

The Etude Master Study Page

GOTTSCHALK'S PERIOD.

NEARLY one hundred years ago (December 25, 1814) the Treaty of Ghent was signed and Great Britain and the United States closed the last conflict between the mother country and the energetic New World. A few months thereafter (February 22, 1815), Boston, a favored theater for peace jubilees, held a musical festival celebrating the signing of the treaty. The success of this musical event led to the formation of the *Handel and Haydn Society* one month later. By Christmas of the same year the society was able to give a concert made up largely from the works of Handel and Haydn. In less than ten years the organization had become important enough to commission Beethoven to write an oratorio for its use. Beethoven was greatly pleased, but unfortunately did not undertake the work.

In Philadelphia music had also had a fine beginning, for as early as 1759 there had been a performance of that peculiar contraption known as the *Beggar's Opera*, and in 1801 parts of Handel's *Messiah* had been given at a public concert. In New York the musical work seemed to center at first around the church, and Ritter in his *Music in America* mentions a performance of *The Messiah* taking place in Trinity Church as early as 1750. (The work was first given in Dublin in 1742). Comic operas or more properly speaking ballad operas, which were mere farces interspersed with songs were given in New York as early as the middle of the 18th century. The musical character of these performances continually improved, and by 1815 we find that the works of Henry Bishop were becoming popular in America. In 1823 Payne's famous *Clari, the Maid of Milan* was presented with music by Bishop (including *Home, Sweet Home*). In 1825 Weber's *Freyschütz* was given in New York in a somewhat garbled form. In the fall of the same year Manuel Garcia brought his opera company to New York. It was made up largely of members of his family and his friends. His daughter, Mme. Malibran, was the leading soprano. Mr. Louis C. Elson goes so far as to call Garcia "our musical Columbus." A number of the representative works of the time, notably *The Barber of Seville*, *The Magic Flute* and *Masaniello* were given in garbled form.

As early as 1791 New Orleans had a regular company of musical theatrical performers, and by the time of our second war with England there was a regularly established operatic enterprise in the Southern city. Louisiana had become a part of the United States, thanks to good American dollars and Napoleon's fear of England. But it was at heart still a Latin territory. The spirit and traditions of France and even Spain were not to be removed by legal annexation. Indeed, the legislators continued for many years to conduct their debates in the French language, and to this day the tendency to emulate France and things French is very manifest.



1829—The Real Gottschalk—1869

"Music is my bride to cheer and delight me.
Music is my friend to amuse and make me gay.
Music—ah! it is my angel to lead me to God."

GOTTSCHALK'S ANCESTORS.

The foregoing must make quite clear the fact that Gottschalk was born in an atmosphere very different from that of most other parts of America with the exception of the French sections of Canada. French ideals, French literature, French art, French music made New Orleans the Paris of the new world. But there was a still greater French influence in the life of Gottschalk than his environment. His mother was one Aimée Marie de Braslé, a native of New Orleans, who when she was fifteen years old married Edward Gottschalk, who went to America from England in 1828. The father, it is understood, had studied medicine in Leipsic, and had secured his degree there.

GOTTSCHALK'S CHILDHOOD.

Louis Moreau Gottschalk was born in New Orleans, May 8, 1829. He was said to have been very frail and very fair when a child. His personal beauty was such that it attracted wide attention, and he was a most amiable, tractable child. His sister relates that once, while their mother was resting at Pass Christian, she was startled by hearing the sound of a very attractive melody coming from the adjoining music room. It was a melody the mother had played. She knew that no one else but her three-year-old baby was in the house. Half startled and half delighted, she rushed to the room in which the piano stood and found Louis Moreau Gottschalk standing on a high stool.

The child's father was startled by this unusual manifestation of talent, and an expert was brought in the person of a French musician called Letellier. He mapped out a course suitable to the talent of so young a pupil. At the age of six Gottschalk commenced studying French and also the violin with a teacher named Ely.

