

Chopin called him “THE KING OF PIANISTS,”

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but was Louis Moreau Gottschalk America’s first musical genius or simply the purveyor of sentimental claptrap?

by Peter Andrews

Even for a city that prided itself on being a preeminent center of European musical activity, the Parisian concert debut of Louis Moreau Gottschalk on April 2, 1845, was a singular occasion. Startlingly, the pianist was a youthful American, and, of course, it was well understood in Paris that Americans were devoid of cultural refinement. When the ballerina Fanny Elssler had announced her intention to tour the United States four years earlier, the Paris journal *Charivari* threw up its hands at the thought of such an exquisite artist showing herself to “these savages, these trans-Atlantic Arabs, these coarse, ill-mannered, thick-headed, bad-hearted descendants of renegades and rebels.”

Fifteen-year-old Gottschalk possessed none of those lamentable qualities. Born in New Orleans of a family with aristocratic pretensions, he was a model young gentleman, properly educated for the times and widely read in the literature of antiquity. Although he was somewhat delicate in appearance, he could fence a bit and he sat a horse well. His French, always better than his English, was as precise as his manners were courtly.

Nonetheless, he had known the sting of Parisian musical prejudice. Gottschalk had arrived in France, an eager thirteen-year-old, with a sheaf of hometown notices attesting to his prodigality on the piano, and had hoped to study at the Paris Conservatoire. But the director, Pierre Zimmermann, who felt Americans were only seriously interested in steam engines, refused to hear the boy audition on the grounds that anyone who had spent his formative years in the crude climate of the Americas was already beyond pianistic salvation. He told Gottschalk to go home and learn to become a mechanic.

Moreau remained in Paris, however, and continued his musical education privately. He studied piano with Camille Stamaty, and composition with Pierre Maleden of Limoges. His training lacked the cachet of the Conservatoire but it was thoroughly professional. Two of his fellow students were Charles Camille Saint-Saëns and Georges Bizet, who afforded him spirited competition.

After three years, Stamaty considered his American student ready to face the musical public. Following a few salon recitals in the homes of wealthy Parisian art patrons, Gottschalk was booked for a performance at the Salle Pleyel, the most luxurious concert hall in the city. The Parisian musical scene was small, and the word tended to get around when a particularly good talent—even if he was an American barbarian—was about to make an appearance. Personally invited by Stamaty, the audience that attended Gottschalk’s debut was socially distinguished and musically knowledgeable. They must have sensed they were in for something special when Frederic Chopin arrived to listen to the boy from Louisiana.

Gottschalk more than fulfilled the promise Stamaty held out. His debut was the kind of electrifying affair that had illuminated the pianistic world perhaps only a half-dozen times since Mozart established its traditions some seventy years before. By all accounts, Gottschalk cut a fine stage presence: modest and sympathetic with that aura of dreamy melancholy so favored by pianists of the time. His program was a demanding one that included Thalberg's transcriptions of airs from Rossini's *Semiramide*, a Liszt fantasy on Meyerbeer's *Robert le Diable*, and Chopin's Concerto in E Minor. Gottschalk's playing was adjudged to be flawless. Then, as now, there were dozens of talented young pianists around who could play the notes, but Gottschalk had in addition that mysterious ability granted only to the great virtuosos to give a sense of tension and excitement to the playing of music with which the audience is already familiar. Hector Berlioz was to say later that Gottschalk's playing "dazzles, astonishes." It was common to remark that when Gottschalk played, it sounded as if more than one person were at the keyboard. "The infantine simplicity of his smiling caprices, the charming ease with which he renders simple things," wrote Berlioz, "seems to belong to a second individuality, distinct from that which characterizes his thundering energies."

At the end of the concert Chopin threaded his way through the audience and went backstage to be introduced to the American prodigy. "Give me your hand, my boy," Chopin said and kissed him in the European manner. "I predict you will become the king of pianists."

Normally, the French press did not cover pianistic debuts, but Gottschalk's performance had caused such a stir it could not be ignored. When the notices began to appear, they served to confirm Chopin's judgment. There was some grumbling that the program had not been "classical" enough; "the classics" at the time meant the works of departed masters such as Bach, Mozart, and Haydn. It did not mean the showy salon pieces of Liszt and Chopin. *La Revue et Gazette Musicale* thought it particularly unfortunate Gottschalk had seen fit to play the Chopin concerto, "a composition of great difficulty and of little brilliance." However, there was no doubt regarding the American's keyboard ability. *Le Ménestrel* managed to misspell Gottschalk's name but conceded he played "in a manner which merits him a first place among our virtuosos."

