chapter fifteen

The exotic periphery

Existence in a tropical wilderness, in the midst of a voluptuous and half-civilized race, bears no resemblance to that of a London cockney, a Parisian lounger, or an American Quaker.

L. M. GOTTSCHALK, NOTES OF A PIANIST.

In the 1820s, somewhat more than two decades after the Louisiana Purchase, there arrived in the turbulent and colorful city of New Orleans a young Englishman from London named Edward Gottschalk. He had studied medicine at Leipzig, but after emigrating to America in his twenty-fifth year he became a successful broker. Handsome, cultured, and affluent, he was admitted to the best Creole society—that is, the old French and Spanish families—of New Orleans, and in this aristocratic milieu he met, and fell in love with, a young girl of exceptional charm and beauty, Aimée Marie de Bruslé. Her grandfather had been governor of the northern province of the French colony of Saint-Domingue, one of the wealthiest and most luxurious colonies of the New World until its prosperity was shattered by war and civil strife. In that troubled period, Mlle. de Bruslé's father, an army officer, fled to Jamaica, where he married a lady of French and Spanish noble birth. Soon afterward, like many other refugees from the West Indies, they settled in New Orleans, a city congenial to them because of its gay social life and its mixed heritage of French and Spanish culture.

Founded by the Sieur de Bienville in 1718, New Orleans soon became a city of strong contrasts, ranging from the most refined elegance to the most unbridled depravity. While the French royal governor, the Marquis de Vaudreuil, busied himself with creating a little Versailles on the Mississippi and organizing grand balls with court dress *de rigueur*, he at the same time fostered gross corruption and nepotism, while his official laxity made the provincial capital an open

city for thieves, prostitutes, gamblers, and lawless adventurers of every description. Negro slaves were brought from Africa in considerable numbers (later they came mostly from the West Indies) and in 1724 the original "Black Code" was promulgated for the regulation of Negroes in Louisiana. It prohibited any mingling of the races, black and white, either through marriage or concubinage, regardless of whether the Negroes were free or slave. To manumitted slaves it granted "the same rights, privileges, and immunities which are enjoyed by free-born persons." This was the basis of the code adopted by the Louisiana legislature after the territory became a part of the United States.

In 1762, by a secret treaty, France ceded Louisiana to Spain, whose colonial empire already included vast sections of what is now the United States, from Florida to California. Not until 1769 did Don Alexander O'Reilly arrive in New Orleans to take possession of the city and the province in the name of the Spanish King. New Orleans then became a Spanish colonial city, with its *cabildo*, its *regidores*, its *alcaldes*. In spite of two disastrous fires, the city grew and prospered under the Spanish regime; in fact, the fires may have done some good, for as a result the Spaniards rebuilt most of the city, thus giving rise to the local saying that they found "a town of hovels and left it a city of palaces."

In 1800 Spain retroceded Louisiana to France, but before the French authorities could take effective possession, the territory was purchased by the United States, and in 1803 New Orleans became officially an American city. Essentially it remained an exotic city within the borders of the United States. The son born to Edward Gottschalk and his Creole wife on May 8, 1829, an American citizen by reason of the Louisiana Purchase, was to become and remain an exotic personality within his native country; and, like the city of his birth, he acted as a link between the progressive, practical civilization of the expanding United States, and the seductive, colorful civilization of Latin America. Louis Moreau Gottschalk—he was named after his mother's uncle, Moreau de l'Islet—whether he lived in Paris or New York, never forgot that he was a child of the tropics; and what we value in his music today is not the glitter of the concert hall or the sophistication of the salon, but the alluring charm of his Caribbean rhythms and melodies.

"Caribbean" is perhaps the best word to describe the musical atmosphere of New Orleans in which Louis Moreau Gottschalk spent

his boyhood. I do not, of course, refer to the world of French opera as performed at the Théâtre d'Orléans, attended by fashionable audiences in full dress. Gottschalk knew this world of "cultivated" music, both at home and during his years of study in Europe. What I refer to is that exotic, unconventional, hybrid, exciting blend of musical elements, the product of complex racial and cultural factors in a new society evolving under strange conditions, which finds its most characteristic expression in the Caribbean area. There was an influx of population from the islands of the Caribbean to New Orleans. Negro slaves were brought from the West Indies, but many other persons, both white and colored, came to the city on the Mississippi as refugees from the terrors of revolution in Haiti, or to escape the international strife that afflicted the Caribbean area. In 1809 and 1810, more than ten thousand refugees from the West Indies arrived in New Orleans, most of them originally from Saint-Domingue (or Haiti, as the former French colony was called after it became independent in 1804). Of these, about three thousand were free Negroes, or rather "persons of color," for their racial composition varied greatly. In order to understand the racial background of this emigration, it will be helpful to glance at a breakdown of the population in the French colony of Saint-Domingue in the year 1789:

White 30,826 Free Negroes and Mulattoes 27,548 Slaves 465,429

To be noted in particular are (1) the overwhelming majority of Negro slaves, and (2) the large proportion of free "persons of color." It was the coming of the latter class to New Orleans that gave the city, in large part, its peculiar social structure. The mulatto women—called quadroons or octoroons, according to the proportion of white blood in their veins—were famous for their seductive beauty, as well as for their gay and attractive dress. The gentlemen of Louisiana flocked to the celebrated Quadroon Balls not merely to dance and admire but also to select the mistress of their choice. The free men of color could gain admittance to these balls only in the capacity of musician, to fiddle for the dancers. Thus it was that the "f.m.c."—free male of color—frequently turned to music as a profession; if such it could be called, for the dance musician was little more than a menial.

The persons of color, *gens de couleur*, having even a single drop of white blood, were a class apart from the blacks, the Negroes. Even

within the *gens de couleur* there were rigid caste distinctions, according to the proportion of white blood. It might be unnecessary to dwell on this subject, were it not for the importance of the caste-and-color system in New Orleans for the future development of American music, particularly with relation to the origin and growth of jazz. Furthermore, these distinctions have led to a curious confusion in the use of the term "Creole." This word is the French equivalent of the Spanish *criollo*, which was used from early colonial times to designate a person of European parentage born in America. It was during the Spanish regime that this term came into usage in Louisiana. As a noun the term was always applied to white persons of European ancestry, born in the New World. But as an adjective, it was applied also to Negroes born in the New World, as opposed to those brought from Africa. It was also applied to the dialect, or patois, spoken by these Negroes, which was a strongly corrupted variety of French. Hence in popular speech the term "Creole" became associated with Louisiana Negro dialect, songs, customs, and dances. Later the octoroons of New Orleans began to be called Creoles, which added to the confusion. In short, the term "Creole" has become so laden with conflicting connotations that it can be used only when hedged around with definitions.

