleans Daily Times-Picayune*, April 9, 1853.

Little did this audience know of the struggles experienced in New York and Boston, and the resounding acceptance of the New Orleans audience must have inspired the composer in a manner not yet experienced in Paris. Historian Willie Proffit described the reception: “The pages of the faithful local press indicate there was hardly an individual in his native city who could resist his charm and delicate rhythmic expressions.”<sup>11</sup> This is a far cry from the half-filled concert halls in New York that did not even bring in enough revenue to pay for the venue. The New Orleans concerts, which lacked the “artistic” compositions Gottschalk sought to employ in New York, caused the composer to develop a genuine sense of patriotism for his country and his native New Orleans in a very different manner than what he had professed while living in Paris.

After leaving New Orleans, Gottschalk gradually began composing popular music that seems to have been intended specifically to please the concert attendees. During the upcoming months Gottschalk played several concerts in smaller American cities. The reactions by these audiences appear to have helped confirm the convictions Gottschalk experienced in New Orleans. A frustrated journal entry, written after a concert in Cincinnati, appears to mock the conflicting ideals felt by American audiences: “I was playing at the concert the *Kreutzer* sonata of Beethoven. The audience had greatly the appearance of going to sleep. The next morning a newspaper says: ‘We could ourselves have done very well without the long piece for the piano and violin.’ It was notwithstanding the same paper that last year was complaining that we did not give classical music.”<sup>12</sup> This entry highlights Gottschalk’s frustration with American audiences

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<sup>11</sup>Willie Proffit, “Crescent City’s Charismatic Celebrity,” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 12, no. 3 (Summer 1971): 254.

<sup>12</sup> Gottschalk, 323.

and this frustration may have contributed to his desire to please the general public above the music critics.

Too many of these occurrences must have frustrated Gottschalk to the point of avoiding the classics altogether. This is evidenced by a conversation with a friend, Geo P. Upton, and recorded in a book of conversations published later by Upton in 1908. During this conversation Upton purportedly asked Gottschalk why he no longer played Beethoven on his concert programs to which Gottschalk replied:

Because the dear public don't want to hear me play it. People would rather hear my *Banjo*, or *Ojos Creollos*, or *Last Hope*. Besides, there are plenty of pianists who can play that music as well or better than I can, but none of them can play my music half so well as I can. And what difference will it make a thousand years hence, anyway?<sup>13</sup>

Statements like this could have very well been inspired by the positive reception to his use of popular music during his New Orleans concerts. The rift between the demands of the popular culture and the demands of certain critics would have expanded to the point that Gottschalk may have felt as though he was incapable of pleasing both parties. This in turn could have been the reason why he began focusing his energy on composing music that catered to the popular tastes and became less concerned with the need to play the classics.

During the late summer of 1853 Gottschalk stopped concertizing and spent two months in New York. It was during this visit that he composed the first sketches of *The Banjo*, which proved to be the quintessential embodiment of Gottschalk's attempt at marketing his music to the American popular culture. This trendy instrument was beginning to develop into "banjo craze" in the United States. As Starr points out, many folk songs, such as Stephen Foster's "Oh, Susanna," the main protagonist of which sings proudly about carrying a banjo on his knee,

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<sup>13</sup> Geo P. Upton, *Musical Memories* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1908), 77.

illustrate the public interest in learning more about this instrument.<sup>14</sup> This is reinforced by a quote from an 1865 article by Mark Twain, published in the *San Francisco Dramatic Chronicle*:

When you want genuine music—music that will come right home to you like a bad quarter, suffuse your system like strychnine whisky, go right through you like Brandreth's pills, ramify your whole constitution like the measles, and break out on your hide like the pin-feather pimples on a picked goose—when you want all this, just smash your piano, and invoke the glory-beaming banjo!<sup>15</sup>

While it is implausible that Gottschalk may have ever had the urge to “smash [his] piano,” his decision to market such a popular instrument in his own composition shows that he was able to react to the current trends in American popular culture.