Gottschalk went on to an enormously successful concert career. In the next twenty-five years, he became the first American concert pianist of any stature and the first American composer whose works were appreciated in Europe. He toured the Continent and the Western Hemisphere at a suicidal pace and became one of the most famous musicians of the time. But if it is possible to encapsulate an entire artistic life within the program notes of a single concert, the essential themes of Gottschalk's career were struck at his debut and repeated with minor variations for the rest of his days. For his virtuosity there was an awe of the kind reserved for the likes of Liszt and Paganini. But there was always the suspicion that he was not a truly classical musician. His virtuosity brought him international popularity and considerable cash. But doubts about his "seriousness" served posthumously to destroy his reputation. His compositions, which were once regarded as the first important music to come out of America, were later dismissed as sentimental claptrap suitable only for parlor piano rolls and background music at silent movies. His playing, which had astonished and dazzled Berlioz, subsequently was denigrated by musical historians who never heard him in performance. With only a few exceptions, when the name of Louis Moreau Gottschalk is now dredged up by contemporary musicologists, it is as if he were some quaint artifact from America's cultural and social past, like a stereopticon or an elephant's hoof umbrella stand. It has been a cruel joke for history to play upon the memory of a man who, in his day, was placed in the vanguard of musical modernists.

Gottschalk's day was the 1840s, a time when the fires of musical romanticism were burning their brightest. There is a tendency today to regard the romantics of a century ago as a group of lyrical aesthetes palpitating over little passages and dabbing vinegar on their temples when the excitement of striking a diminished seventh grew too intense. In fact, they were lusty, creative artists bent on musical revolution as surely as their political counterparts were determined to create a new social order. It is unlikely that serious music has ever known a more turbulent decade than the one of 1840. Liszt abruptly retired from the concert stage in 1847 to devote himself to conducting, teaching, and composing works that were to be as puzzling as his playing had been galvanizing. Berlioz produced *La Damnation de Faust*, perhaps his most representative work, in 1847. Working independently, and never really comprehending the other's genius, Verdi and Wagner were assaulting the *bel canto* traditions of opera. The central figure of the movement, however, was Chopin. It was a curious position for him to be in because he vigorously disliked everything to do with romanticism in whatever form it presented itself. His heart was firmly with Bach and Mozart, and he held his fellow romantics in slight regard. He refused to have anything to do with the works of Mendelssohn or Schubert and once told a friend that Schumann's *Carnaval* should not be considered music at all. He thought Liszt's music was silly and Berlioz's incoherent. Nonetheless, when he died at the age of thirty-nine in 1849, he became the symbol of musical romanticism and, in the words of the historian and critic Harold C. Schonberg, "properly set romantic pianism on its rails and gave it the impetus that still shows no signs of deceleration."

As a pianist Gottschalk was Chopin's anointed successor, and there were those who felt he was the master's superior. According to Adolphe Adam, Gottschalk had "all the grace of Chopin, with more decided character." Berlioz, whom Liszt called "the most powerful musical brain in France," engaged Gottschalk many times to play in his orchestras and became his particular champion. "Gottschalk is one of the very small number who possess all the different elements of a consummate pianist," Berlioz wrote. "He knows just how fancy can be indulged in expression. He knows the limits beyond which any freedom taken with the rhythm produces only confusion and disorder, and upon these limits he never encroaches. There is an exquisite grace in his manner."

Gottschalk also made his mark as a composer those first days in Paris. Drawing on the black and Creole melodies of his New Orleans childhood, he fashioned a number of brilliant piano show pieces. "Bamboula" recalled the street cry of a Louisiana yam vendor, and "La Savanne" was a delightful reconstruction of "Skip to My Lou, My Darling," a ballad that Gottschalk's old family slave-servant, Sally, used to sing to the children. Gottschalk's parents, who had come to Paris to join him in his new-found celebrity, were delighted with those familiar airs, but his mother was shocked to hear he planned to play "nigger stuff" in the sophisticated salons of Paris. But along with romanticism had come nationalism. Gottschalk's exotic compositions powered by the thrilling left hand imitating the beat of the tom-tom took their place alongside the Polish mazurkas of Chopin and the Hungarian rhapsodies of Liszt. "Who does not know 'Bamboula'?" asked *La France Musicale* during the height of the Gottschalk rage. "Le Bananier," written in 1849, according to one nineteenth-century catalogue, was the most played, most applauded piano piece of the day. Gottschalk also became something of a pet in Parisian literary circles, where he consorted with Dumas, Hugo, Lamartine, and Gautier. In June 1849 he must have felt his triumph in France to be complete. He was asked to sit with Pierre Zimmermann of the Paris Conservatoire as a judge at their annual *concours* for students of the piano. One of the contemporary works selected as a test piece was his own "Bamboula." The French, and perhaps Mr. Zimmermann as well, simply ignored Gottschalk's discomfiting American background and claimed him as their own. Gottschalk was merely an