New Orleans had three colorful, exotic dance rituals that all visitors wanted to see: the Quadroon Balls, the voodoo ceremonial dances, and the dances of the Negroes in Place Congo, or Congo Square. The cult of voodoo (more correctly, *vodoun*) is a form of African religion involving ritualistic drumming and dancing to induce "possession" by the *loa* or supernatural spirits. Because one of the leading deities of the cult is Damballa, the serpent god, voodooism is popularly associated with snake worship. Voodoo probably existed in Louisiana from the earliest colonial period, but it received a marked impetus from the influx of West Indian refugees from 1809 to 1810, for the cult flourished primarily among the free "persons of color." Although basically African in origin, voodoo became mixed with Roman Catholic elements, and therefore, like most Caribbean cultural manifestations, was a hybrid product. In New Orleans the principal public voodoo ceremonies took place on St. John's Eve (June 23) and attracted a multitude of spectators. But there were also secret ceremonies that few if any outsiders ever witnessed. George W. Cable described voodoo dances in New Orleans with a great show of moral indignation and the vividness of an eyewitness:

. . . the voodoo dance begins. The postulant dances frantically in the middle of the ring, only pausing, from time to time, to receive heavy alcoholic draughts in great haste and return more wildly to his leapings and writhings until he falls in convulsions. He is lifted, restored, and presently conducted to the altar, takes his oath, and by a ceremonial stroke from one of the sovereigns is admitted a full participant. . . . But the dance goes on about the snake. The contortions of the upper part of the body, especially of the neck and shoulders, are such as to threaten to dislocate them. The queen shakes the box and tinkles the bells, the rum bottle gurgles, the chant alternates between king and chorus:

Eh! Eh! Bomba hon, honc!
Canga bafio tay,
Canga moon day lay,
Canga do keelah,
Canga li!

There are swoonings and ravings, nervous tremblings beyond control, incessant writhings and turnings, tearing of garments, even biting of the flesh—every imaginable invention of the devil.[1]

That gifted writer Lafcadio Hearn, whose book on the West Indies might well serve as background for this chapter, became interested in the music of the Louisiana Negroes, and at one time conceived the idea of writing a book on the subject in collaboration with the music critic H. E. Krehbiel. According to the latter, Hearn proposed to relate the migrations of African music through the ages: "Then I would touch upon the transplantation of Negro melody to the Antilles and the two Americas, where its strangest black flowers are gathered by the alchemists of musical science and the perfume thereof extracted by magicians like Gottschalk." [2]

Dancing in Congo Square

But in Gottschalk's time "the alchemists of musical science" (today more prosaically called comparative musicologists) were not yet busy gathering the "strange black flowers" of Negro music; so Gottschalk had to gather the flowers himself as well as extract the per-

[1] Cable, *The Century Magazine*, Apr. 1886.
[2] Krehbiel, *Afro-American Folksongs*, p. 39.

fume thereof. The question is, under what circumstances did he do it? In his entertaining book on the New Orleans underworld, *The French Quarter*, Herbert Asbury asserts in a footnote: "Louis Moreau Gottschalk . . . based one of his best known compositions, *La Bamboula*, on what he heard and saw in Congo Square as a boy." Now, it is true that the bamboula was one of the Negro dances that could be seen and heard (it was also a song) in Congo Square when Gottschalk was a boy in New Orleans. Whether the boy Moreau—as his family called him—was ever taken to see the dances in Congo Square is a matter of conjecture. But before we attempt to bring him to this exciting spectacle, let us first bring him out of the cradle, where we left him some time ago.

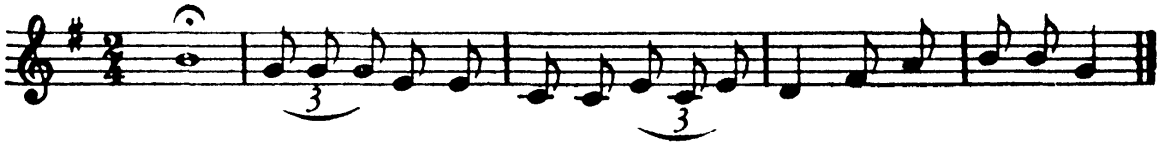
Louis Moreau Gottschalk took only three years to progress from the cradle to the piano. Such, at least, is the family tradition. According to his sister, when Moreau was three years old, one day everyone in the family was startled by a faint but most exquisite melody on the piano. "The tone and touch were perfect." When Mamma rushed into the drawing room, "she found little Moreau standing on a high stool, playing the melody she had sung to him in the morning." After that, Papa lost no time arranging for his small son to take music lessons. He studied both piano and violin, but the piano was his instrument. At the age of eight he gave his first public concert, a benefit for his violin teacher Miolan. Shortly before his twelfth birthday, his father decided to send him to Europe for further study. In May, 1842, after giving a farewell concert, young Moreau sailed for France and was placed in a private school in Paris. Three years later, while convalescing from an attack of typhoid fever in the French provinces, he composed the piano piece that was to become so popular everywhere, *La Bamboula.*

If Gottschalk based that composition on "what he heard and saw in Congo Square," then it is obvious that he must have been taken to see the dancing there before his departure for Europe. Assuming that the sheltered child was taken there, perhaps by a Negro nurse if not by his parents, what would he have seen and heard? Firsthand accounts are lacking, but George W. Cable, in his article *The Dance in Place Congo*, published in 1886, seems to have reconstructed the scene with considerable authenticity. The following is extracted from his article.

The booming of African drums and blast of huge wooden horns called to the gathering. . . . The drums were very long, hollowed, often from a single piece of wood, open at one end and having a sheep or goat skin stretched across the other. . . . The smaller drum was often made from a joint or two of very large bamboo . . . and this is said to be the origin of its name; for it was called the Bamboula.

The drummers bestrode the drums; the other musicians sat about them in an arc, cross-legged on the ground. One important instrument was a gourd partly filled with pebbles or grains of corn, flourished violently at the end of a stout staff with one hand and beaten upon the palm of the other. Other performers rang triangles, and others twanged from jew's-harps an astonishing amount of sound. Another instrument was the jawbone of some ox, horse or mule, and a key rattled rhythmically along its weatherbeaten teeth. . . . But the grand instrument at last, was the banjo. It had but four strings, not six. . . .

