

2008

The Antebellum "Piano Girl" in the American South

Candace Bailey

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.claremont.edu/ppr>



Part of the [Music Practice Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Bailey, Candace (2008) "The Antebellum "Piano Girl" in the American South," *Performance Practice Review*. Vol. 13: No. 1, Article 1. DOI: 10.5642/perfpr.200813.01.01
Available at: <https://scholarship.claremont.edu/ppr/vol13/iss1/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Current Journals at Scholarship @ Claremont. It has been accepted for inclusion in Performance Practice Review by an authorized editor of Scholarship @ Claremont. For more information, please contact scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu.

The Antebellum “Piano Girl” in the American South

Practice in private music far more difficult than that you play in general society.

“Mems for Musical Misses,” *Harper’s New*
Monthly Magazine

Candace Bailey

Copyright © 2008 Claremont Graduate University

Throughout the nineteenth century, the education of young gentlewomen almost always included music lessons, with piano lessons being the most frequently recommended. The social context for these young women pianists, “piano girls,” has been described in several modern works, particularly since Arthur Loesser’s seminal work *Men, Women, and Pianos: A Social History*.¹ In the 1980s, Judith Tick made the term “piano girl” a familiar one in musicological studies, and since that time the idea of the piano girl and her role in society has been explored by others.² Most of these studies describe the social phenomenon of the piano girl, but how she played, whether the repertoire differed based on occasion, and the extent of application has yet to be fully considered.

In order to fully appreciate the context, and by extension the performance practice, of the piano girl, she must be examined within her own culturally specific milieu. In her perceptive work on French women pianists of this period, Katharine Ellis has demonstrated the importance of isolating the phenomenon within a defined time and place, for values do not necessarily

¹ Arthur Loesser, *Men, Women, and Pianos: A Social History* (New York: Dover, 1990).

² Judith Tick, “Passed Away is the Piano Girl: Changes in American Musical Life, 1870-1900,” in *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150-1950*, eds. Jane Bowers, Judith Tick (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois, 1987), 325. James Huneker’s comments originally appeared in *Overtures* (New York, 1904), 286. Tick drew attention to Huneker’s remarks in “The Emergence of a Professional Ethos for Women Composers,” chapter 8 of *American Women Composers before 1870* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983 and 1979), 217ff. For more on Huneker, see Lee Orr, *Alfredo Barili and the Rise of Classical Music in Atlanta* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 48-49. See also works such as Ruth A. Solie, *Music in Other Words: Victorian Conversations*, California Studies in 19th-Century Music 12 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004); and Jewel Smith, “Music, Women, and Pianos: The Moravian Young Ladies’ Seminary in Antebellum Bethlehem, Pennsylvania (1815-1860)” (Ph.D. diss., University of Cincinnati, College-Conservatory of Music, 2003).

translate across borders.³ Scholars of antebellum southern culture have also established that distinct elements shaped the way that participants of that society functioned.⁴ It seems logical, therefore, to study the piano girl of the antebellum South as a discrete subject. This is not to say that piano girls in the northern part of the United States necessarily functioned differently, but rather to contextualize performance and the piano girl in antebellum southern society.

How and what young women played can be discerned from various sources. Sheet music collections provide many titles; those with markings confirm that the works were indeed played, at least in some context. Diaries often provide a better sense of the context in which young women performed. Domestic novelists help complete the picture by demonstrating how society understood musical performance by young women.

One of the best examples of the latter is Susan Petigru King's *Lily: A Novel* (1855), which contextualizes piano playing and young women pianists in general. King grew up in the antebellum South, was brought up to be a belle, and her descriptions of young women and the piano concur with statements found in etiquette books, commentaries, and the like throughout the mid-nineteenth century.⁵

³ Katharine Ellis, "Female Pianists and Their Male Critics in Nineteenth-Century Paris," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 50 (1997): 353-385.