American by accident of birth. The critic Oscar Comettant grandly announced, “Il est Français d’esprit, de coeur, de goût et d’habitudes.”

Later that same year, Gottschalk embarked on the first of the grand concert tours that were to occupy him, except for one extended and uncharacteristic period of lassitude, for the rest of his life. He played engagements throughout the provinces of France and went on to great success in Switzerland. In Lausanne, he said, the audience threw enough flowers on the stage to carpet the theater. After playing “Le Bananier” as an encore five times, he finally slipped off the stage and “left the lunatics to yell in the desert.”

When he was not pocketing cash from ticket receipts at public performances, there were little tokens presented to him by members of the nobility, such as the gold and diamond jewel case presented to him by the Grand Duchess Anna of Russia in gratitude for playing at one of her salons. There were other, even more startling, evidences of his popularity. Following a concert in Geneva, the diminutive Gottschalk was waylaid by an ardent lady who picked him up, stashed him in her carriage, and galloped off with him. They were not seen again for five weeks. It was a great scandal, of course, but not the kind to harm the reputation of a virtuoso pianist, particularly at a time when women were known to battle each other over one of Liszt’s abandoned cigar butts.

After a brief return to Paris, Gottschalk went on to Spain, where his reception was almost hysterical. Queen Isabella made him a chevalier, and the Spanish Academy inducted him as an honorary member. The Spanish audiences were particularly fond of highly theatrical musical offerings, and Gottschalk, who was developing a keen appreciation for giving the audience what it wanted, composed a monster work entitled *El Sitio de Zaragoza* (“The Siege of Saragossa”). Billed as a “grand symphony for ten pianos,” it was apparently a mélange of Spanish national airs punctuated by bugle calls and cannonades. Only a fragment of its original three-hundred-page score has survived, but it must have been quite something. One critic said the work “unveiled the true heart of the Spanish people.” Gottschalk was told to make himself at home in the royal palace, and this he did, playing duets with the king and, according to court rumors, finding time for a few high-level affairs of the heart. Two of the ladies romantically linked with Gottschalk were the queen’s sister, Doña Luisa, and the Countess de Montijo, who was soon to become the wife of Napoleon III.

Abruptly one morning an emissary from the queen arrived at Gottschalk’s door with a message informing him he had exactly twenty-four hours to leave Spain. It is not clear whether Gottschalk had aroused the queen’s displeasure as a result of a sexual indiscretion or if he had been caught up in one of the baroque political intrigues that flourished in Isabella’s court. Whatever the reason, it was not to be the last time a woman was responsible for Gottschalk having to pack his luggage quickly and head for the border.

GOTTSCHALK ARRIVED back in America in 1853, eager to match the huge financial success enjoyed by the Swedish soprano, Tenny Lind, three years before. His first New York concert, on February 11, was only a middling success, but his second, the following week, was a triumph. “A mere pianist,” *The New York Times* reported, “has filled the great Niblo’s Garden from pit to ceiling.” He went on to Philadelphia, where he was billed as “the King of pianists” and unveiled a new piano work entitled *The Battle of Bunker Hill*. The piece turned out to be *El Sitio de Zaragoza* all over again, with the Spanish airs removed and snatches of “Yankee Doodle,” “The Star-Spangled Banner,” and “Oh, Susannah” put in their place, but it was warmly received.

