

Gottschalk's "The Banjo," op. 15, and the Banjo in the Nineteenth Century

by Paul Ely Smith

Louis Moreau Gottschalk first performed "The Banjo, Grotesque Fantasie, An American Sketch," op. 15 in New Orleans in March 1855, about two years after his return from Europe.¹ No documentation survives indicating the specific musical inspiration for the composition of the piece—whether it was inspired by African-American banjo players whom Gottschalk surely must have encountered in New Orleans (he grew up within a few blocks of the Place Congo), or influenced by minstrel banjo players he no doubt heard in his extensive traveling. From Gottschalk we have only a cryptic remark about critics dismissing the piece as "a melody for the Negroes," and the biographer Vernon Loggins refers to the piece as "the most enduring of his Negro compositions."² Some evidence, then, points to the influence of African-American rather than minstrel sources.

If the piece were indeed drawn from African-American sources, it would take its place as one of the few surviving representatives of a musical tradition that, in spite of its enormous influence on American music as a whole, has itself almost entirely disappeared. Though the names and music of generations of influential African-American banjo players may never be known, I wish to argue that Gottschalk's op. 15 is not only a remarkably accurate representation of this banjo tradition, but also the most detailed and complete surviving contemporaneous record of mid-nineteenth-century African-American banjo music—in no other source has such a variety of techniques been preserved. Significantly, many of these techniques provide a previously missing link between West African plucked-lute performance practice and twentieth-century banjo and blues guitar styles. Although this connection has been suggested by numerous researchers, they have lacked, however, conclusive evidence of a transitional nineteenth-century African-American plucked-lute performance practice.

The banjo and its music figure prominently in much of the important research on nineteenth-century American vernacular music, not only because the banjo represents one of the few clearly African-American musical influences for which substantial documentation exists, but also because it was central in the beginnings of American popular music and later became a major influence on ragtime and jazz. Hans Nathan devotes an entire chapter to the banjo in *Dan Emmett and the Rise of Early Negro Minstrelsy*, and Dena Epstein's landmark 1975 article, "The Folk Banjo: A Documentary History," formed a central part of her book, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War*.³

The haunting problem in this research is the absence of information about the sound and performance practice of the banjo. Epstein's work is a triumph of musicology in the information she was able to glean from the documentary evidence, but period descriptions are woefully inadequate for reconstructing the actual sound of the music, and her work is concerned with instrumental transmission, not style. Nathan provides numerous informative, detailed musical analyses, but since his discussion relies heavily on notated banjo music, his work excludes a consideration of the gestural components of banjo playing, which would have been transmitted orally and which defy the conventional notation used in the minstrels' tune books.

The actual sound of nineteenth-century banjo music remained a mystery until the important research of Robert Winans, in a series of articles beginning in 1976 and leading up to his 1985 recording of a reconstructed minstrel show band for New World Records, and Eugenia Conway, in her 1980 dissertation "The Afro-American Traditions of the Folk Banjo."⁴ Both Winans and Conway supplemented documentary evidence of nineteenth-century banjo music with a thorough analysis of surviving banjo playing traditions, supplying gestural and musical components lacking in the documentary evidence alone. Winans concluded that the original minstrel banjo style was exclusively a "brushless," non-chordal downstroke style, since it survives in current traditional playing in Appalachia and is the only style represented in the earliest minstrel methods and tune books.⁵ Conway found essentially the same style in her study of surviving banjo-playing traditions among African-Americans in the North Carolina Piedmont, research which supports the minstrels' claims that they learned their music directly from African-Americans. In fact, the minstrel banjo-player Frank Converse transcribed a piece he claims to have learned in his youth (probably before 1850) from an African-American banjo-player that demonstrates many of the features of the brushless downstroking style.⁶

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The first step in establishing Gottschalk's op. 15 as an accurate representation of mid-nineteenth-century banjo music is to demonstrate that the piece depicts styles for which we already have evidence. The brushless downstroking style discussed by Winans and Conway is in fact present in several places, for example, in measures 39–42 and 55–58 (examples 1 and 2). As is the case with much of the piece, these passages translate easily into actual banjo performance, once allowances are made for the banjo's idiosyncrasies (especially in example 2) and for various pianistic effects such as octave displacement and doubling.⁷ I have transposed the banjo versions into C major, for "double-C" tuning ($g^2-c^1-g^1-c^2-d^2$), and have given the banjo

music in both standard musical notation and tablature, since tablature includes important gestural information left out of conventional notation and is also familiar to most banjo players.⁸ An explanation of the tablature system and tuning used here appears in the Appendix at the end of the article.