And then there was that long-drawn human cry of tremendous volume, richness, and resound, to which no instruments within their reach could make the faintest approach:



Eh! pou' la belle Layotte ma mourri 'nocent,
Oui 'nocent ma mourri!

All the instruments silent while it rises and swells with mighty energy and dies away distantly, "yea-a-a-a-a-a!"—and then the crash of savage drums, horns, and rattles.

Cable then goes on to describe the dancing of the bamboula:

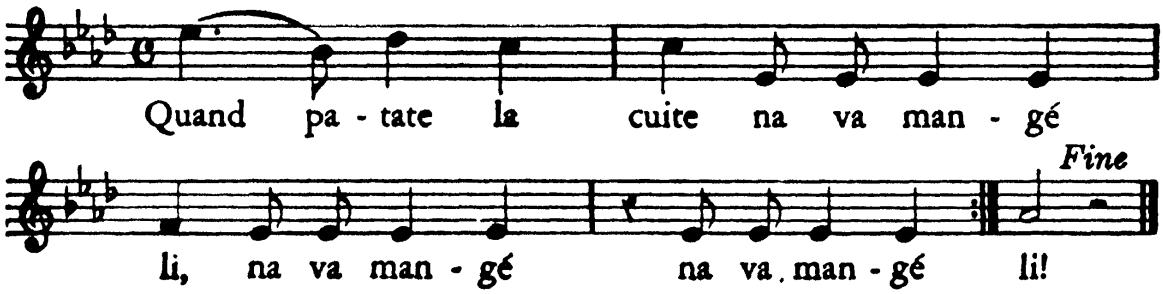
The singers almost at the first note are many. At the end of the first line every voice is lifted up. The strain is given the second time with growing spirit. Yonder glistening black Hercules, who plants one foot forward, lifts his head and bare, shining chest, rolls out the song from a mouth and throat like a cavern. . . . See his play of restrained enthusiasm catch from one bystander to another. They swing and bow to right and left, in slow time to the piercing treble of the Congo women. . . . Hear that bare foot slap the ground! one sudden stroke only. . . . The musicians warm up at the sound.

A smiting of breasts with open hands begins very softly and becomes vigorous. The women's voices rise to a tremulous intensity. . . . The women clap their hands in time, or standing with arms akimbo receive with faint courtesies and head-liftings the low bows of the men, who deliver them swinging this way and that.

See! Yonder brisk and sinewy fellow has taken one short, nervy step into the ring, chanting with rising energy. . . . He moves off to the farther edge of the circle, still singing, takes the prompt hand of an unsmiling Congo girl, leads her into the ring, and leaving the chant to the throng, stands before her for the dance. . . . 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.

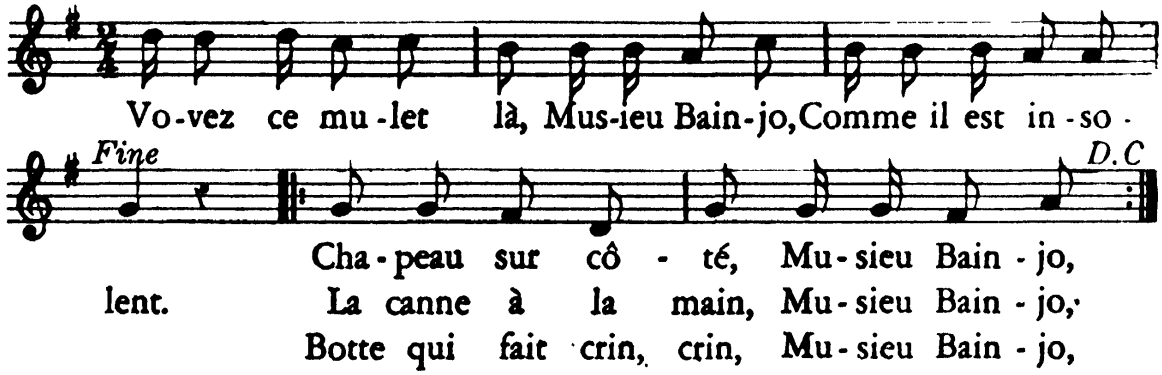
Now for the frantic leaps! Now for frenzy! Another pair are in the ring. The man wears a belt of little bells, or, as a substitute, little tin vials of shot, "bram-bram sonnette!" And still another couple enter the circle. What wild—what terrible delight! The ecstasy rises to madness; one—two—three of the dancers fall—*bloucoutoum! boum!* —with foam on their lips and are dragged out by arms and legs from under tumultuous feet of crowding new-comers. The musicians know no fatigue; still the dance rages on:

Quand patate la cuite na va mangé li!
("When that 'tater's cooked don't you eat it up!")



For Cable, the bamboula represented "a frightful triumph of body over the mind," and he adds: "Only the music deserved to survive, and does survive. . . . The one just given, Gottschalk first drew from oblivion." The second musical example quoted above is one of several tunes included in a supplement to Cable's article. It is titled *The Bamboula*, the arrangement is credited to Miss M. L. Bartlett, but no source for the music is given. Actually this tune bears little resemblance to a West Indian dance; so it is not surprising to find Cable remarking, "I have never heard another to know it as a bamboula."

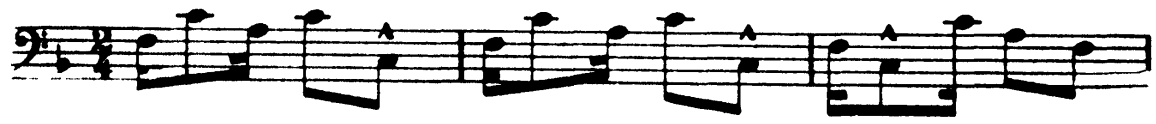
But he goes on to remark that in *Slave Songs of the United States* there is a bamboula from Louisiana, "whose characteristics resemble the bamboula reclaimed by Gottschalk in so many points that here is the best place for it." He then quotes the music of this song, under the title "Miché Banjo," in an arrangement by H. E. Krehbiel (who, incidentally, calls attention to what he describes as "the particularly propulsive effect of the African 'snap' at the beginning"). I quote the music as it appears on page 113 of *Slave Songs of the United States* (New York, 1867), where it is titled "Musieu Bainjo": the song is about a mulatto who puts on airs, with his hat on one side, his cane, and his new boots that creak. The spice of the text is in the double meaning between *mulet* (mule) and *mulatre* (mulatto).