What makes this piece so impressive is Gottschalk’s ability to write idiomatically authentic “banjo” music for the piano. Paul Ely Smith has transcribed Gottschalk’s piece into standard banjo notation and tablature and thus shown how compatible the composition actually is to the instrument it claims to portray. The piece is based on a pentatonic scale that corresponds with the five strings of the banjo. In the article Smith claims that certain Gottschalk passages display technical demands unique to the banjo, such as up-picking techniques and certain chordal patterns associated with a mid-nineteenth century style of banjo playing. Since the African-American banjo performers at the time did not have a standardized system for notation, Smith argues, “the Banjo is the most complete document we have of the nineteenth-century African-American tradition.”<sup>16</sup> When contemplating Gottschalk’s legacy as an American composer, it is important to consider the ways in which his music accurately represents what was happening in

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<sup>14</sup> Starr, 148.

<sup>15</sup> Mark Twain, “Enthusiastic Eloquence” *The San Francisco Dramatic Chronicle*, June 23, 1865.

<sup>16</sup>Paul Ely Smith, “Gottschalk’s ‘The Banjo,’ op. 15, and the Banjo in the Nineteenth Century” *Current Musicology* 50 (Spring, 1991): 57.

the United States. *The Banjo* therefore displays how in-tune Gottschalk was with mid-nineteenth century American culture.

Gottschalk may have also interacted with the premier banjo virtuoso at the time, an African-American from the West Indies and fellow New Orleans native named Picayune Butler. Butler, who was performing in New York at the time of Gottschalk's 1853 summer arrival, was known as the most virtuosic banjo player in the United States. Working as a street corner performer in his early years, there is a chance that Gottschalk could have heard him play in New Orleans. Although no evidence does suggest that this meeting ever took place, it is reasonable to assume that Gottschalk may have encountered one of his Broadway performances while staying in New York that summer. The possibility of Gottschalk's interaction with Butler could explain the idiomatic authenticity of the piece.

The music of *The Banjo* is simplistic, based on folk idioms and the sounds of a popular instrument, and even quotes Stephen Foster's minstrel song *Camptown Races*. In many ways *The Banjo* clearly avoids the elements associated with Gottschalk's Parisian piano music, such as the elaborate B section in *Bamboula* or the Chopinesque nature of his op. 1 compositions. Instead Gottschalk employs light texture and simple pentatonic melodic figures. Harmonically the piece stays in F-sharp for the entirety of the composition. Moreover, Gottschalk rarely strays from the chords which relate to the F-sharp pentatonic scale. The strongest use of traditional harmony and cadences only comes during Gottschalk's statement of *Camptown Races*. Part of the reason for the simple harmonic structure, as well as the flashy virtuosic passages, could be Gottschalk's desire to authentically write for this extremely popular American instrument.

In many ways this reaction to popular trends is analogous to what Gottschalk did in Paris by composing exotic music and incorporating fashionable idioms of Chopin and Liszt. However,

unlike *Bamboula*, which I explored in Chapter One, Gottschalk seems to be actually searching for an authentically “American” sound in this composition. The music represents actual strumming patterns, resonant drones that are characteristic of the instrument, syncopation techniques, and uses pentatonicism to represent the five-stringed instrument. Perhaps this is partly due to the fact that Gottschalk’s original *creole* pieces were a reaction to his childhood recollections, whereas *The Banjo* was written by a twenty-four year old composer with the resources to conduct research on the instrument. In this light Gottschalk’s *creole* music composed while in Paris can be seen as providing a more generic form of exoticism, consistent with existing stereotypes about Louisianan slaves. However exotic pieces like *The Banjo* composed while living in the United States were tinged with actual American music idioms in order to appeal to the popular culture of the American concert-goers.