For the next seven years, Gottschalk was a musical vagabond, touring all over the eastern United States. "My home," he confided to his diary, "is somewhere between the baggage car and the last car of the train. ... The conductors salute me as one of the employees." He made a good deal of money, but was keenly disappointed that his success did not equal that of Jenny Lind. Except in his native New Orleans, he never experienced the kind of rapturous reception he had known in Europe. Although he was an ardent republican in American political matters, he clearly missed hobnobbing with nobility and having regents strike medals in his honor. Americans just paid cash. And there were some places where not even cash seemed worth the effort. New Jersey and Central Africa, he said, had to be the two worst places in the world to try to play serious music.

In Boston he received his first set of bad notices. The musical scene there was ruled by the severe critic and cleric, John Sullivan Dwight, whose *Journal of Music* was the most influential music magazine in America at the time. Dwight was steeped in the Germanic sobrieties of Beethoven. Gottschalk, with his Frenchified manner and delicate Parisian touch, playing tunes culled from the New Orleans marketplace, was everything Dwight abhorred in contemporary music. He granted Gottschalk's technique, "the most clear and crisp and beautiful that we have ever known," but then added, "What is the execution without some thought and meaning?" Gottschalk's program of dainty salon pieces was dismissed as an affront to New England musical intelligence. If Gottschalk wanted to present himself as a serious musician, he should play some serious music. Gottschalk countered by doing a very foolish thing. The program for a later concert listed a little-known Beethoven bagatelle as a Gottschalk composition, and identified Beethoven as the composer of one of Gottschalk's pieces. Dwight dutifully fell into the trap set for him. He praised the "Beethoven" and excoriated the "Gottschalk." Gottschalk wrote the eminent critic a note apologizing for the "printer's error" in the program, but sweetly thanking him for such high praise for his simple work. Gottschalk won the day on points, but it did him little good to show up the humorless Dwight. For the next fifteen years the Boston journal sniped away at Gottschalk's reputation with devastating effect.

When a pianist has been kissed by Chopin and praised by Berlioz, it is easy to disregard the carping of a Boston divine who cannot recognize a Beethoven work when he hears one. But there was much truth in Dwight's criticism. For all of the brilliant sheen on Gottschalk's talent as a pianist and a composer, it was not a particularly deep talent. Although he played Bach for a few knowledgeable friends, and by all accounts superbly, he felt he dared not play such difficult music in front of a paying American audience. It was all very well and good for Dwight to preach the doctrine of high art to the scattering of classical music lovers who read his little magazine; Gottschalk had a living to make. His job was not to bring the intricate glories of Bach to Davenport, Iowa, but to get the people of Davenport to come to his concerts at all. When the public could pay fifty cents to see Adah Menken as "The Naked Lady" astride a horse in Mazeppa, getting them to spend two dollars to watch a small man in a frock coat play the piano was not one of the easier ticket sells in the entertainment world. Increasingly he fell back on the old familiar stuff that had always worked in the past. More important, he started to get sloppy. On January 28, 1857, the *Musical Journal* in Philadelphia caught him in the unforgivable: "Mr. Gottschalk attempted to play the first part of Henselt's Concerto, Op. 16. We say 'attempted' not because he substituted for the difficult runs of the middle part his usual easy ones, leaving out entirely those for the left hand, nor because he dropped a good many notes; but because in spite of these abbreviations and simplifications, the remaining difficulties of the piece appeared to be so immense to him that he could not afford to show the least expression, not anything of an artistic-like conception or treatment."

Gottschalk must have known he was often just going through the motions, and we can only guess what emotional price he had to pay for that self-knowledge. We may assess part of that price by the curious West Indian interlude in his career. In 1856 he began a long association with Salvatore Patti and his daughter, Adelina, who was to become one of the greatest divas in operatic history. They concertized throughout the Caribbean. For a while it was an exciting time. Gottschalk explored the possibilities of Cuban music with a huge ensemble from Havana's Grand Tacon Theater. "My orchestra," he wrote, "consists of six hundred and fifty performers, eighty-seven choristers, fifteen solo singers, fifty drums and eighty trumpets—that is to say nearly nine hundred persons bellowing and blowing to see who could scream the loudest."

During this period he wrote some of his finest piano music and his first symphony, *A Night in the Tropics*, a glorious orchestral work in which traditional symphonic music abandons itself to the syncopation of habanera rhythms.

THEN SUDDENLY, in 1860, he dropped out of sight. Later he was to write that he fell under the sway of the Antilles, which "impart a voluptuous languor that is contagious; it is a poison that slowly infiltrates all the senses and benumbs the soul with a kind of ecstatic torpor." A less romantic, modern view might be that he experienced a small breakdown. After a full ten years of the most vigorous concertizing, he seemed gripped by a consuming lassitude. For more than a year he was scarcely heard from, and occasionally a notice of his death appeared in American newspapers.