According to an account coming from Gottschalk's sister, the boy was so remarkable that he was requested to play the organ during the absence of the local parish organist. Indeed, he was impressed into service without warning of any kind. His teacher pulled the stops and used the pedals, but the boy read the music for the entire mass at sight. At the end he was so exhausted with excitement and delight that after running home to tell his mother he fell weeping hysterically in her arms.

A PRODIGY.

At eight Gottschalk gave a concert in aid of a violinist connected with the French opera (M. Miolau), who had been attended by misfortune. The concert was a huge success. After the child was home safely tucked away in bed he was awakened by a serenading party composed of the violinist and his many friends from the opera.

DEPARTURE FOR EUROPE.

Although even at that time musical culture had made a very gratifying advance in New Orleans, it was realized that a course of study in Europe was well nigh indispensable for the very talented boy. This was difficult to bring about, principally because the boy and his mother were so deeply devoted to each other. He was, according to all accounts, an unusual youth in the sense that he was constantly trying to do good to others. In after years his selfishness was noted by many observers. A stern father, however, settled the European question by booking his passage on a steamer leaving New Orleans in May, 1842. By this time the boy had become very popular in his home city, and his farewell concert was attended by a very large audience. His departure was kept secret from his mother, and she was so prostrated by his going that for a time it seemed as though she might not survive.

AT SCHOOL IN PARIS.

Arriving in Paris, the twelve-year-old virtuoso was put in a private school conducted by M. Dussart. For the first six months he studied with Charles Hallé. Hallé (originally Carl Halle) was a German who had settled in Paris and had become the friend of Cherubini, Liszt, Chopin and others. In 1843 he went to England, where he worked for most of the rest of his life as a conductor and as a teacher. He was knighted in 1888. His position was such that he was able to introduce the wonderfully gifted Gottschalk to many celebrities. When Halle left for England, Gottschalk became the pupil of Camille Marie Stamaty, a pupil of Kalkbrenner and Mendelssohn. Stamaty also became the teacher of no less a master than Saint-Saëns. Under this new teacher Gottschalk made remarkable progress, and it is said that Chopin took a great interest in his work. His teacher in harmony was M. Maledan.

STUDENT LIFE IN PARIS.

Gottschalk was fortunate in having two influential relatives who introduced him into the exciting life of the Parisian capital. These were his aunt, the Comtesse de Lagrange, and his cousin, the Comtesse de Bourjolly. With the talents he soon became much sought, and his brilliant improvisations became the talk of Paris even in the days of great masters of the keyboard like Liszt, Chopin and Thalberg. Still a child, he found time to write down some of his improvisations, and the result was his *Ossian* and the *Danse des Ombres* both of which were dedicated to his mother. At fifteen he was writing such pieces as *Bannier*, *Savanne* and *Bamboula*. An attack of typhoid fever proved an obstacle in his school work from which he did not recover for some considerable time. According to one report he was the pupil of Berlioz for a time, but it is not unlikely that he was rather his *protégé* than his pupil since the older musician took a fatherly interest in the work of the rising young pianist and composer.

His association with Berlioz was so important to him that he declined an invitation to visit the Queen of Spain. Frequent concerts took place in the Salle Pleyel, and many of the musicians of the day were very enthusiastic. Naturally men of the type of Offenbach, Le Couppey, Jos. Ascher and many others were fascinated by the immense facility with which Gottschalk treated his melodic ideas. His judgment was greatly respected, and when he was little over sixteen he was asked to act as one of the judges at a prize contest at the Paris Conservatoire. At the same time he gave a series of highly successful concerts in which Berlioz participated.

Overwork and overexcitement proved too much for so sensitive a youth, and in 1847 he was obliged to take a long rest. At every place, however, he was importuned to give concerts, and in Switzerland especially he extended his reputation very considerably through occasional appearances. In the meantime his family in America had become excited over the reports of his success, and his mother and his sisters visited him in Paris in December of the same year. This encouraged him immensely, and he wrote many of the popular salon pieces of the type which made his name famous during the next quarter of a century. Much of his time was devoted to playing for charitable purposes, as he was only too anxious to help others at all times.

EARLY CONCERT TOURS.