Example 1. Measures 39–42.

0 0 0 0 2 0 0 2 0 0 0 0 0 2 0 0 0 0 0 2 0 0 2 0 0 4 0 2 0

D T D T D T D T D R T D T D T D T D R T D T D T D T D R T D T D T D T

Example 2. Measures 55–58.

0 0 0 0 2 4 0 0 2 2 2 4 5 4 5 4 4 4 10 0 5 2 0 0 0 10 12

D P L D D T D H D P L D P L D T D H D T H D P L D T D T P L D P D P L D T D D

Brushless downstroking is not the only technique present in "The Banjo," however; in fact, representations of more chordal styles of downstroking clearly predominate. Since brushing and other chordal techniques are also very much a part of surviving traditional banjo performance practice, their presence in Gottschalk's piece suggests that they do not necessarily arise from later developments, as Winans and Conway argue.

The basic downstroking right-hand pattern that most beginning banjo players start with is demonstrated in example 3, from a recent banjo instruction book, Miles Krassen's *Clawhammer Banjo* ("clawhammer" is one of several terms for the downstroking banjo technique).⁹ After the eight-measure introduction, "The Banjo" proceeds with a texture that unmistakably represents the same technique (example 4). That this texture is present in "The Banjo" and yet not represented in methods and tune books of the early minstrel era does not necessarily refute the hypothesis that these styles are truly representative of earlier practices. Conway noticed, for example, significant omissions in the minstrel-era methods, which she cites as proof that white folk musicians learned directly from African-Americans:

In their banjo playing, the North Carolina mountain whites and Piedmont blacks and the early minstrels all share a common position and motion of the right hand and also certain principal movements: the strike and its variations, the pull-off, the hammer-on, and drop-thumb-ing. Dink Roberts even uses the distinctive minstrel technique of the "triple strike," one also known to southern mountain banjo players. However, Piedmont blacks and mountain whites also share preferences for the pull-off on an unsounded string, for the hammer-on when the first note is played open, and for variations of drop-thumb-ing, which many folk call "double-noting." Since none of these tendencies is emphasized by the early minstrel instructors—Rice, for example, does not describe all of them—they seem to have been transmitted from Afro-Americans to mountain whites without the minstrels as intermediaries.¹⁰

Example 3.

The musical notation for Example 3 consists of two staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a 4/4 time signature. It contains a sequence of notes: a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, a quarter note G4, a quarter note F4, a quarter note E4, a quarter note D4, and a quarter note C4. The bottom staff is a bass staff with fret numbers 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, and 0. Below the bass staff are the chord symbols D, B T D, B T, D, B T.

Example 4. Measures 9–12.

Moderato.
Tres Rythmé.

p Con Spirito.

T
A
B

0 2 4 5 7 5 3 0 2 0 0 0 0 2 0 0

D B T D B | D B T D B | D B T D T B T | D T B T D T B T

Evidently the minstrels had not mastered all the elements of the African-American style, or perhaps these techniques were considered too advanced for beginners' instruction methods. They could even have been considered "professional secrets."

Another explanation is that the minstrels knew of these styles but were limited by their transcription techniques—a common problem in trying to apply conventional music notation to an oral music tradition. In the downstroking style, for example, there are countless gradations between bringing down the index finger on only one string, i.e., "brushless," and allowing adjacent strings to sound as well. When attempting to notate a banjo piece, it is often easier to represent the main melody note and leave the subtleties of the adjacent strings to the individual player's taste and experience. Moreover, downstroking banjo music has always been transmitted by oral tradition; to learn a tune or technique only from notation without a thorough familiarity with the gestures and sound of the music is virtually impossible. Consequently, it is not surprising that Gottschalk, who was attempting to capture the actual sound of banjo music, would create a more accurate reproduction in his piano "transcription" than that contained in the surviving documents we have of notated banjo music.

