

# Gottschalk Programs Wagner



THANKS TO THE UBIQUITOUS nineteenth-century touring Italian troupes, operas by Rossini began being staged at Buenos Aires from October 3, 1825 (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*), by Bellini at Rio de Janeiro from January 17, 1844 (*Norma*), by Donizetti at Rio de Janeiro from December 28, 1846 (*Lucia di Lammermoor*), and by Verdi at Rio de Janeiro from November 11, 1854 (*Ernani*). For lack of equivalent touring troupes able to mount German-text operas such as *Der Freischütz*, *Tannhäuser*, and *Der fliegende Holländer*, nothing comparable could have occurred in Latin America—even had audiences been musically ready for them in the forepart of the century.

In South America (as in Mexico) Wagner's operas had to make their way by means of instrumental excerpts, not staged performances. Between 1865 and 1869 Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829–1869) served as Wagner's best advance publicity agent in both the western United States and South America. At San Francisco, California, he climaxed his crowded series with a monster concert at Platt's Hall where nine pianists joined in performing the *Tannhäuser* march. The *Daily Alta California*, xvii/5634, of August 9, 1865, qualified this concert as Gottschalk's supreme success of a San Francisco series that had begun May 10, 1865, at Maguire's Academy of Music. Gottschalk, in *Notes of a Pianist* (1964, page 301), remembered the event reviewed August 9 chiefly for his success in silencing an incompetent performer (son of the proprietor of the hall) who played so badly that

the most complaisant ear would have hardly been able to distinguish any shreds of Wagner's theme floating here and there like waifs in the midst of an ocean of false notes, in a deafening storm of continuous pedal.

On September 18, Gottschalk sailed from San Francisco for Panama. At Lima he introduced Wagner to the Peruvian concert public at the Sal6n Otaiza December 22, 1865. Now in cooperation not with the horde of pianists that had joined him at San Francisco but with a mere elite three—the brothers Claudio and Reynaldo Rebagliati and Guillermo Tate—he again triumphed with the same *Tannhäuser* march that was to be a mainstay during the next quadrennium ("Gottschalk en el oeste sudamericano," *Bolet6n Interamericano de M6sica*, 74, November 1969, page 17). Continuing south, Gottschalk captivated the Santiago de Chile public with an extravaganza involving eight pianists on the same march (rapturously reviewed in *Il Ferrocarril*, xi/3283, July 10, 1866, 3:5–6). At Buenos Aires in a concert pair on April 27 and 29, 1868, at the old Teatro Col6n, Gottschalk joined with thirteen local pianists who enchanted the Argentinian concert public with the same *Tannhäuser* march ("Gottschalk en Buenos Aires," *Bolet6n Interamericano de M6sica*, 74, page 8).

Notably enhancing chances for the success of each monster concert, Gottschalk always led up to it at San Francisco, Lima, Santiago de Chile, Buenos Aires, and elsewhere that he programmed Wagner's march, with a series of prior triumphs highlighted by his arrangements of reigning Italian operas. By association, he therefore elevated Wagner's name, when first met, to a plane with already established Italian favorites.

How did Gottschalk himself first become acquainted with Wagner's operas? Had he heard anything by Wagner while himself still in Europe? Gottschalk reached Paris in the summer of 1842, played a private recital there in the Salle Pleyel April 2, 1845, and made his professional debut in the same hall April 17, 1849. After touring Switzerland in 1850 and Spain in 1851-1852, he returned to the United States—landing at New York City January 10, 1853, and playing his first recital there on February 11. Wagner began his wretched Parisian stay three years before Gottschalk reached Paris. Arriving in September 1839, Wagner completed the composition drafts of *Rienzi*, Acts III, IV, and V, between February 15 and September 19, 1840. He finished the *Rienzi* score November 19, and the score of *Der fliegende Holländer* while still at Paris one year later, November 19, 1841. But he was gone by the summer of 1842.

Since Gottschalk had no opportunity to meet Wagner at Paris nor to hear the first Parisian performances of either *Rienzi* (Théâtre Lyrique, April 6, 1869) or *Tannhäuser* (Opéra, March 31, 1861), where then did he have an opportunity to witness any staged Wagnerian opera? Possibly in New York City, where *Tannhäuser* was first mounted April 4, 1859? Whether or not he was then still in the French Antilles, he wrote his Cuban alter ego, Nicolás Ruiz Espadero, a letter dated at Buffalo December 1, 1862, showing that by 1862 he knew not only parts of *Tannhäuser* in their orchestral garb, but also that by 1862 he was familiar with the orchestral beginning of Act II from *Rienzi*. In his letter to Espadero, first published in Luis Ricardo Fors's *Gottschalk* (Havana: La Propaganda Literaria, 1880), pages 403-404, he says that he is making an arrangement of the *Tannhäuser* overture and continues thus:

You cannot conceive the effect with orchestra. The instrumentation is admirable, new, picturesque, and of an unheard of majesty. True, what I most like in Wagner is precisely the orchestral effect. For the rest, there are many things that thus far I do not understand. However, there is a phrase in *Rienzi* that enchants me. It is of celestial inspiration, and belongs to those phrases that intoxicate me, that one could hear always, that make us feel when we hear them for the first time the kind of cold-hot tingling, of unexplainable surprise, that the listener can neither define nor anticipate. The passage begins as follows:

Allegro moderato con pasion.  
M. E. BEMOL

The image shows a musical score for the beginning of the Tannhäuser Overture. It consists of two systems of music, each with a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The tempo and mood are indicated as 'Allegro moderato con pasion.' and the key signature is 'M. E. BEMOL' (one flat). The first system has a '1' above the treble staff and a '2' above the bass staff. The second system has a '3' above the treble staff and a '4' above the bass staff. The word 'Segue el' is written at the end of the second system.

acompañamiento

1 2 3 & &

I do not remember having seen the music. What I have quoted is nevertheless the outline of something more beautiful.