Creole songs and dances: the background

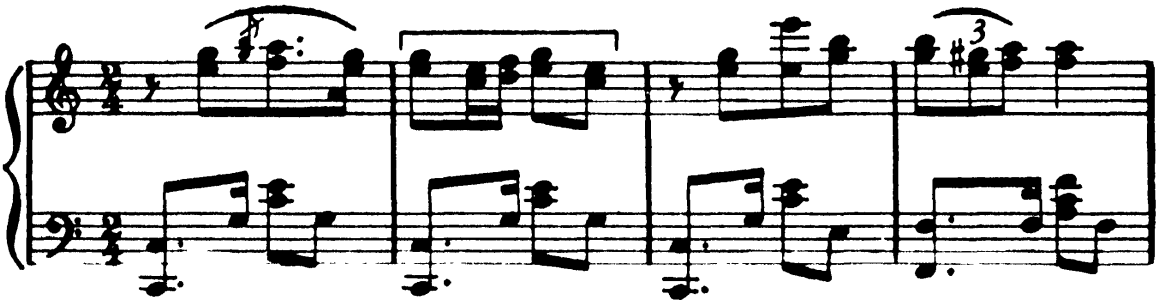
The editors of the collection from which this song was taken, state that, along with six others in the same volume, it was obtained from a lady who heard them sung, before the Civil War, on the Good Hope plantation, St. Charles Parish, Louisiana. According to them, it represents "the attempt of some enterprising Negro to write a French song." There is perhaps no need to take this information literally, but they were undoubtedly correct in recognizing this song as the product of French music plus Negro "enterprise." Its West Indian character is unmistakable. When the French *contredanse* was transplanted to Haiti in the eighteenth century, it began to undergo rhythmic modifications under Negro influence, particularly by the introduction of the "habanera rhythm" in the bass. This rhythm became the basis of the *contradanza* of the Antilles, as well as of the habanera, the tango, and numerous other Latin American dances. Further modifications occurred when Negro musicians altered this fundamental rhythm

by transferring the accent to a weak beat. This may be seen in the bass of a *contradanza* titled *Los Merengazos:*[3]



The alert reader will at once notice that this metrical pattern corresponds exactly to that of the first and third measures of "Musieu Bainjo." It is, moreover, identical with the so-called "cakewalk" figure that forms the rhythmic basis of American ragtime music.

Let us now seek a Caribbean counterpart for the metrical pattern of the second and sixth measures of "Musieu Bainjo." Among many examples that could be quoted, we shall choose a Cuban *contradanza* from the early nineteenth century, which also shows the habanera rhythm in the bass.[4] The metrical pattern that concerns us particularly is marked with a bracket.

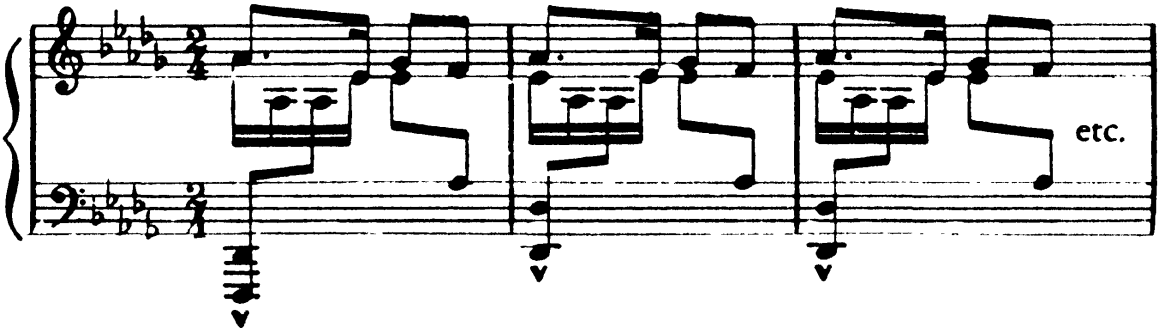


The foregoing, among numerous other illustrations that might be cited, should serve to indicate concretely the extremely close relationship between the music of the "Creole" Negroes of Louisiana and the music of the Caribbean islands, with its mixture of Spanish, French, and African elements. It is worth noting that the editors of *Slave Songs of the United States* speak of these tunes as "peculiar . . . difficult to write down, or to sing correctly." Their notation is probably only an approximation of what the Louisiana Negroes actually played and sang when they made their music "hot" for Place Congo.

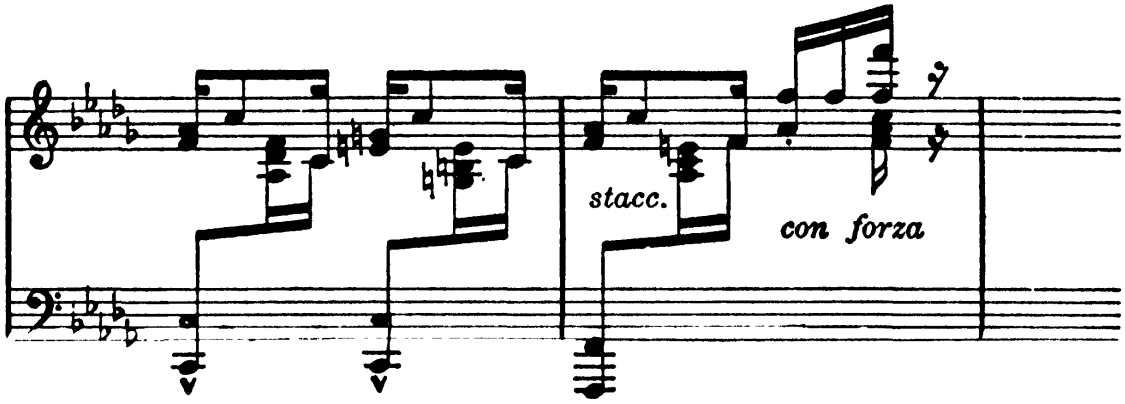
The supposition that Gottschalk "lifted" his *Bamboula* from Congo Square seems farfetched. A more likely explanation is that, like the anonymous lady who supplied the Creole tunes for *Slave Songs of the United States*, he heard this, and other similar tunes, sung by Negroes in his household or on nearby plantations. Cable is correct

[3] From Carpentier, *La Música en Cuba*, p. 119.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 112.

in remarking the traits that Gottschalk's *Bamboula* has in common with "Miché Banjo" (or "Musieu Bainjo"). The points of resemblance have to do chiefly with the use of two characteristic rhythmic figures: that of the habanera and that of the cakewalk. Gottschalk uses the former in the treble over a heavily accented first beat in the bass: [5]



The cakewalk figure appears in the following measures in combination with a typical pattern of the *contradanza:*



Elsewhere in this piece, he uses the *contradanza* rhythm with the characteristic accent on the weak beats.