The use of folk elements seen in *The Banjo*, which clearly reacted to the incredibly popular minstrel groups, was not the only genre of American popular music Gottschalk chose to invoke in his compositions. Throughout the 1850s, the United States also experienced an explosion of popularity of sentimental music. It was during this period in 1854, while still living in Cuba, that Gottschalk wrote pieces with extremely sentimental titles such as *The Last Hope*, *O Loving Heart*, and *The Dying Poet*. The most famous of these overtly sentimental works, *The Last Hope*, would become the piece Gottschalk later referred to as his most requested composition.<sup>17</sup>

Like his experience in New York, Gottschalk’s early time in Havana was filled with disappointment. Queen Isabel II of Spain had written a letter of introduction for Gottschalk, but political turmoil between Cuba and Spain nullified the value of such an introduction. Instead

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<sup>17</sup> Gottschalk, 316.

Gottschalk was seen as a threat and as such was detained upon his arrival. Franklin Pierce, the current United States President, had told the American people he intended to annex Cuba. Spain was also trying to negotiate with the Americans, which displeased the Cuban officials. As a result, Gottschalk was held in custody and his concert plans were stalled. He had stayed in Havana two months before he was eventually allowed to play his first concert.<sup>18</sup>

During these two months Gottschalk was extremely prolific in composing pieces in the styles he had observed from the American musical scene. The one consistency in Gottschalk's career was his ability to recognize trends in popular culture and emulate them successfully in his own career. He did this in his exotic music in Paris, his banjo piece, and later also in his sentimental pieces. Besides focusing on music with extreme sentimentality, Gottschalk also chose to stop playing his *creole* pieces altogether when he returned to the United States in 1855. Given the international fame he had established with *Bamboula*, it seems that the composer was searching for a new musical identity. And this search was not only directly related to the unpleasant experiences in New York, Boston, and now Havana as well, but also reflects Gottschalk's conscious reaction to the American obsession with sentimental music.

The popularity of sentimental music progressively increased throughout the 1850s and was at its prime in 1855 when Gottschalk returned to the United States. This music represented a reaction to the craze for minstrel songs that were fashionable just a few years earlier. As Starr summarizes:

Then, in one of those sudden shifts typical of popular music, Americans began calling for the exact opposite qualities. They wanted music that was serious rather than bantering, reflective rather than extroverted, refined rather than bawdy.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Starr, 171.

<sup>19</sup> Starr, 197.

The emotional content of *The Last Hope* clearly parallels the new sentimental tastes in the United States. *The Last Hope* was later given the sub-title, “Religious Meditation,” and also had a written introduction to go along with the score. Gottschalk would even have this programmatic introduction printed in his own concert programs. The cover of the sheet music showed a stained glass window with rays of sun emanating from behind it. Then at the center of the page was a cross.<sup>20</sup> The written introduction relates a story of Gottschalk’s stay in Cuba. In it, an elderly woman on her deathbed and in great pain asks Gottschalk to play a melody that would soothe her, and the composer improvises what would later become the basis for *The Last Hope*. According to this introduction, the woman was so pleased with the music that she smiled and passed away content at her death. Thus the written program of the composition is already filled with melodramatic sentimentality.

The religious theme must have resonated with American audience. This notion of sentimental religiosity would have been of greater appeal to American audiences who had strong religious roots. The religious content of the piece may not have held the same appeal to the more cosmopolitan and secularized audiences in Paris. In fact, this theme became so popular that the melody was actually set to words and used in a Presbyterian hymnal for ninety years.

Gottschalk’s musical portrayal of this story further intensifies the overtly emotional description. Gottschalk begins with a short, four-measure melody; the same one he claims to have improvised. Although the piece is written in a 3/4 meter, the slow tempo, marked only by the word *Religioso*, causes the bar lines to merge, suggesting the piece has no clear meter. This is evident as early as m. 5, which begins with two quarter note rests, undermining the sense of a

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<sup>20</sup> This is somewhat strange because Gottschalk did not have any strong religious beliefs during his life. He professed to be Catholic, although he did not attend mass or practice his Catholicism. His largest display of moral conviction was seen in his father’s insistence on being provider for his mother and siblings, a task he dutifully performed until his death.

clear downbeat. The piece as a whole develops the short melody through the key of B minor and ends in B major. But unlike in other pieces by previous composers that use the shift from minor to major for a heroic effect, Gottschalk ends with a quiet and subtle arpeggio marked *ppp*. Such an ending could very well symbolize the elderly woman's peaceful passing into the afterlife.