Banjo methods and tune books were never intended as literal and complete representations of actual performances. Rather, they either presented outlines of tunes already learned by ear, or provided a simple starting version of a tune, with the assumption that the player would supply the gestural and aural information necessary to complete the musical performance. The

notation itself would therefore not be a reliable indicator of the actual sound of the music. Piano music, on the other hand, even though it, too, relies on gestural and aural information, is much more reliably conveyed via traditional notation.¹¹ A good example of this kind of effect captured by Gottschalk but ignored in notation of banjo music is the sustained C sharp that appears in the right hand of measure 11 (example 4). Such a sound, though never notated, is common in banjo music, since it occurs naturally through the vibration of the open string.

* * *

Up-picking, though it appears as early as the 1850s among minstrel banjo players¹² and is also used by the African-American banjo players studied by Conway,¹³ is considered by Winans to be a later development influenced by European guitar music:

The early, or "stroke," style was gradually replaced by the "guitar," or "classical," style of playing, which . . . is essentially the application of classical guitar techniques to the banjo.¹⁴

Up-picking is present, however, in the performance practice of the banjo's West African ancestors, according to Michael Coolen, the only researcher who has explored in depth the relationship of the banjo to West African plucked-lutes. This connection had been suggested by many writers, including David Ames, Harold Courlander, Gene Bluestein, Paul Oliver, Dena Epstein, and Samuel Charters, but Coolen, who actually learned to play the "khalam" from griots in the Senegambia, discovered aspects of the West African traditions that had been overlooked by other observers. Significantly, he found not only the use of a downstroking style, but also the frequent combination of up-picking and downstroking:

Except in very fast passages, the index finger uses a downward stroke on the strings. . . . The thumb also plucks in a downward fashion, while the middle finger usually plucks upward.¹⁵

Coolen also has noted the use of strumming by West African khalam players:

There is also occasional use of strumming, although the musicians with whom I worked were quite adept at finger picking techniques. Strumming can also be found in "kora" [harp-lute] performance, where the strum is used as a kind of ostinato going over the basic repetitive pattern.¹⁶

From this research and the evidence presented in Gottschalk's op. 15, Winans's thesis asserting the chronological priority of non-chordal styles of banjo playing can no longer be maintained. Rather, it seems that more chordal varieties of downstroking arose simultaneously with the brushless style, and must date back at least to the early 1850s. Gottschalk, moreover, also represents banjo techniques which have not been documented elsewhere in the surviving evidence of mid-nineteenth-century banjo music, and these mirror the various aspects of West African plucked-lute performance practice discussed by Coolen. This presence is strong evidence that Gottschalk's sources were African-American.

The most significant example is the sextuplet ornament that first appears in measure 25 (example 5). Unlike the triplet that first appears in measure 55, which has been documented in the minstrel-era methods (called a "triple strike"¹⁷) and can be executed within the context of the downstroke style, the sextuplet cannot be realized without a momentary switch from downstroking into an up-picking technique. A different inversion of the arpeggiated chord is required—the banjo is much more limited in this regard than the piano—but the sounds are clearly analogous. The right-hand pattern used is one that will be immediately familiar to bluegrass-style banjo players as the "forward-backward roll," and its presence represents the earliest documented use of an up-picking technique in banjo music. What is even more remarkable is that this combination of up-picking and downstroking in the same context is an essential aspect of West African khalam technique—precisely the type of "very fast passage" that would require the index finger to switch from its usual downward picking into an upward motion. This use of up-picking techniques in nineteenth-century African-American banjo styles suggests that later up-picking banjo styles, rather than demonstrating a European influence, may well be derived from an earlier banjo style that mixed up-picking and downstroking, one closely related to West African performance practice.¹⁸

In positing that a technique such as up-picking on the banjo would have African rather than European sources, it is worth pointing out an unfortunate pattern in research on American vernacular music: the assumption of a European or white American source when the existing information is inconclusive. Though virtually all the recent scholarly literature recognizes the banjo's West African origins, the myth of a European or white American source for the banjo has been persistent.¹⁹ A similar myth, based on claims by early minstrels such as William Whitlock and Daniel Emmett of the "Virginia Minstrels," credits the invention of the banjo/fiddle and the banjo/fiddle/percussion ensembles to the minstrels.²⁰ Conway, having found no evidence to contradict the claim, has passed on this questionable information.²¹ J.H. Kwabena Nketia, however, in his *African Music in Ghana*, cites the

Example 5. Measure 25.