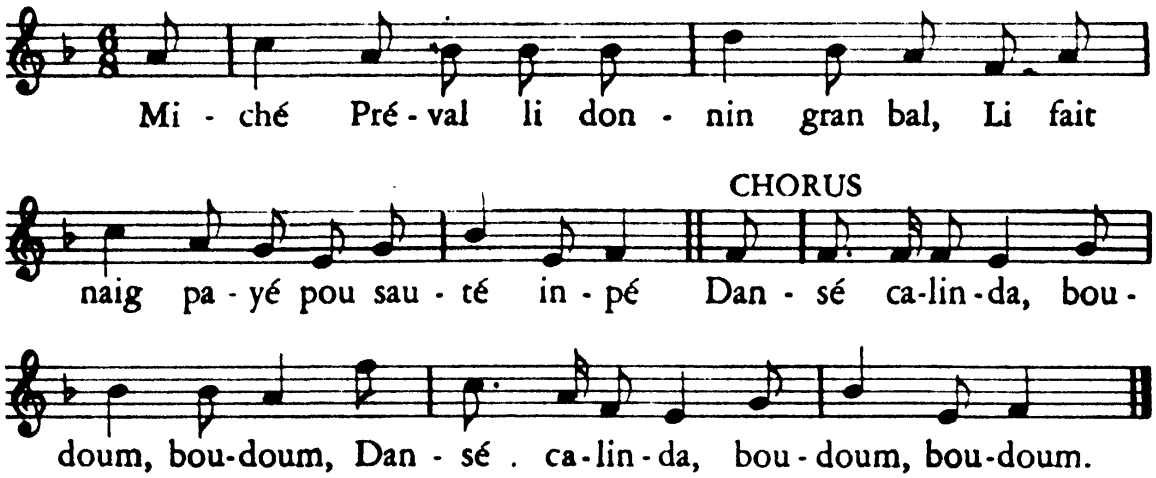
In his Cuban dance titled *Ojos Criollos*, there is an interesting juxtaposition of the cakewalk and the habanera rhythms, with syncopation in the bass. In another Cuban dance, *Dí que si* (also known by its French title, *Réponds-moi*), the cakewalk figure appears systematically over a bass that repeatedly stresses the weak beat of the measure (in 2/4 time).

Although Gottschalk adapted his Creole and Caribbean compositions to the prevailing style of mid-nineteenth-century piano writing in the virtuoso manner, he was highly sensitive to the nuances of local color and extremely perceptive of the rhythmic intricacies of this New World music.

[5] This and the following example copyrighted in 1908 by G. Schirmer.

Among other dances of the Louisiana Negroes, all reported by various writers as found in the West Indies also, were the *babouille*, the *cata* (or *chacta*), the *counjaille* (or *counjai*), the *voudou*, the *calinda*, and the *congo*. According to Cable, the congo ("to describe which would not be pleasant") was known as the *chica* in Santo Domingo, and in the Windward Islands was confused under one name with the calinda. It is indeed difficult to unravel the nomenclature of these dances. Probably the most widespread of all was the calinda, which Cable says was the favorite dance all the way from New Orleans to Trinidad.

The editors of *Slave Songs of the United States* wrote that the calinda "was a sort of contra-dance." They quote the description of a French writer, Bescherelle, who mentions the two lines of dancers as "advancing and retreating in cadence, and making very strange contortions and highly lascivious gestures." [6] They were right in characterizing the calinda as an adaptation of the French *contredanse*, which as brought to the West Indies by the French colonists was a polite and circumspect social dance. But, as Curt Sachs has pointed out,[7] dances in which men and women line up in two rows facing each other and advance and retreat, were not unknown in Africa. So the Negroes found in the *contredanse* a natural point of departure for a new type of hybrid dance combining European and African elements. This applies to the choreography. What about the music? In *Slave Songs of the United States*, the following song (No. 134) is given as an example of the calinda:



[6] I have been unable to identify the work from which this quotation is taken. Compare, however, the quotation from Père Labat given on p. 314. It would not be surprising if this were the source of the description attributed to Bescherelle.

[7] Sachs, *World History of the Dance*.

The first thing that strikes one about this tune is its completely European character; it is clearly a tune of French origin, which has undergone little or no modification by the Caribbean milieu. In this connection we observe also that of seven Creole tunes included in the collection, this is the only one in 6/8 meter. Of the others, four are in 2/4 and two in common time. This distinction is significant, for, although 6/8 meter is not foreign to Caribbean music, the 2/4 meter is by far the more prevalent, not only in Caribbean music, but in Afro-American music as a whole. In short, this calinda is obviously a tune that has scarcely been "worked over" at all by the Negroes, and one cannot but be struck by the incongruity between this pleasant little tune and the wild orgies which Cable describes as taking place in the Congo Square. Of course, it no doubt sounded wilder when the Negroes played and sang it to the accompaniment of drums, gourd rattles, triangles, jew's-harps, jawbone and key, quils (Pan's pipe made of three cane reeds), and banjos.

The songs of the calinda are satirical and often personally abusive. The calinda quoted above is about a certain Monsieur Préval who gave a ball in New Orleans, using a stable as the ballroom—much to the astonishment of the horses, says the song—and neglecting to obtain the necessary license. Krehbiel, in his book *Afro-American Folksongs*, gives a composite text for this song, in which he includes several stanzas that he says were supplied to him by Lafcadio Hearn. One of these is particularly interesting: "Black and white both danced the bamboula; never again will you see such a fine time." Two points are significant here: one, that the bamboula was a ballroom dance; two, that it may have been danced by both blacks and whites. Let the reader return for a moment to what was said in Chapter 4 of this book, where mention was made of the congo as a ballroom dance in Colonial Virginia. Cable and other writers describe the congo and the bamboula as wild, lascivious, primitive dances. Yet it is likely that they also existed as more or less restrained social dances, performed to such European instruments as the violin and the clarinet.

