GOTTSCHALK

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The people of New York and Boston had received a strong musical impulse from the Lind concerts, and it was not astonishing to find them ready to extend as warm, if not as excited, a reception to Thalberg as they had to Jenny Lind. He was not managed by such a showman as P. T. Barnum, but he was well heralded by Ullmann, and I distinctly remember the intense curiosity with which the audience awaited his first performance in Niblo's concert room in the autumn of 1855. He was the first really great pianist of European fame to come to this country, and he was known to have divided the honors and opinions of the Old World with Liszt himself. It is true De Meyer had been here and had in turn astonished and charmed his audiences by his immense *tours de force* and his delicate touch, while Gottschalk, fresh from his Parisian triumphs, had also been heard and admired, but the colossal reputation of a Thalberg had worked up the pitch of expectancy to fever-heat. It was not a trifling incident of the day or week to go to one of these concerts, but a much-coveted privilege eagerly sought for and anticipated as a rare treat. At the matinees, always largely attended by ladies, quite a social feature was added by the serving of tea and light confectionery during the entr'actes.

Thalberg was immensely successful, giving as many as three concerts in a day, one in the morning and evening in New York, and a third in the afternoon in Brooklyn. His repertoire consisted only of about twelve of his own fantasias, but these were played with absolute perfection. There is no doubt that the great players of the last generation were much more perfect in technical finish than those of the present time who play everything from Bach to Liszt. Thalberg was wise enough to avoid all compositions which he felt did not belong to his peculiar genre; he did not encroach upon the classics, and consequently he never scored any failures. He knew his limitations, but he did not allow others to discover them. He was satisfied to be successful in his own compositions, which still remain the best operatic transcriptions extant. His perfect virtuosity was the result of untiring labor. Vincent Wallace once told me that he had heard him practise two bars of his "Don Pasquale" Fantasia in the octave variation on the Serenade for a whole night, never leaving the piano until sunrise. I gave my warmest sympathy to Wallace, but I confess to have enjoyed very keenly the result of the night's work. I think I heard him every time he played in New

York, as Ullmann sent me an entree to the concerts for the season. I had always been an ardent apostle of his methods, and the more I heard him the more I felt his claim on my admiration.

Later in the same year Thalberg and Gottschalk joined forces and played some duets for two pianos at the Niblo concerts. One in particular, on themes from "Trovatore," composed by both of them, and which I have never seen in print, was wonderfully effective and created the most tremendous furore and excitement. A remarkable double shake which Thalberg played in the middle of the piano, while Gottschalk was flying all over the keyboard in the "Anvil Chorus," produced the most prodigious volume of tone I ever heard from the piano. Gottschalk and Thalberg brought their own European grand pianos with them, the former used a Pleyel, and the latter an Erard, but finding the Chickering grands so satisfactory they both adopted them, as the foreign pianos suffered very much from our changeable climate. The retirement of Thalberg and Gottschalk practically ended the reign of those artists, who devoted their whole energies and talents to the perfection of execution, and for this end chiefly used their own compositions as mediums of virtuosity.

Sigismond Thalberg

If Gottschalk's reputation as an artist of the first rank has been somewhat dimmed by succeeding virtuosi as well as by the change which has taken place in the taste of the musical public, he nevertheless stood alone as master of a style all his own. Possessed of the languid, emotional nature of the tropics, his music recalled the land of his birth and the traits of his people. He became at one time the rage in society; he was overwhelmed with attentions from the fair sex, and was sought after both in public and private. He must have been completely overpowered by these testimonies of esteem had he not been endowed with more strength of character than is generally accorded to him. I knew him well, and always found him a generous and sympathizing friend, ever ready to aid in advancing my career, and according to me all the credit which was my due. I often assisted him at his concerts in duets for two pianos, one on themes from Verdi's "Jerusalem," another his own arrangement of "William Tell," and after his return from Cuba we played his Cuban dances for two performers on one piano.

At his second concert in New York, after his return from Paris, he chose to play Weber's " Concertstück," rather a strange choice, as it was physically impossible for him to execute the octave glissando passages as marked, from a habit of biting his nails to such an extent that his fingers were almost devoid of them, and a glissando under these circumstances was out of the question.- He substituted an octave passage, played from the wrist with alternate hands, very cleverly to be sure, but missing a good deal of the desired effect. He was so persistent in this habit of biting his nails that I have known the keys to be covered with blood when he had finished playing. It was the fashion at that time always to wear white gloves with evening dress, and his manner of taking them off, after seating himself at the piano, was often a very amusing episode. His deliberation, his perfect indifference to the waiting audience was thoroughly manifest, as he slowly drew them off one finger at a time, bowing and smiling meanwhile to the familiar faces in the front rows. Finally disposing of them, he would manipulate his hands until they were quite limber, then preludize until his mood prompted him to begin his selection on the programme. He devoted himself almost entirely to his own compositions, which were full of character and charm, and he remains today the one American composer of genuine originality, the "Bamboula," "Marche de Nuit," "Le Bananier," " Jota Aragonesa," and others too numerous to mention bearing abundant testimony of his genius.

I have often seen him arrive at a concert in no mood for playing, and declare that he would not appear; that an excuse might be made, but that he would not play. He cared no more for the public than if he had been in a private drawing-room where he could play or not as he pleased; but a little coaxing and a final *push* would drive him on to the stage, and after a few moments the fire would kindle and he would play with all the brilliancy which was so peculiarly his own. He was possessed of a ringing, scintillating touch, which, joined to a poetic charm of expression, seemed to sway the emotions of his audience with almost hypnotic power.

From a photograph, copyright, 1861, *by C. D. Fredericks & Co.*

Louis Moreau Gottschalk

His eyes were the striking feature of his face, large and dark with peculiarly drooping lids, which always appeared half closed as he played. There must be some youthful grandmothers in New York today who have experienced the charm of their magnetic albeit languorous glances.

There was much that was sad and painful about his death, which occurred at Rio, in 1869. A mystery hung over his last days which has never been clearly explained. All that we know is recorded by his sister, who edited his book, published in 1881, and entitled " Notes of a Pianist." These notes, originally written in French, are so full of spirit and local color that one is almost inclined to believe that Gottschalk, had he lived, might have been as prolific and original with his pen as he was in his music.