T I M T M I T B

T I M T M I T M

"Forward-backward roll"

frequency of bowed-lute, plucked-lute, and percussion ensembles in Ghana,²² and Michael Coolen finds similar ensembles to be common in the Senegambia:

Furthermore, the "nyanyaur" [a bowed-lute] was played not only in ensemble with a plucked-lute, but with a third instrument, a tapped calabash. This trio of nyanyaur, plucked-lute, and tapped calabash was paralleled strikingly by the fiddle, banjo, and tambourine ensembles so popular in the United States in the 19th century. Such American trios must have seemed quite familiar to any slaves taken from the Senegambian region.²³

Indeed, the influence of African bowed-lute performance practice on the evolution of American fiddle music is an area ripe for exploration and will surely call into question the assumption that African-Americans' early adoption of the European violin is necessarily an indication of acculturation.

The only section of "The Banjo" that has heretofore received attention from scholars regarding its correspondence to actual banjo music is the closing thirty-eight measures of the piece, which imitates "the characteristic strumming of the instrument in a boisterous and realistic manner" (example 6).²⁴ Ironically, though strumming may be characteristic of twentieth-century four-string banjo performance practice, it is not at all part of traditional five-

string banjo technique and has generally been regarded as a later development along with the four-string tenor and plectrum banjos, which were developed around the turn of the century. Hence, a strumming texture in the midst of an antebellum five-string banjo piece is provocative, especially considering that references to strumming turn up in the documentary evidence collected by Dena Epstein²⁵ and that strumming is also present in West African performance practice.

Example 6. Measures 187-190.

The musical score consists of five staves. The top staff is a single treble clef line with the instruction "Facilité." above it. The second and third staves are grouped by a brace on the left and contain a piano texture with the instruction "ben misurato." above the first staff and "un poco piu animato. f" above the second staff. The word "martellato." is placed between the second and third staves. The fourth staff is a single treble clef line with a more complex piano texture. The fifth staff is a bass clef line with a simplified piano texture. Below the fifth staff, the strings are labeled T, A, and B. Fingerings are indicated by numbers in parentheses: (2) for the first string, (3) for the second, and 5 for the third. The strumming pattern is indicated by letters B and T: B T B T B T B T B T B T B T (etc.).

This texture does not necessarily represent strumming, however. The simpler version of the piano texture which appears in these closing measures above the more difficult version is easily rendered within the context of downstroking. If this banjo texture is played very fast (in this section of the piece, Gottschalk does indicate a quickening of the tempo to "piu presto" and finally to "prestissimo"), with a very loose right hand and wrist, the resulting sound is more accurately represented by the more difficult piano version. Significantly, an untrained observer would be hard pressed to distinguish this downstroking banjo texture from strumming, but the player has most flexibility with regard to rhythmic and melodic emphasis using this downstroking technique.

The accuracy of the banjo imitations in "The Banjo" invites an inquiry into Gottschalk's sources. I would argue that such sensitive renditions of banjo textures on the piano could be the result only of an intimate knowledge of banjo techniques, and, since there is no evidence that Gottschalk himself played the banjo, he must have worked with someone who did.

Was this hypothetical banjo player a white minstrel show performer or an African-American? All the evidence indicates that this player must have been an African-American, for the minstrels' style lacks many of the techniques represented in op. 15.²⁶ Such a player could easily have been found in New Orleans, where Gottschalk spent a significant amount of time in the two years leading up to the composition of "The Banjo."²⁷ Not only was New Orleans a center for African-American music in the nineteenth century (as it would continue to be in the twentieth), but Conway's study of records of the period suggests that New Orleans was the geographical center for one of two regional African-American banjo styles.²⁸ In New Orleans in 1853-55, Gottschalk not only had the time, but also the access to a thriving tradition of African-American banjo music from which to derive his piano piece.

In fact, op. 15 is best regarded as the culmination of a series of efforts to capture the banjo's style at the keyboard. In 1853-54, Gottschalk composed the so-called "Second Banjo" (published posthumously as op. 82) that demonstrates some of the textures that would appear in his op. 15 and indicates that an interest in transcribing banjo music had occupied him for several years.²⁹ Banjo imitations similar to those in op. 15 can be found in his earliest published compositions as well, such as his op. 2 "Bamboula" (1844-45), which are indisputably derived from African-American music (example 7).