The "something more beautiful" to which Gottschalk referred can be seen in the printed piano-vocal score for the same passage.

### Zweiter Akt. Einleitung und erste Szene.

Moderato con anima.  $\text{♩} = 89$ .

Viol. Fl.  
u. Picc.

Vcl.

*ben tenuto*

G.  
Orch.



Musical score system 1: Treble and bass clefs, key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#), and a common time signature. The bass line features a complex rhythmic pattern with notes marked *pp* and *\*pp*.

Musical score system 2: Continuation of the piano accompaniment with similar rhythmic patterns and dynamic markings.

Musical score system 3: Continuation of the piano accompaniment.

Musical score system 4: Continuation of the piano accompaniment.

Musical score system 5: Continuation of the piano accompaniment.

Musical score system 6: Includes parts for Horn, Violin (Vcl.), Bassoon (Fag.), and strings (Str.). The Horn part is marked *pp*. The strings are marked *p*. The system concludes with the instruction *mit Ob.* (with Oboe).

The image displays three systems of musical notation for Wagner's *Tannhäuser* Overture. The top system features a piano part with a *cresc.* marking and a *p* dynamic. The middle system is labeled *Str.* (strings) and includes *f dim.* and *p* markings. The bottom system includes parts for *Viol. I*, *Fl. Ob.*, *Cl.*, and *Hörn.*, with *f dim.* and *p* markings. The score is written in a key with three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 3/4 time signature.

However the question of Gottschalk's whereabouts in April of 1859 is resolved, it is certain that he had an opportunity six years earlier to hear an orchestral performance of the *Tannhäuser* overture at Boston. He played his ill-fated début in Boston Music Hall Tuesday night October 18, 1853. Having been excoriated by John Sullivan Dwight for playing only his own compositions, he returned next week for a second recital in the same hall that was better treated in *Dwight's Journal of Music*, iv/4, October 29, 1853, page 30, because now Gottschalk "played some classic music and played it well,—with clearness, delicacy and feeling." The classic music referred to by Dwight included the second and third movements of Beethoven's *Kreutzer* Sonata played with Germania orchestra violinist Suck. Gottschalk concluded his second Boston program with "Liszt's fantasia on *Lucia*, the execution of which was wonderful, and electrified the audience," according to reluctant Dwight.

Between Gottschalk's first and second Boston programs the fifty-strong Germania orchestra on Saturday evening, October 22, 1853, gave their "First Grand Subscription Concert" of that season, conducted by Carl Bergmann. Part I began with Beethoven's Fifth Symphony; Part II started with the "Overture to the Grand Romantic Drama *Tannhäuser und der Sängerkrieg auf Wartburg* (First time in America)." In Dwight's review at page 28 in the same October 29 issue that contained his review of Gottschalk's second Boston concert, he called the *Tannhäuser* overture the equal of any of "the great overtures of Mozart, Beethoven, Weber, Cherubini and Mendelssohn"—which for him was high praise indeed. He continued:

The overture is full of power and beauty. The ideas are both original and pregnant, and they are developed with wonderful strength and skill, leaving the conviction on the hearer's mind of an abundance of reserved power. There is a masterly progress in its dramatic interest; it is one of the most exciting overtures we ever listened to, in that respect resembling the *Leonore* [No. 3] of Beethoven, though wholly different in character and working up of ideas.



At their second, third, and fourth subscription concerts of the 1853 season given alternate Saturday nights in Boston Music Hall, always conducted by Carl Bergmann, the Germanians repeated the *Tannhäuser* overture November 5 (*Dwight's Journal*, iv, 40), played the *Rienzi* overture for the first time in America November 19 (*Dwight's*, iv, 55) to enormous audience applause, and capped their season with a "Grand Wagner Night" December 3 (*Dwight's*, iv, 71) "on which occasion the Orchestra will perform none but Compositions of Richard Wagner." Apart from previously played overtures, this first all-Wagner night in America included the first New World performance of excerpts from *Lohengrin* (including the Bridal procession music).

After dissolution of the Germanians Carl Bergmann took the conductorship of the New York Philharmonic, pioneering with the *Tannhäuser* overture in New York April 21 and November 29, 1855, a Recitative and Chorus from *Rienzi* January 8, 1859, and the prelude to *Lohengrin* November 19, 1859. With some concert tour intermissions, Gottschalk was in New York City from May 1855 until January 1857. From December 20, 1855, until June 1856 he indeed "gave the longest series of piano concerts ever [heretofore] given in New York City" (John G. Doyle, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk, 1829-1869: A Bibliographical Study and Catalog of Works* [Detroit: Information Coordinators, Inc., 1982], p. 11).

In January of 1857 he began a tour of the Caribbean isles that this trip took him to Cuba, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, St. Thomas, Gaudeloupe, and Martinique. According to Fors's *Gottschalk*, page 103, he again spent some time in the United States during 1859 before returning to Cuba for a third protracted visit beginning in December 1859. None of his Caribbean concerts included Wagner. Instead, he waited until the close of 1862 to make his first *Tannhäuser* arrangement. Doyle catalogues the march arrangement *ca.* 1863, and quotes Andrew Minor's date for its first New York performance with four pianos at Irving Hall April 20, 1863.