Before long, *The Last Hope* became the most requested piece of music in Gottschalk's repertoire. Gottschalk himself even wrote about being enslaved by the demand for this piece.<sup>21</sup> Gottschalk's relatively simple sentimental pieces were in high demand by the public. In his recollection of Gottschalk's life, his friend Louis Ricardo Fors, an early biographer of the composer, makes bold claims about this period in Gottschalk's life, his need for money, and the resulting dependency on his publisher:

Avaricious editors obliged him to compose against his will and contrary to the impulses of his good taste and his talent. He wrote these under burlesque pseudonyms or completely vulgar names but the editors, always thirsty for maximum profit, published these imperfect compositions over the author's actual name.<sup>22</sup>

Although the recollections of this biographer cannot reflect the composer's true intentions or the artistic value found in these compositions, Fors's claims do highlight Gottschalk's ability to provide a considerable amount of material for his editors in order to satisfy the demands of the American public.

Pieces like *The Last Hope* represent nineteenth-century American popular culture. Sentimental pieces were in high demand from New Orleans to New York, Philadelphia to San Francisco, and as Gottschalk played these pieces throughout the country, Americans with radically different social backgrounds were absorbed by this genre. By composing in this genre, as well as tapping into the folk idioms seen in *The Banjo*, Gottschalk's music paints an accurate

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<sup>21</sup> Gottschalk, 316.

<sup>22</sup> Louis Ricardo Fors, *Gottschalk* (Havana: La Propaganda Literaria, 1880), 128.

picture of American popular tastes in that era. Although Gottschalk was no new Beethoven, as Dwight would have liked, his pieces offer an even more authentic look into American life and social tradition.

Yet even though Gottschalk wrote in these purely American styles, they were only one facet of Nineteenth-century American music. Moreover, these popular styles would have been celebrated by predominantly white audiences. This helps explain why Gottschalk's appropriation of African based *creole* music may not have held the same appeal. The American resistance towards African-based folk idioms continued well after Gottschalk's death. In fact, during the early twentieth century, American composers were resistant to acknowledge jazz as symbolizing the American music tradition. Richard Taruskin observed that European composers, especially in Paris, actually took interest in American jazz idioms before they were recognized by American composers.<sup>23</sup> Solo piano works, such as Claude Debussy's *Golliwogs Cakewalk*, used jazz and ragtime idioms that were similar to the elements seen in Gottschalk's *creole* compositions sixty years earlier.

These African-tinged influences, seen in Gottschalk's compositions, remained an isolated phenomenon of American music until the twentieth-century. After World War I, American composers, such as Aaron Copland, started using jazz idioms in their own "serious" compositions. However, as Richard Taruskin observed, "Copland himself associated his serious interest in jazz with an experience he had not in America but in Vienna, during a brief vacation

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<sup>23</sup> Richard Taruskin, "Chapter 11: In Search of the 'Real' America," in *Music in the Early Twentieth Century*, vol. 4 of *The Oxford History of Western Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), <http://0-www.oxfordwesternmusic.com.library.uark.edu/view/Volume4/actrade-9780195384840-chapter-011.xml> (accessed March 25, 2012).

in 1923, while he was studying in Paris.”<sup>24</sup> In this way, American composers sought validation of their own national heritage by European composers. It seems as though Gottschalk’s difficulty integrating his *creole* elements into the American music tradition was a direct result of this same resistance. Like the later use of jazz idioms, Gottschalk’s African-tinged music flourished while he was living in Paris, but was not well-received by the American public.

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<sup>24</sup> Taruskin.

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