Example 7. "Bamboula," measures 17-20.

The musical score for "Bamboula" measures 17-20 is presented in three systems. The top system shows the piano accompaniment in treble and bass clefs. The treble staff has a dynamic marking of *ff* and the instruction *très rythmé*. The bass staff has a dynamic marking of *p* and includes markings for *Red. V* and *7*. The middle system shows the guitar tablature with fret numbers (5, 0, 0, 5, 4, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0) and fingerings (D, T, D, P, L, B, B, D, T, D, T, D, D, B, B, T, B, B, B, T, T, D, D). The bottom system shows the guitar tablature with fret numbers (5, 0, 0, 5, 4, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0) and fingerings (D, T, D, P, L, B, B, D, T, D, T, D, D, B, B, T, B, B, B, T, T, D, D).

The evidence suggests that "The Banjo" is the most complete document we have of the nineteenth-century African-American banjo tradition. By using the piano and a notation system well-suited for the preservation of piano music, Gottschalk avoided the considerable difficulties the minstrels had in trying to notate the nuances of banjo music directly. Out of his ongoing interest in the banjo, Gottschalk has provided us with a unique document of the instrument's techniques and styles, one far richer than that left by the minstrels. As a result, our understanding of nineteenth-century African-American banjo music is much more complete. In particular, chordal styles and up-picking techniques, previously thought to have been later developments influenced by European music, are aspects of a performance practice brought to this country from Africa along with the banjo itself. This tradition continues to resonate in the vast spectrum of American plucked-lute performance practice, from the banjo styles of the North Carolina Piedmont and the chordal textures of jazz-era four-string banjo music to the fingerpicking blues guitar styles of the Mississippi Delta. As a final note, however, it is important to point out that while Gottschalk preserved the practice of a significant and influential musical tradition that would have otherwise been lost, many other aspects of the tradition—the names of the musicians and their experiences—will unfortunately remain a mystery, as Gwendolyn Brooks so powerfully relates.

Gottschalk and the Grande Tarantelle

[Gwendolyn Brooks, 1988]³⁰

My Black brothers and sisters.
 Nimble slaves in New Orleans,
 dancing to your own music,
 loving your wild art,
 your art, vertical, winnowy, willful—
 you did not know that Gottschalk was watching, was hearing.
 Slouched in the offing, he was.
 Crouching most shamefully, he was.
 Stealthy. Heavy breathing.
 He fell in love with your music.

Died at forty.
 But before that he Created
 Le Banjo (An American Sketch).
 He Created
 piano pieces based on "tunes he heard in the Congo."

Early he stole
the wealth of your art.
Wrongfully
he bore it away to the white side of town—
you never knowing—
and there he doctored the dear purity.
He whitened your art,
and named it his own.
He traded it for money
in Great Halls of whiteness.

He sold it to thronging white company.

The patrons went MAD.
Loving odd music (embroidered savagery),
women wept and wilted.
They cut off and wore his hair.
He became the Lapel-piece Composer.
His concerts and conquests multiplied, he handled many a money,
and he died at forty, an over-musicked man.

He rose across you, Black Beauties.
He stole your art.
He never passed you a penny.
Nor painted your name on a page.

But *hark!*
He inherited slaves from his father and freed them.
All hail the Debt-payer.

NOTES

¹ Robert Offergeld, *The Centennial Catalog of the Published and Unpublished Compositions of Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (New York: Ziff-Davis, 1970), 13.

² Louis Moreau Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist*, ed. Jeanne Behrend (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), 212; Vernon Loggins, *Where the World Ends* (Baltimore: J. H. Furst, 1958), 141.

³ Dena J. Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977).

⁴ Eugenia Cecelia Conway, "The Afro-American Traditions of the Folk Banjo," (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1980; Ann Arbor: UMI, 1980). Other discussions of performance practice can also be found in Jay Bailey, "Historical Origin and Stylistic Developments of the Five-String Banjo," *Journal of American Folklore* 85 (1972): 58-65; and Gene Bluestein, "America's Folk Instrument: Notes on the Five-String Banjo," *Western Folklore* 23 (1964): 241-48.

