

Art of Music (Extracts concerning Gottschalk)

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In general, the love song of the black Creole is more distinctive than that of other Afro-Americans. A famous example is 'Layotte,' utilized by Louis Moreau Gottschalk (b. New Orleans, 1829, of French and English parentage), who achieved international fame both as pianist and composer. Gottschalk did much to make the charm of Creole melodies known to the world. The themes of his piano pieces perpetuate many of these melodies, among them Avant, grenadier, which forms the theme of one of his earliest compositions, Bananier.

The popularity of Gottschalk and the general interest which his music aroused in Paris and elsewhere was one of the sensations of the musical world of that day.

CHAPTER XII

THE CLASSIC PERIOD OF AMERICAN COMPOSITION

Pioneers in American composition: Fry, Emery, Gottschalk The Boston group Of 'classicists': Paine, Chadwick, Foote, Parker, etc. Other exponents of the 'classical': William Mason, Dudley Buck, Arthur Whiting, and others The lyricists; Ethelbert Nevin; American song writers Composers of church music.

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The book is after Victor Hugo's Notre Dame de Paris, and, while the score represents merely (as do many more modern American operatic scores) a strange mingling echo of the several European models of the day, there are a vitality and a grasp of form which make the achievement in a measure phenomenal.

Associated with Fry in his musical life was another pioneer of the opera field, George F. Bristow (born in 1825; died in 1898), whose scores, however, have less of dramatic freedom than have those of Fry, being more strongly marked with the influences of German classicism. Bristow's works include an opera, 'Rip Van Winkle,' an unfinished opera, 'Columbus,' the oratorios 'Praise to God' and 'Daniel,' five symphonies, two overtures, string quartets, and many shorter works.

Another name that finds place in the early annals of American music is that of Stephen Emery (born 1841; died 1891), counted a composer in his day but now known to us chiefly as one of America's first theoreticians and the teacher of many whose names are now well known.

Larger is the place filled by the name of Gottschalk.

Louis Moreau Gottschalk may be claimed as an American, having been born at New Orleans in 1829, but his decidedly Creole origin and French education seem to remove him from the line of relationship with those Anglo-Saxon traditions which we are apt to consider as constituting the purely American.

Gottschalk enjoyed during his life equal fame as pianist and composer. His claim to the former was probably just; Berlioz himself spoke with enthusiasm of his playing and of our own artists we have the testimony of many, such as William Mason, Carl Bergmann, and Richard Hoffman, as to the genuine enjoyment which they obtained in hearing the concerts of Gottschalk. But how evanescent has been the fame of his compositions, existing only in the memory of comparatively few; as entities they are already silent pages of notes. All that is heard of his music to-day is an occasional faint tinkle of that surviving strain of sentimentality which was destined to such continued popularity in the polite repertoire, 'The Last Hope.' Gottschalk wrote two operas and several orchestral scores and many songs, but his piano compositions comprise the bulk of his works. While there are among these compositions many pages of beauty not unlike that of Chopin, and in the dance compositions on negro-creole and Spanish themes a certain vigor and distinction, the majority of them represent the merest vehicles of virtuosity written to tickle the ears of a public which had been brought up on the banalities played by the sensational pianists that visited America in those days. Over-sentimental, and at times vulgar, as the art of Gottschalk now appears to us, his place in American music is an important one and we cannot but feel that amid environments more sustaining to a higher ideal of art such a genuinely musical temperament as was his would have produced an art less ephemeral.

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GOTTSCHALK (1) Louis Moreau

(1829-1869) : b. New Orleans, d. Rio de Janeiro; studied with Stamaty, Paris; concert pianist in France, Switzerland, Spain and the Americas; his repertoire consisted largely of his own compositions, of salon music, brilliant and often sentimental in character, also Spanish folk-songs. Ref.: IV. 307, 33bf; mus. ex., XIV. 191; portrait, IV. 332. (2) Gaston: brother of Louis M.
(1) ; singer and teacher in Chicago.