Mention of the calinda as a favorite dance of the Antilles goes back as far as the early part of the eighteenth century. Père Labat, in *Nouveau Voyage* . . . (The Hague, 1724), mentions it as an "African" dance, which he saw in Santo Domingo around the year 1698. According to this author, the Spaniards learned the "calenda," as he

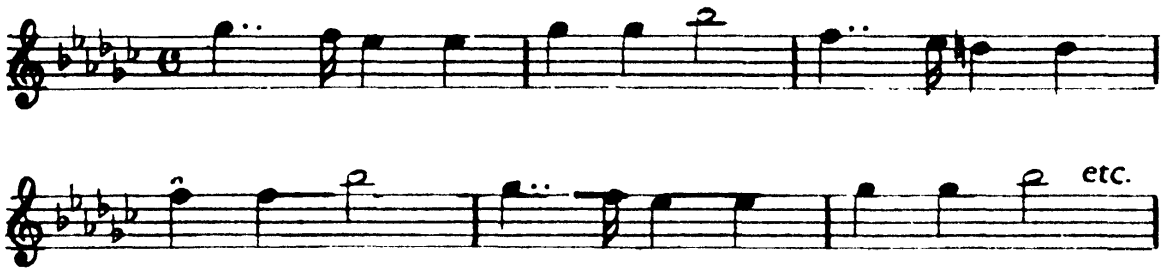
calls it, from the Negroes, who brought it over from the Coast of Guinea in Africa. His description follows:

> The calenda is danced to the sound of instruments and of voices. The participants are arranged in two lines, one in front of the other, the men facing the women. The spectators form a circle around the dancers and the musicians. One of the participants sings a song, of which the refrain is repeated by the spectators, with clapping of hands. All the dancers then hold their arms half-raised, leap, turn, make contortions with their posteriors, approach within two feet of each other, and retreat in cadence, until the sound of an instrument or the tone of the voices, signals them to approach again. Then they strike their bellies together two or three times in succession, after which they separate and pirouette, to begin the same movement again, with highly lascivious gestures, as many times as the instrument or the voice gives the signal. From time to time they go arm in arm, and circle around two or three times, while continuing to strike their bellies together and exchanging kisses, but without losing the cadence.

This description, which was copied (without acknowledgment) by several later writers, supplies the realistic details omitted by Cable in his account of the dance in Place Congo. It would not be at all surprising to find that this passage was also one of the major sources for Cable's article. Cable was born in 1844, a year after the dancing in Place Congo was suppressed; he had to reconstruct the scene from earlier accounts of writers who had actually witnessed the West Indian dances that were transplanted to New Orleans. As for the music, he took most of the tunes from the Creole songs included in *Slave Songs of the United States.* These songs evidently circulated widely in Louisiana, and Gottschalk must have had ample opportunity to hear them elsewhere than in Congo Square.

Gottschalk in Europe

There is sufficient evidence that Moreau Gottschalk carried with him to Europe, deeply impressed in his mind, the Creole songs of his native Louisiana. Besides his *Bamboula*, there is his Ballade Creole (Opus 3 *de la Louisiane*) titled *La Savane*, dating from his first years in Europe, in which he uses the theme of a song called "Lolotte" (No. 135 in *Slave Songs of the United States*):



Gottschalk used only a portion of the original melody, which is one of the most attractive of the Creole songs. Poor Lolotte, says the song, has only a heartache, while Calalou has an embroidered petticoat and a Madras kerchief. Pointing out that *calalou* was originally the term for a West Indian dish, a noted ragout, Cable thinks that in this song "Calalou" is a derisive nickname "intended to apply here to the quadroon women who swarmed into New Orleans in 1809 as refugees from Cuba, Guadeloupe, and other islands. . . ." A composite version of "Pov' piti Lolotte," with the music arranged by H. T. Burleigh, is given in Krehbiel's *Afro-American Folksongs.*

One more remark may be made about this song, and that is the strong resemblance it bears to the familiar American play-party song, "Skip to my Lou." Numerous versions of this old play-party song are available in collections of American folk music, so that the reader can easily verify this similarity—if indeed the familiar tune be not remembered from one's own childhood. Are the two songs related? Do the words "Skip to my Lou" indicate some connection with Louisiana? Is the play-party song derived from the Creole song? I do not know the answers.

La Savane was among the pieces that Gottschalk composed while he was in France, at the age of fifteen or sixteen. *La Bamboula,* as previously stated, was another; and a third was *Le Bananier* ("The Banana Tree"), subtitled "*Chanson nègre.*" These youthful compositions might be called a Louisiana trilogy and were to become and remain favorites with the public, along with that other characteristic and brilliant showpiece, *The Banjo,* subtitled "*Fantaisie grotesque*" and probably composed in Spain in 1851. (According to Gottschalk's Cuban biographer Fors, there was an earlier version of *The Banjo,* published by Espadero; but I have not located a copy of it.)

Gottschalk's first piano teacher in Paris was Charles Hallé, with whom he worked for six months. He then studied piano with Camille Stamaty and harmony with Maledan. Through his mother's family connections he was received and feted in the *salons* of the French

nobility. In April, 1845, just after his sixteenth birthday, he gave his first public concert in the Salle Pleyel and attracted the attention of Chopin, who saluted him as a future "king of pianists." He became the pupil and friend of Hector Berlioz, with whom he gave a series of concerts at the Théâtre des Italiens during the season of 1846–1847. Concerning Gottschalk as a pianist, Berlioz wrote:

> Gottschalk is one of the very small number who possess all the different elements of a consummate pianist—all the faculties which surround him with an irresistible prestige, and give him a sovereign power. He is an accomplished musician—he knows just how far fancy may be indulged in expression. . . . There is an exquisite grace in his manner of phrasing sweet melodies and throwing light touches from the higher keys. The boldness, the brilliancy, and the originality of his playing at once dazzles and astonishes. . . .

In 1850 Gottschalk made a concert tour of the French provinces, Savoy, and Switzerland. The following year he went to Spain, where his success was enormous. The Queen entertained him in the royal palace and bestowed upon him the diamond cross of the Order of Isabel la Católica. He remained in Spain nearly two years, concertizing, composing, and basking in adulation. Among the compositions that recall his Spanish sojourn are *Midnight in Seville*, *Manchega* (*Etude de Concert*), *The Siege of Saragossa*, and *Jota Aragonesa*.

In the autumn of 1852 Gottschalk returned to Paris, where he took leave of his mother and his sisters, who had been living there since the end of 1847. He then embarked for New York, where he was met by his father and where his formal American debut as a mature pianist took place on February 11, 1853, in the ballroom of Niblo's Garden. The success of the concert may be judged by the fact that P. T. Barnum immediately offered him a contract for $20,000, plus expenses, for a concert tour of one year. Gottschalk refused, on the advice, it is said, of his father, whose dignity was doubtless offended at the thought of having his son exhibited in public like a side show. Nevertheless, under the management of Max Strakosch, Gottschalk embarked on a tremendously successful concert career. In the winter of 1855–1856 he gave eighty concerts in New York alone, and in 1862–1863 he gave more than eleven hundred concerts in the United States and Canada. In the intervening years he was far otherwise en-

gaged: the lure of the tropics, the spell of the Caribbean, held him in thrall.