⁵ Robert B. Winans, "The Folk, the Stage, and the Five-string Banjo in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of American Folklore* 89 (1976): 435. "Downstroking" refers to the technique of sounding the strings: the right hand, cupped somewhat like a loose pistol grip, appears to bounce up and down on the strings. Normally, the back of the index finger strikes or plucks on one or more of the long four strings in a downward motion; the minstrel-era methods called this technique a "stroke" or "downstroke." The thumb also comes down on the strings (often, but not always, on the short fifth "thumb" string), but while the right hand finger is performing the stroke, the thumb rests on the string it is about to play and plucks it with a somewhat downward and outward motion as the hand bounces back up. A "brush" in downstroking banjo technique involves stroking more than one string with the right hand. "Brushless" is therefore a non-chordal, single-note style.

⁶ Unfortunately, he did not recall the name of the banjo player. Frank B. Converse, "Banjo Reminiscences," *The Cadenza* 11 (1901): 4. Cited in Lowell H. Schreyer, "The Banjo in Ragtime," in *Ragtime: Its History, Composers, and Music*, ed. John Edward Hasse (New York: Schirmer Books, 1985), 57. Schreyer reproduces the entire transcription.

⁷ Gottschalk, "The Banjo," *Piano Music of Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, ed. Richard Jackson (New York: Dover, 1973), 26. All of the Gottschalk examples in this article come from this edition. An example of the banjo's idiosyncrasy can be seen in the first example with the offbeat sixteenth notes that appear as F sharps in Gottschalk's version, but are G's (instead of C's) in the banjo transcription. Offbeat notes such as these are always played by the thumb in downstroking, and the fifth string, tuned in this case to g and never fretted in this style, is the only string that could be played in this circumstance, since the fourth string has just been stroked by the index finger. The effect on the actual sound of the passage is not as dramatic as the appearance in notation might suggest.

⁸ The actual tuning of the nineteenth-century African-American banjo probably varied a great deal, but was in any case significantly lower than the modern tuning. Robert Winans has noted that the minstrels tuned their banjos a third or fourth below modern pitch (see Winans, "Early Minstrel Show Music, 1843-1852," in *Musical Theatre in America*, ed. Glenn Loney, [Westport: Greenwood Press, 1984], 71, 73). I tune my gourd banjo down a fourth and play this piece in G; however, most banjo players using modern instruments will be more comfortable with the standard C tuning.

⁹ Miles Krassen, *Clawhammer Banjo* (New York: Oak Publications, 1974), 12. The tablature comes from Krassen's book, but his example is intended for G tuning (gDGBd), which would produce G chords using this pattern. I have transcribed the pattern as if it were being played in the double-C tuning being used elsewhere in the examples.

¹⁰ Conway, 132-33. "Drop-thumbing" refers to the practice of bringing the thumb down to play on one of the long strings; this becomes "double noting" if it used extensively. The "triple strike" is demonstrated in example 2—the triplet ornaments are played by a rapid succession of a downstroke, a left-hand pluck, and another downstroke. The other terms, "hammer-on," etc., are defined in the appendix of this article and may also be found in Larry Sandberg, *Banjo Styles* (New York: Oak Publications, 1978), 9.

¹¹ Aspects of nineteenth-century banjo music not transmitted by the traditional notation are immediately apparent in most performances of "The Banjo." With the image of the brilliant, metallic sound of modern bluegrass or four-string plectrum banjo music in mind, modern performers generally ignore the "moderato" tempo indicated by Gottschalk; they prefer an excessively brisk tempo with a mechanical staccato attack, devoid of the bounce and swing typical of good downstroking banjo players. The African-American banjo of the mid-nineteenth century was itself very different from the metal-strung, twenty-pound, brass-and-maple behemoth that was developed during the first few decades of the 1900s and still the instrument favored by most modern players. In contrast, the African-American banjo sound chamber was usually fashioned

from a gourd with animal skin stretched over the opening cut in the top. Tuned significantly lower than modern banjo tuning and fretless, it had a richer and arguably more expressive sound than modern instruments (see note 8 above, Dena Epstein, "The Folk Banjo: A Documentary History," *Ethnomusicology* 19 [1975]: 349, 358, and elsewhere). Winans's recording of a reconstructed minstrel show band, *The Early Minstrel Show*, New World Records NW 338 (New York: New World Records, 1985), does not feature a gourd banjo, but his sound chamber of animal skin stretched over a wooden frame is also authentic and demonstrates many aspects of the mid-nineteenth-century style and sound.