In 1849 Gottschalk made a tour of France, only to find that his pieces were played everywhere by people who were anxious to *fête* him after every performance. His father arrived in Paris and Gottschalk returned long enough to greet him and then departed for an extensive tour of Spain. There he was lionized in a manner difficult to understand in this more materialistic age. The king gave him the diamond cross of "Isabella la Catholique" and that of "Leon d'Holstein." The sword of honor, "El Chielanero," was also bestowed upon him.

One sensational tale is told of his visit to Spain. A young woman who was devoted to music lay at death's door. She had longed to hear Gottschalk play, but was unable to leave her bed. She was in humble circumstances. The pianist heard of this and had his instrument taken to her room. There he played while her spirit departed in peace. After two years spent in the adulation of his Spanish admirers, he returned to Paris and left for New York in 1852, where he was greeted by his father and brothers. Gottschalk never saw Paris again.

AMERICAN APPEARANCES.

About the middle of the last century, Niblo's Garden was one of the chief amusement resorts in New York. It possessed a large auditorium and everything from symphony concerts to spectacular extravaganzas was presented in that famous theatre. Accordingly Gottschalk's first American appearance was scheduled to take place there. (Feb 11th 1853). Some of his fascinating piano pieces had gained some popularity in America and the concert was very successful. The musical criticism of the day leaned rather toward the spread eagle English which resounded through our legislative halls after the fashion of Daniel Webster. One of the papers in endeavoring to pile on applause of the exaggerated kind said. "Gottschalk has the dexterity of Jaell, the power of Mayer and the taste of Herz," a criticism altogether without meaning in this day since the minor pianists with whom he was compared are rapidly becoming little more than obscure phantoms in musical history. In another paragraph we are told that "he dashes at the instrument as Murat charged the enemy." The New York Tribune even went so far as to intimate that it was very gratifying to observe a citizen of our glorious republic eclipsing Beethoven and certain other classical "old fogies."

A more authoritative criticism, albeit from an impassioned musical enthusiast, comes from no less than Hector Berlioz, and reads:

"Gottschalk is one of the very few 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. He knows the limits beyond which any liberties taken with the rhythm produce only confusion and disorder; and upon these limits he never encroaches. There is an exquisite grace in his manner of phrasing sweet melodies, and throwing off light touches from the higher keys. The boldness and brilliancy and originality of his play at once dazzles and astonishes, and the infantile naïveté of his smiling caprices, the charming simplicity with which he renders simple things, seem to belong to another individuality, distinct from that which marks his thundering energy: Thus the success of M. Gottschalk before an audience of musical cultivation is immense."

GOTTSCHALK AS A COMPOSER.

Berlioz's adulation must come as a surprise to many who have read for years some of the supercilious criticisms of lofty musicians who fail to see anything of merit in the very individual work of Gottschalk because he worked along a somewhat different plane from that of the more serious and more exacting musicians whose names are classed with the masters of the art. However, the day of Gottschalk is now long past, and we may estimate his artistic achievements as well as his shortcomings through the perspective which lends frankness to judgment. Such programs as Gottschalk played would be impossible in the concert halls of America to-day. Compared with the great masterpieces for the piano, many of Gottschalk's works would be declared trivial and even *banal* by the average newspaper critic. This criticism would be justified in many cases. Even in Boston in his own day Gottschalk was very coldly received, for Boston was already saturated with the classicism of the German school. Regarded by the severe standards of taste cultivated by the musician who has rarely been away from his Bach, Beethoven and Brahms long enough to learn that fully three-fourths of the world still clings to pretty and catchy tunes of a more or less commonplace