Gottschalk spent most of this time roaming about the Antilles, "indolently permitting myself to be carried away by chance... giving a concert whenever the night overtook me." As often as not, Gottschalk's audience was a lone, half-mad mulatto who thought himself to be the Pope's brother.

The mists began to clear, possibly because he was running short of cash, and he began to pick up the threads of a concertizing career in Havana when word came from the United States about the outbreak of the Civil War. A Southerner by birth and social inclination, Gottschalk nonetheless detested the institution of slavery and was a staunch Unionist. He swore an oath of allegiance to the Federal government and hurried back to New York. He arrived in February 1862, full of self-reproach for his Latin sojourn; "years foolishly spent, thrown to the wind, as if life were infinite, and youth eternal."

He became the foremost musician associated with the North. His heroic piano composition "L'Union," a paraphrase of national tunes dedicated to Gen. George McClellan, Commander of the Army of the Potomac, was accepted as an anthem of the Federal cause. Part of the mythology surrounding Gottschalk during this period was that he frequently appeared on the battlefield to play for the Union troops. There is no evidence to indicate he actually sought out a killing ground as a concert stage, but his openhearted support for the Union was well appreciated. President Lincoln, not a notably music-minded statesman—he once listened to a prodigy playing a number of serious pieces at a White House recital and finally asked if the child would mind playing "Listen to the Mocking Bird"—was persuaded to appear at a Gottschalk performance of "L'Union." Gottschalk was mortified because he felt he had played badly before his beloved President, but it is unlikely Lincoln would have known one way or the other.

Gottschalk resumed concertizing at a furious rate. When, before, he had given two concerts in a day, he now, thanks to knowledge of train schedules worthy of a dispatcher, was sometimes able to manage three.

The Northern states were not suited to his warm temperament—“when I see snow, I see death”—but he pushed himself ruthlessly. Musically, it was not a happy time for him. He wrote almost nothing of any interest during the war years, and the unremitting grind of his concert schedule as he entrained from one small town to the next, always repeating the same program of minor Gottschalk showpieces wherever he went, became a dreadful burden. “I have become stupid with it,” he wrote in his diary. “I have the appearance of an automaton under the influence of a voltaic pile. My fingers move on the keyboard with feverish heat, and for the moment it is not possible for me to hear the music, without experiencing something of the sensation of that hero of Alexander Dumas fils, condemned for one month to eat nothing but pigeon. The sight of a piano sets my hair on end like the victim in the presence of the wheel on which he is about to be tortured.”

Understandably, his health faltered. He started experiencing attacks of neuralgia in his eye and he frequently had to take to his bed suffering from the effects of recurring influenza. One of the lowest points in his life surely came in June 1865, when he arrived for a concert in Virginia City, Nevada, “the saddest, the most wearisome, the most inhospitable place on the globe.” For three days he lay in the bedroom of a small mining-camp hotel too ill to get up, and except for a doctor and a few people from Louisiana who had heard of him, no one came to inquire after his health. Thus Gottschalk, who had been served champagne in the most rarefied salons in Paris, could not persuade a hotel clerk in Virginia City to bring him a glass of warm water.

He then journeyed on to San Francisco where he was to know his last success in America. His concerts were well attended and the city presented him with a huge gold medal nine inches in circumference and encrusted with diamonds and rubies. It was, according to one San Francisco newspaper, “worthy of a monarch” and was presented with all respect to “the first musician in America.”

Gottschalk doubtless accepted the gift as such, but his enjoyment of the civic honor was short lived. Soon afterward he was caught up in another Gottschalkian scandal. The details are sketchy, but apparently he had been taken with a young lady from the Oakland Female Seminary. The two had gone for a carriage ride and returned somewhat late. The girl was dismissed from school, and a few days later Gottschalk sneaked out of San Francisco, leaving his pianos behind, and boarded a steamer for South America. Gottschalk later protested his innocence and claimed the incident came about as a result of a smear campaign launched by a disgruntled impresario. Vernon Loggins, Gottschalk’s most encyclopedic biographer, has insisted, with some ingenuousness, that nothing disreputable could possibly have taken place because the carriage never stopped en route. However, San Francisco was a community of considerable worldliness, and it is difficult to believe that an honored cultural figure would have been forced to flee the city with vigilantes in dogged pursuit merely because he had made a young lady late for school.

