

AN APPRECIATION OF GOTTSCHALK BY ONE WHO KNEW HIM

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I have heard many pianists of note dating back into the 'forties' beginning with Henri Herz and extending through to Paderewski. Of the entire number I consider Thalberg, Gottschalk and Rubinstein the three greatest. Each possessed genius, originality and individuality as a composer. Rubinstein covered a larger range of compositions than either of the others. Thalberg created a new school of piano effects, and Gottschalk had very great individuality as a composer. His compositions, however, require for their proper interpretation not only an almost perfect technic but a touch capable of the most delicate expression and also of great power. To be a good Gottschalk player requires a poetical nature. One must possess the delicacy of a Joseffy combined with the power of a Rubinstein to be able to give a correct idea of the full capabilities of Gottschalk's music.

Although I appreciate and admire Gottschalk as a composer, I think he was still greater as a virtuoso. I have had many opportunities for hearing him play and imbibed inspiration from his superb performance of his most notable pieces.

When Gottschalk came upon the stage at a concert he always wore white kid gloves. After seating himself at the piano, while slowly pulling off his gloves, he would look around at the audience, smiling and bowing to friends whom he recognized. He usually improvised a few chords before beginning the piece and the exquisite harmonic effects he produced were always in perfect taste and correct form. His touch was indescribably charming and he produced tones from the piano that have probably never been equaled by any other performer. I never heard Liszt, but presume that there were points of similarity between him and Gottschalk. Undoubtedly they were the two greatest pianists that ever lived.

It is not true that Gottschalk only excelled in the performance of his own compositions. I have heard him play Bach fugues and other classics, one after the other, with the most wonderful effect. Whatever he played he glorified with the superb quality of tone and brilliancy of execution always at his command. He had an enormous repertoire at his command. People wanted to hear Gottschalk play Gottschalk. There is nothing very remarkable in that. When Charles Dickens gave readings in this country he read from his own works exclusively. No one criticized him for not reading selections from the work of other authors. Gottschalk's compositions are so original and charming that they were, when played by him, indescribably effective. When he played the *Last Hope* he made the melody sound as though someone was playing it upon an organ with the vox humana stop drawn, and the delicate runs accompanying it sounded like the murmurs of an Aeolian harp. The effect was such that many in the audience would be affected to tears. It may seem extravagant language, but I consider Gottschalk the most perfect master of pianoforte effect that ever lived. With the exception of Thalberg, I have never heard any other pianist whose execution and touch were so absolutely flawless. A number of great pianists have appeared since and delighted the world by their masterly performances; and I certainly would not undertake to depreciate their great merits. I can only assert the impression Gottschalk's playing made upon me. There are many others, however, who coincide with my opinion of this great genius.