type, Gottschalk must forever remain beyond the pale. But for the millions who have yet to attain the musical heights Gottschalk and composers of his type are still the silken rope up which they are most likely to climb, if climb they will. Considered broadly, music of this class holds a far more important place in our general musical development than some hyper-critical, not to say "snobbish," censors ever admit. However, this discussion of a somewhat important phase in our American musical progress must not induce the reader to look upon the music of Gottschalk as lacking in merit. Indeed, much that Gottschalk did in the way of inventing tunes and treating them effectively for the pianoforte was highly commendable. His *Pasquinade*, for instance, is very striking both from the melodic and rhythmic standpoint. Compared with the *Ninth Symphony* or *Die Meistersinger*, it becomes absurdly insignificant, but notwithstanding this it possesses a distinct merit as a composition of its class and generation. The ever popular *Last Hope* is simply a hymn-like tune with a decorative variation that, although superficial, is attractive, effective and distinctive. Gottschalk at least devised a treatment for this particular piece that gives an effect quite different from the conventional variations that were being turned out in his day as fast as the labored printing processes of the time permitted. Gottschalk's *Last Hope* is a fair example of the more stereotyped variations upon which so many musicians pinned their bid for present material success as well as their hope for immortality.

GOTTSCHALK AS A TEACHER.

It is hard to think of a man of Gottschalk's temperament as a teacher but nevertheless he frequently had pupils. His charming personality made him very popular. Of all those who studied with him none has gained a popularity equal to that of Teresa Carreno, who still is loud in his acclaim. Those who knew Gottschalk also knew that though he played his own type of composition at his concerts he was also well acquainted with the works of the classical masters and played them finely. Gottschalk, despite his impassioned disposition, was complacent enough to realize that it was his own individual works written along the lines of the style of *salon* compositions then so popular that made him in demand. Boston deigned to hear him and tried to accept him despite his training and traditions but in other parts of the country Gottschalk excited a *furor* hard to realize in this day. He visited cities then comparatively small in size such as Albany, Syracuse, etc., and the public literally went wild over his playing.

GOTTSCHALK IN LATIN-AMERICA.

In 1856 Gottschalk sailed for the West Indies and found himself so delightfully received by the warm-blooded people of the tropical isles that he remained with them for some six years. There he produced some of his most interesting work as a composer. Gottschalk went from town to town like a monarch. His presence was the signal for a *festa*. That he was delighted is shown by his letters, which are a mixture of commonplaces reflecting the languid life of the torrid climate, here and there invigorated by quotations from Shakespeare and sauced by comparisons of the tropical bill of fare with the menu of Delmonico. Many of the things he produced were so trivial that he himself had them put out under the nom de plume "Seven Octaves," but he did produce such a piece as *Ojes Creoles*, and we are told that he was more

susceptible to the eyes of the lovely Creoles than was best for his musical advancement.

Departing from the West Indies he toured through Central America and Venezuela, returning to New York in 1862. Much to his surprise he found New York as brilliant and apparently as prosperous as ever despite the fact that the country was in the midst of one of the most terrible of all wars. He gave concerts successfully and was delighted with the country as he found it after so long an absence. The papers were so enthusiastic over his playing that he was "sickened with the flattery." At other critics who failed to enjoy his light hearted compositions and appreciate them as representatives of a special style he had favored he hurled, "Why will they exhaust their ten-pounders in order to kill mosquitos." In Boston his reception by the public was more favorable, but the papers still regarded him coldly. He took sides with the North in its struggle against the South and in Montreal when he was requested to play *Dixie*, went to the piano and played an elaborate improvisation around *Yankee Doodle*.

RETURN TO SOUTH AMERICA.

In 1865 Gottschalk sailed for San Francisco. Transit by land across the continent was far more difficult at that time than the little matter of the water voyage around South America. After a none too successful sojourn in California, he sailed for South America, where he met with immense favor in all the countries he visited. His houses were "sold out" eight days in advance and seats brought as high as twenty-five dollars apiece. In Brazil he became a favorite of the emperor, and his friendship with the Portuguese pianist, Arthur Napoleon, was also of great assistance to him in Rio Janeiro. In South America he won popular favor by his charitable tendencies and his interest in establishing free schools. Indeed, there are many who feel that his influence upon education in the Latin-American countries was very great indeed. A quotation from one of his addresses indicates a very broad grasp of an important principle which he endeavored to get South Americans to observe:

The popular system of education in the United States is that austere elaboration, which, of a child, makes successively a man, and later a citizen, has for its principal object that of preparing the individual for the use of liberty, that cuirass of the strong, but which frequently for the weak is transformed into the shirt of Nessus. In my country, it is not its eminent individuals, but the superiority of the intellectual level of the people, which attracts the attention of the observer; for however great Prescott, Longfellow, Everett, Bancroft, and many others may be, these noble characters are lost to view in presence of the enlightenment of the collective entity—the "people."