Although Gottschalk sometimes talked about returning to America and defending his honor, he never did. For the next four years he performed in South America specializing in multi-piano concerts, which provided his audiences with a great deal of noise but probably not

much in the way of music. It was at one of those outsized concerts that he collapsed at the piano and died a few days later. He was forty years old.

If a pianist and a composer can be said to live as long as his playing is remembered and his works performed, then Gottschalk, indeed, died young. Three years after his death the truly classic age of pianism in America was ushered in at the concert by Anton Gregor Rubinstein. Playing a more deeply resonant Steinway piano than Gottschalk's lightly strung Chickering, the Russian virtuoso brought forth an emotional intensity few recalled ever coming from Gottschalk. Rubinstein played the masterworks of Beethoven and Bach that Gottschalk had feared to try. By comparison, Gottschalk seemed to be what Dwight had always said he was: shallow. In sad truth, it is very likely that Gottschalk's playing did deteriorate into a kind of flashy inconsequentialness. However, we must also enter into Gottschalk's ledger the earlier judgments of Berlioz and Chopin, neither of whom were given to praising insubstantial talent, and recognize that for a dozen years Gottschalk had traveled throughout America playing under dreadful conditions in front of audiences who, by and large, did not have an idea in the world what he was doing. No American had ever played any better before and only a few have played as well since.

The posthumous judgments on his compositions have been even more devastating to his reputation. Although Gottschalk wrote three operas and several orchestral works, his best compositions were written for the piano. He was a master of the *piece d'occasion*. Like Montaigne, he could turn a small moment into a delightful celebration. From a balloon ascension in New Orleans he fashioned "L'Extase." Looking at a landscape painting by his friend Frederic Edwin Church, he wrote "The Andes." "Maria la O" commemorated a visit to one of Havana's more sumptuous sporting houses. "Le Banjou" recalls nothing more complicated than how much fun it is to play the banjo. None of these pieces are profound any more than many of the works of Offenbach or Debussy are profound. That most of them are lost to contemporary concert programming is as much a reflection of twentieth-century American snobbery as it is of our high musical tastes.

European composers, however, saw Gottschalk's melodies as a treasure trove of useful ideas. Bizet, who was to write the "Habanera," first heard the form from Gottschalk and kept the American's music in his own library. And Borodin's notebooks make it clear that "Le Bananier" wound up in his "Polovetsian Dances." Debussy's Golliwog's Cakewalk seems almost a transcription of Gottschalk's music, and one observer traced Gottschalk's themes as far afield as Verdi's *Aida*.

The piece that did Gottschalk's memory the most harm in America was "The Last Hope," a lachrymose ballad about a young lady who takes a long time dying, and then, while the bereaved are mourning her passing, their attention is called to the heavenly reward that we all desire. This was a traditional sentiment much used by poets and composers of the day, but Gottschalk's treatment was the sentimental ballad to end all sentimental ballads. For generations "The Last Hope" was approached only by "The Maiden's Prayer" as the one mandatory piece of sheet music on the piano of every home in America that aspired to gentility. Then fashions changed, and Gottschalk's music, which once had stood for the best this country could produce, became a national embarrassment.

But Americans today have begun to realize that there is something irrepressible about Gottschalk's music that refuses to be perpetually shut away. When the distinguished American pianist Leonard Pennario was casting about for "something to do for the

Bicentennial,” he came across some pieces of Gottschalk’s old music. “I was astonished when I read them,” Pennario said. “They were bright and witty with a universal appeal. And yet, except as music for the ballet *Cakewalk*, I had never heard them in concert. They are fiendishly difficult to play, which may be one reason so few pianists are playing them today. You have to hit all those notes without slurring and make it all seem effortless. But when you do it correctly, the effect is wonderful. ‘*Le Banjou*’ is just about the perfect encore piece. The house goes wild every time they hear it.”

If Mr. Pennario’s recent success in performing Gottschalk’s music and with the two all-Gottschalk albums he has recorded is any indication, we may yet see a revival of interest in the work of America’s first important composer. After more than one hundred years of neglect, Gottschalk’s music still has the power to bring audiences into the concert halls and then lift them out of their seats—two qualities that can not stay out of musical fashion forever.