¹² Winans, "The Folk, the Stage," 428.

¹³ Conway, 110.

¹⁴ Winans, "The Folk, the Stage," 428. It is worth pointing out that several up-picking styles of banjo playing survive among folk musicians, the most famous of which is "bluegrass style." I have found no evidence in my research to support the assumption that these styles are necessarily European in origin.

¹⁵ Michael Theodore Coolen, "Senegambian Archetypes for the American Folk Banjo," *Western Folklore* 43 (1984): 129-30.

¹⁶ Coolen, letter to the author, Nov. 1, 1989.

¹⁷ Conway, 132, 230.

¹⁸ Thus, it is also likely that early blues guitar styles, representing an adaptation of banjo techniques to the European instrument, also demonstrate the survival of West African instrumental performance practice in to the area of recorded blues.

¹⁹ See, for example, Bruno Nettl, *Folk and Traditional Music of the Western Continents*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1973), 214.

²⁰ Hans Nathan, *Dan Emmett and the Rise of Early Negro Minstrelsy* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962), 116-17.

²¹ Conway, 37.

²² J. H. Kwabena Nketia, *African Music in Ghana* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1962), 106.

²³ Coolen, "Senegambian Archetypes," 119.

²⁴ John Godfrey Doyle, "The Piano Music of Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829-1869)," (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1960; Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1960), 137.

²⁵ See Dena Epstein, "The Folk Banjo: A Documentary History," *Ethnomusicology* 19 (1975). For example, from page 356: "When all was ready for the dance, one of them . . . tuned a large guitar, made from a calabash strung with catgut, and began to strum as on a Moorish mandolin" (Pavie 1833: II, 319-20).

²⁶ Melodic analysis of the piece has been inconclusive; in his 1960 dissertation, John Godfrey Doyle finds hints of Stephen Foster's "Camptown Races" in the introduction and closing measures and cites Jeanne Behrend's suggestion of traces of the spiritual "Roll, Jordan, Roll," but "the common use of the pentatonic scale, the similarity of melody and rhythm in all three examples, makes it practically impossible to describe an influence" (p. 136).

²⁷ Loggins, 127-41.

²⁸ Conway, 5-7.

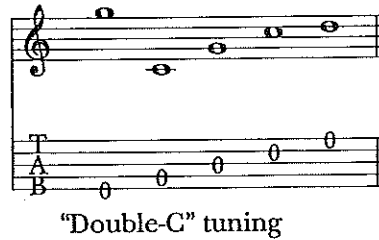
²⁹ Doyle, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk 1829-1869: A Bibliographical Study and Catalog of Works, Bibliographies in American Music*, 7 (Detroit: Information Coordinators, 1982), 267.

³⁰ Gwendolyn Brooks, "Gottschalk and the Grande Tarantelle," reprinted, by permission, from *Gottschalk and the Grande Tarantelle* (Chicago: The David Company, 1988), 9-10.

Appendix

A Note on Reading Banjo Tablature

The staff represents the five strings of the banjo as they appear to the player looking down on them from playing position, with the bottom line indicating the highest-pitched string (the short string). The tuning used in the examples in this article is "double-C" tuning ($g^2-c^1-g^1-c^2-d^2$):



The numbers on the staff represent the frets (or on a fretless banjo, where the fret positions would be). Parentheses around a number indicate that the string is stopped by the left hand at that point, but not sounded. The letters underneath the staff represent various ways of sounding the strings.

- T = thumb (right hand)
- D = index finger, downstroke (right hand)
- I = index finger, up-picking (right hand)
- M = middle finger, up-picking (right hand)
- B = brush (a downstroke with the right-hand finger(s), stroking two or more strings)
- P = pull-off (a left hand pluck on a string previously sounded)
- PL = pluck with left hand
- H = hammer-on (bring a left hand finger down on the fingerboard hard enough to sound the string at that point)
- R = run (play a second distinct note as part of a single right hand index finger downstroke)