A Berlioz-like combination of players pleased the South Americans, and Gottschalk arranged orchestras with eight hundred performers and sometimes he had as many as thirty pianists. The emperor of Brazil took an active interest in all these "events." He even made Gottschalk director general of all the bands of the Army and Navy so that he would have as much help as he needed. Gottschalk rejoiced in the possession of eighty drummers.

GOTTSCHALK'S LAST DAYS.

On the 26th of November Gottschalk conducted a huge festival in Rio Janeiro. A feature of the concert was a "Marche Solenné" which he had arranged for the orchestra. It concluded with the National Hymn. Gottschalk

had hardly recovered from an attack of yellow fever. The next day the worn-out musician tried to lead the orchestra again, but was too weak to do so. He gradually grew worse and died on December 18, 1869. The Philharmonic Society conducted the funeral, and for some time his body laid in state. On the day of the burial, business ceased in the Brazilian capital and the streets through which the cortege passed were lined with people for miles. He was buried within the rites of the Roman Catholic Church, of which he had been a member during his entire lifetime.

AVAILABLE GOTTSCHALK COMPOSITIONS.

The writer has made a somewhat careful survey of the compositions of Gottschalk, noting particularly those which are still in popular favor as well as some which have not stood this "survival of the fittest" test but which are nevertheless of merit musically. The numerals represent the grade. *The Union* (A very elaborate paraphrase upon American national airs). *Yankee Doodle*, *Hail Columbia*, *Star Spangled Banner* (9); *Tournament Galop* (6); *Souvenir de la Havana* (a surprisingly beautiful Habanera with rhythmical difficulties which put it in 8); *Souvenir Andalouse* (brilliant collection of Spanish themes, 5); *Pasquinade* (one of Gottschalk's most characteristic pieces, 5); *Creole Eyes* (may also be obtained in duet form, 4); *Orfa Grand Polka* (brilliant piano piece of great popularity, 4).

Radieuse Valse (7); *Ricordati Nocturne* (6); *Marche de Unit* (7); *Love and Chivalry* (4); *Morte* (6); *The Maiden's Blush* (4); *Marguerite Valse* (4); *The Last Hope* (7); *Jeunesse Mazurka* (4); *Marche Funèbre* (this is an exceptionally fine work even in this day, 7); *Bamboula* (interesting and characteristic, 9); *Le Bannier* (West Indian Negro folk song type made into an interesting piano piece, 7); *Eighth Ballade* (showing Gottschalk's aspirations toward a higher style); *The Banjo* (immensely popular, 8); *The Dying Poet* (4); *Fairy Land Schottisch* (trivial, 3); *Danse Ossianique* (6); *Valse Poétique* (7); *Grand Scherzo* (indicates Gottschalk's possibilities had he set his aim just a little higher. This is a very unusual composition for its time, 7); *Water Sprite* (popular but trivial, 7); *The Spark* (5); *The Tremulo* (possibly Gottschalk's most successful effort, 8). The difficulties in Gottschalk's works are of a purely technical character except in those cases where he has reproduced the fascinating but baffling rhythms of Latin-America. Space prevents us from mentioning other compositions of merit but less renown than the above.

AN APPRECIATION OF GOTTSCHALK BY ONE WHO KNEW HIM.

Some years ago John Francis Gilder, an American pianist and composer of popular salon music, wrote the following appreciation of Gottschalk in the *Musical Record*. It is not given here as an accurate estimate of Gottschalk's standing as an artist but rather as means for the present day reader to understand the enthusiasm with which Gottschalk was regarded by his contemporaries.

"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."