

MUSIC THROUGH THE AGES

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(extract concerning Gottschalk)

LOUIS MOREAU GOTTSCHALK. - "Gottschalk," said Berlioz, his teacher, "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 . . . thus the success of M. Gottschalk before an audience of musical cultivation is assured."

Louis Gottschalk (New Orleans, 1829-1869), the son of Edward Gottschalk, an English Jew, and Aimée Marie de Brasle, a creole, spent most of his life abroad and was regarded by the majority of Americans as a foreigner "and was accordingly most successful. He combined the attractiveness of pianist-composer and beau idéal. He was the first of our matinée idols" (John Tasker Howard).

He was an infant prodigy and at thirteen went to Paris to study, and, through his aunt, the Countess of Lagrange, became the favorite of royalty and the aristocracy. Chopin prophesied that he would become "King of pianists." After a concert tour in France and Spain, he gave a concert at Niblo's Theater (1853) in New York where his reception was comparable to the excitement caused by Jenny Lind the year before. But he had the good sense to refuse P. T. Barnum's offer of twenty thousand dollars a year, and toured American cities, giving eighty concerts in New York alone.

He was the first American to receive European honors. He gave some thousand concerts in Cuba and South America, but died at forty in Rio de Janeiro, too delicate to stand the strain of constant travel and his vast social obligations.

Of his ninety compositions for the piano, most are forgotten save *The Last Hope*, and *Ojos Creollos* (Creole Eyes), *Banjo*, *Souvenirs of Andalusia*, *Bantoula*, *Le Bananier* (The Banana- Tree), and *Dance Ossianique*. Howard says Gottschalk was "a forerunner of Ethelbert Nevin - at heart, and by necessity a sentimentalist -he was a composer of salon music *par excellence*".

It has recently been discovered that he wrote a piano concerto, the score of which was lost, and steps have been taken for its recovery.