Caribbean vagabondage

Gottschalk seems to have visited Cuba for the first time in 1853. In his *Notes of a Pianist* he wrote:

> I shall never forget the two months which I passed at Caymito, in the interior of Cuba. The house which I inhabited was at an hour's distance from the first cabins of Caymito. . . . Unfortunately, the only company of my Eden was a very ugly negress, who, every evening, after having roasted the coffee, bruised her corn in a hollow piece of wood, and recited the Ave Maria before an old coloured image of the Virgin, came and squatted down at my feet on the veranda, and there, in the darkness, sung to me with a piercing and wild voice, but full of strange charm, the *canciones* of the country. I would light my cigar, extend myself in my *butaca*, and plunge, surrounded by this silent and primitive nature, into a contemplative reverie, which those in the midst of the everyday world can never understand. The moon rose over the Sierra de Anafe. . . . The distant noises of the savanna, borne softly by the breeze, struck on my ear in drawn-out murmurs. The cadenced chant of some negroes belated in the fields added one more attraction to all this poesy, which no one can ever imagine.

What a pity that Gottschalk did not write down for us the notation of these Afro-Cuban songs and chants. He did, however, try to capture some of this atmosphere in his own music. Meanwhile, the atmosphere of the tropics captured him. In 1856 he returned to Havana and then began a period of vagabondage in the Caribbean that lasted nearly six years: ". . . six years madly squandered, scattered to the winds"—so he wrote of this period afterward. About these irresponsible years he tells us in his *Notes of a Pianist:*

> I have wandered at random, yielding myself up indolently to the caprice of Fortune, giving a concert wherever I happened to find a piano, sleeping wherever night overtook me,—on the green grass of the savanna, or under the palm-leaf roof of a *veguero* [caretaker of a tobacco plantation], who shared with me his corn-tortilla, coffee, and bananas. . . . And when, at last, I became weary of the same horizon, I crossed an arm of the sea, and landed on some neighbor-

ing isle, or on the Spanish Main. Thus, in succession, I have visited all the Antilles,–Spanish, French, English, Dutch, Swedish, and Danish; the Guianas, and the coasts of Pará [Brazil]. At times, having become the idol of some obscure *pueblo,* whose untutored ears I had charmed with its own simple ballads, I would pitch my tent for five, six, eight months, deferring my departure from day to day, until finally I began seriously to entertain the idea of remaining there for evermore. Abandoning myself to such influences, I lived without care, as the bird sings, as the flower expands, as the brook flows; oblivious of the past, reckless of the future, and sowed both my heart and my purse with the ardor of a husbandman who hopes to reap a hundred ears for every grain he confides to the earth. But, alas! . . . the result of my prodigality was, that, one fine morning, I found myself a bankrupt in heart, with my purse at ebb-tide. Suddenly disgusted with the world and myself, weary, discouraged, mistrusting men (ay, and women too), I fled to a desert on the extinct volcano of M— [in Guadeloupe], where, for several months, I lived the life of a cenobite. . . .

My hut, perched on the verge of the crater, at the very summit of the mountain, commanded a view of all the surrounding country. . . . Every evening I rolled my piano out upon the terrace; and there, facing the most incomparably beautiful landscape, all bathed in the soft and limpid atmosphere of the tropics, I poured forth on the instrument, and for myself alone, the thoughts with which the scene inspired me. . . .

Amid such scenes I composed "Réponds-moi," "La Marche des Gibaros," "Polonia," "Columbia," "Pastorella e Cavaliere," "Jeunesse," and many other unpublished works. . . . My despair was soothed; and soon the sun of the tropics . . . restored me with new confidence and vigor to my wanderings.

I relapsed into the manners and life of these primitive countries: if not strictly virtuous, they are, at all events, terribly attractive. . . . The mere thought of re-appearing before a polished audience struck me as superlatively absurd. . . . It was at this period that Strakosch wrote to me, offering an engagement for a tour of concerts through the United States. . . .

Gottschalk hesitated, breathed a sigh of regret–and accepted. He felt morally rescued: ". . . but who could say, if, in the rescue, youth and poetry had not perished?" Meanwhile, thousands of America's youth were perishing in the Civil War; but this did not diminish the brilliant success of Gottschalk's concert tour. Actually, Gottschalk did not

remain indifferent to the issues of the Civil War. His sympathies were with the North, perhaps in part because—as John Kirkpatrick surmises—he was conscious of his musical debt to the Negroes. In 1862 or 1863 he composed a piece called *The Union*, an allegory prophesying the rescue of the Union by the Northern armies.

From his sojourn in Cuba, Gottschalk drew material for a number of his most effective piano pieces. These include *Souvenir de la Havane* (Opus 39), *Souvenir de Cuba* (Mazurka), *Dí que sí* (*Réponds-moi!*), *Suis-moi!*, *Ojos Criollos*, and *La Gallina* ("The Hen"). John Kirkpatrick, the pianist who frequently features Gottschalk's pieces on his programs of American music, tells me that he thinks the piece titled *Suis-moi!* ("Follow Me!") shows the composer "at his very best." Kirkpatrick has made a two-piano arrangement of Gottschalk's symphony in two movements, *La Noche de los Trópicos* ("The Night of the Tropics"). Another large work inspired by tropical atmosphere is the *Escenas Campestres Cubanas* ("Cuban Country Scenes") for vocal soloists (soprano, tenor, baritone, and bass) and orchestra.

In all his travels Gottschalk never forgot that he was an American. Whenever the occasion arose, he was ready to talk on American subjects, and in his concerts he also recalled his native land. At a concert in Havana in 1854, he performed a fantasia for piano on "Old Folks at Home," which he titled *Recuerdos de mi Patria* ("Memories of my Homeland"). Wherever he went in Latin America, he was highly esteemed and honored, both as a person and as an artist.

It is ironic that American musicians had to wait until 1893 for Antonin Dvořák to tell them about the possibilities of utilizing American Negro music to achieve "local color," when Gottschalk began doing just that as early as 1845.

