

consolation when I was sad...it would sing me a song of peace."

Freedom was gained by the reverse process of having friendly help to return North.

If Northrup's repertoire included "Negro" songs of the era, he may well have played music that had been disseminated by a unique group of slave workers/entertainers: the Black watermen.

As noted earlier, worksongs were important to maintain a rhythm for the task being performed as well as to maintain spirits. Blacks were firemen and food handlers on the boats, and stevedores on land. They moved along the Eastern seaboard and all of the major rivers: Mississippi, Ohio and Missouri. They moved as far west as Omaha, Nebraska, south to the Gulf Coast, and all along the East Coast. When their work day was over, the boatmen were often called upon to entertain the passengers with a show during dinner, and dance music afterwards. Because these workers/slaves "enjoyed" the greatest mobility, it is entirely possible that they may be responsible for disparate segments of the Black population throughout the States having knowledge of the same songs. The handicap of slavery, then, truly produced a universal language in song.

THOMAS GREENE BETHUNE (1849-1908), known as "Blind Tom" suffered a double handicap, for he was born sightless to a slave named Charity Wiggins in Columbus, Georgia. When his mother was sold to a Colonel Bethune, Tom was "thrown-in" the purchase.

Before long, it was discovered that he could duplicate on the piano any music to which he had listened. As is common in individuals who must compensate for a missing sense, he early developed his very sensitive ear and memory for music performed in his presence. The discovery of this "gift" by Bethune was capitalized on by the owner and his family.

Tom's career began when he was but eight years old

and presented in a recital in Savannah by his master. In the first year of the Civil War, he was required to perform in several concerts for the aid of veterans of the Confederate Army.

He performed at the White House; throughout the United States and in the European capitals. His extensive repertoire included selections from the music of the masters: Bach, Beethoven, Chopin, Mendelssohn, Rossini; from Heller, Liszt, Gottschalk, Hoggman, Thalbert; operatic arias from Verdi, Bellini, Gounod - popular ballads of the day; in short, anything that had been written and he had heard, he duplicated precisely. It was written by Trotter that he could duplicate over seven thousand musical compositions.


At times, his recitals assumed a somewhat carnival air. Three pianos would be placed on stage. While two pianists were "banging away" discordantly, at the third piano, twenty notes were sometimes struck in rapid isolation. Tom correctly produced notes precisely as they had been delivered.

Another example of his showmanship was indicated when he proceeded to play *Yankee Doodle* in B flat with his right hand, *Fisher's Hornpipe* in C with his left, sang *Tramp, Tramp, Tramp* in another key; all in their respective tempo and without effort. His owners also invited members of the audience to submit requests for him to play, which he did with ease. To increase his repertoire, professionals were hired to play for him.

After the death of Colonel Bethune in 1883, his son took over Tom's management. Upon his death, his widow and new husband, Albert Lerche became Tom's agent. His last performance was in 1904. At the time of Tom's death in 1908, he had made several fortunes for the Bethune family.

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