South American triumphs

In June. 1865, Gottschalk sailed for California, where he spent the summer concertizing. Then he embarked on a ship bound for Chile, beginning what was to be his life's last journey. In Peru, en route, he remained long enough to give about sixty concerts and to receive "a gold, diamond, and pearl decoration." Gottschalk was always ready to place his talent at the disposal of charity and other worthy causes. Hence it is not surprising that in Valparaiso, Chile, the board of public schools, the common council, the board of visitors of the hos-

pitals, and the municipal government, each presented him with a gold medal. The government of Chile voted him a special grand gold medal. In Montevideo, Republic of Uruguay, Gottschalk gave a benefit concert for the "Society of the Friends of Education," which warmly thanked "this noble American citizen." In a letter to the society, Gottschalk expressed himself eloquently and with apparent conviction on the subject of democracy and education in the United States. He pointed out that "The popular system of education in the United States . . . which, of a child, makes successively a man, and later a citizen, has, for its principal object, to prepare him for the use of liberty. . . ." The United States has seldom if ever had a more effective cultural ambassador in South America than Louis Moreau Gottschalk.

In Buenos Aires he gave other charity concerts and in November, 1868, organized a great music festival at the Teatro Solis, with over three hundred participants (orchestra, chorus, and soloists). After compositions by Verdi, Meyerbeer, and Rossini, the concert ended with two works by Gottschalk: *Marche Solennelle* and *Montevideo,* the latter a descriptive symphony. In the spring of 1869, Gottschalk went to Rio de Janeiro, where his triumphs exceeded anything previously experienced. Brazil was then ruled by the Emperor Dom Pedro II, a benevolent and liberal monarch. Gottschalk's success in Brazil is best described in his own words, from a letter to a friend in Boston:

> My Dear Old Friend,—My concerts here are a perfect *furore.* All my houses are sold eight days in advance. . . . The emperor, imperial family, and court never missed yet one of my entertainments.
>
> His Majesty received me frequently at palace. . . . The *Grand Orient* of the masonry of Brazil gave me a solemn reception. . . .
>
> The enthusiasm with which I have been received here is indescribable. At the last concert, I was crowned on the stage by the artists of Rio. . . .
>
> The emperor is very fond of my compositions, especially "Printemps d'Amour" and "Ossian."
>
> My "Morte" (she is dead!) has had here, the same as in the Rio de la Plata, *un succès de larmes,* as several of my fair listeners wept at listening to that rather sad and disconsolate of my last effusions, which is my favorite now, and which I consider as being neither better nor worse than old "Last Hope."

My fantaisie on the national anthem of Brazil, of course, pleased the emperor, and tickled the national pride of my public. Every time I appear I must play it.

In great haste, yours as ever,
GOTTSCHALK

Of the compositions mentioned in this letter, *Ossian* was one of his earliest piano pieces, written for his mother's birthday when he was a young student in Paris (from the same period dates his *Danse Ossianique*, originally called *Danse des Ombres*). The piece titled *Morte* is mentioned again in a letter to the music publishers Hall & Son of New York, dated Rio, October 24, 1869:

Herewith I send you a new piece ("Morte,"—"She is Dead"),—a lamentation. I do not know whether it will be successful or not, but I believe it to be my best effort for years. Ever since I have played it, it has been encored; and a great many women have hysterics and weep over it—maybe owing to the romantic title. . . .

For once, Gottschalk appears to have been too modest. If anything could make women weep and swoon, it was his own playing and the romantic aura of his personality. And if *Morte* did not become as famous as his earlier sentimental effusions, *The Last Hope* and *The Dying Poet*, it was probably because Gottschalk did not live long enough to play it himself for the American public in his own inimitable manner.

On July 24, 1869, Gottschalk wrote to his Boston friend F. G. Hill, saying, among other things: "On the 30th, the emperor gives a grand fête at the palace, at which I am to play. I see his Majesty very often. He is a very kind and liberal-minded man. He is fond of inquiring about the States; and we have long talks together, alone in his private apartments." Soon after this, Gottschalk was stricken with yellow fever. On August 5 he was so low that the physicians gave him up. Yet by the latter part of September he had recovered sufficiently to resume his concerts. He was preparing "three grand festivals, with eight hundred performers, at which I will produce my symphonies, and the grand 'Marche Triomphale' I dedicated to the emperor. He is very anxious to have those festivals organized, and has offered me the means to muster in Rio all the musicians that can be had within the province." In another letter he exclaimed: "Just think of eight hun-

dred performers and eighty drums to lead!" There speaks the disciple of Berlioz. Gottschalk burned up all his energy, expended the last ounce of his depleted strength, to organize and conduct this mammoth festival, which took place on November 26, 1869, at the Opera House of Rio de Janeiro.

The *Marche Triomphale*, which closed the first program, and into which the composer had woven the strains of the Brazilian national anthem, aroused tremendous enthusiasm, the excited audience rising to its feet and cheering. Gottschalk was called to the stage again and again to receive the ovations of the public. It was his last triumph. The next day he felt very weak, drove to the Opera House in his carriage, but was unable to conduct the orchestra in the second program of the festival. About two weeks later he was taken to the suburb of Tijuca, where, after much suffering, he died at four o'clock on the morning of December 18, 1869. The next day his embalmed body was exposed in state in the hall of the Philharmonic Society of Rio de Janeiro, and there the orchestra of the society played Gottschalk's *Morte* before the coffin was removed to the cemetery of St. John the Baptist, several miles outside the city. The newspapers of Brazil printed glowing eulogies of the dead musician. The following year Gottschalk's remains were taken to New York and placed in Greenwood Cemetery (October, 1870).

While admitting that he was no more than a *petit maître*, it seems to me that Gottschalk is a significant figure in America's music, not merely a historical effigy. Apart from the fact that his best music still has power to delight and charm the listener, his significance lies in his capacity for fully absorbing the atmosphere of the New World in some of its most characteristic aspects. As far as most American composers of the nineteenth century were concerned, Columbus might just as well have never discovered the New World. Our national folkloristic movement in music did not acquire definite momentum until the arrival of Dvořák, half a century after Gottschalk had composed his characteristic Creole pieces. Under more favorable circumstances, Gottschalk might have been the Glinka of America's music, the initiator of an impulse toward exploring and exploiting a new world of musical impressions. As it was, he remains an isolated, exotic figure, his music marked by a curious ambivalence. On the one hand he produced elegant *salon* pieces that stand as slightly tarnished gems

of the genteel tradition. And on the other hand he ventured into exotic realms of personal and musical experience, projecting, however tentatively and incompletely, something of that untrammeled eclecticism, that reaching out for, and eager acceptance of, unprecedented sensations and impressions, that should characterize the artist who feels himself privileged to be born in a new world.