⁴ Among the numerous studies on this subject, see Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988) and *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Christie Anne Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle: Higher Education and Student Socialization in the Antebellum South* (New York: New York University Press, 1994); Walter J. Fraser, Jr., et al., eds. *The Web of Southern Social Relations: Women, Family and Education* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985); and Anya Jabour, *Scarlet's Sisters: Young Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

⁵ King (1824-1875) herself was an interesting paradox among the southern plantation class, and her questionable actions—from publishing novels to flirting excessively—clearly place her somewhat outside the normative behavior of someone of her age and class. Literary historian Karen Manners Smith notes that King was one of a few southern women novelists who waged "a literary war on the belle and the lady...insisted that their section could not afford to cultivate feminine ideals that included vanity, weakness, venality, or self-indulgence." Karen Manners Smith, "The Novel," in *The History of Southern Women's Literature*, eds. Carolyn Perry, Mary Louise Weaks (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), 55.

As described in *Lily*, King's heroine Lily Vere might be typical of the piano girl:

Three hours a day her fresh, young voice, or her pretty, graceful touch was heard at the piano. She was no great musician, but she had taste, if not execution; sang with sweetness and correctness, though her notes were few, and was, in short, one of those unpretending performers to whom one can listen without an hour's praying and prelude.⁶

Lily's cousin, Alicia, with whom she is attending school in New York, continues:

"I know why you plod over your music in that untiring way," Alicia said...Lily patiently deciphering a difficult passage in Thalberg, and Alicia lolling back in the easiest chair she could find...

"Why?" asked Lily, pausing, and turning round for a second, with her finger raised over the next note.

"Because Clarence Tracy has chosen to go mad at Heidelberg over the trombone, or ophicleide, or Jew's-harp, or Heaven knows what, and you intend to perfect yourself so as to perform duets with him."

In this passage, King records society's definition of admirable qualities of the young female pianist. She practices three hours a day, which implies a certain economic background since she does not have to spend her time doing chores. She is "no great musician," which would not be the right words to describe someone from the upper class, for it suggests a profession. She has taste, which signifies culture, presumably attained after some financial support has prepared her. She lacks "execution," somewhat surprisingly since she practices three hours a day, but too much execution seems to connote an undesirable level of testosterone. She is "sweet and correct," with only a "few notes," which distinguishes her from the lower-class of stage performer who might have a wide vocal range, but is no "lady." She is "unpretending," not touting herself. In other words, she is an ideal young woman. That such a young lady would spend three hours a day, and her parents [or guardians, in this case] a considerable sum of money, learning to play the piano not very well begs the question of why?

⁶ Susan Petigru King in *Lily: A Novel*, intro. by Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993; King's novel originally published by Harpers in 1855), 71.

THE PIANO GIRL

As early as 1810, a correspondent of the *Star* noted that women thought it was only necessary to know how to play the piano in order to get a husband, and the excerpt from *Lily* verifies that many indeed thought that to be the case.⁷ Such a pursuit does seem to be on the minds of fathers seeking to find the most suitable matches for their daughters, and the proportionately large amount of money spent on piano lessons, especially when compared to other aspects of education, clearly places a priority on pianistic abilities. (Only harp lessons approached those for the piano in cost; voice lessons were usually considerably less expensive.) Pianos were available in a variety of styles and sizes, which naturally affected the price. A January advertisement in the *Raleigh Register* in 1850 lists pianos in rosewood or mahogany available with metallic plate, with six octaves for \$180-250; with metallic frame and 6.5-6.75 octaves for \$250-300; and finally with a metallic frame and seven octaves for \$300-400. By June, the same firm, Kuhn, Anthony & Co. of Baltimore, offered “grand” pianos from \$500-1000.⁸ Other pianos were also available.⁹ Writing during the war years, Malvina Waring could report happily that her Steinway managed to remain unscathed by the Yankees’ assault on her home.¹⁰

An excellent visual representation of the piano girl and how she was supposed to perform can be seen on the front cover of the “Happy Family Polka” (See Fig. 1). The young woman sits politely, with excellent posture, performing some piece almost solely for her own enjoyment—certainly no one appears to be listening to her. Her performance does not draw attention to her, does not distract the others within hearing, but continues on as pleasant background music.

⁷ Quoted in Guion Griffis Johnson, *Ante-Bellum North Carolina: A Social History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1937), 195; *Star*, 25 October 1810.

⁸ *Raleigh Register*, 5 January 1850.

⁹ David S. Thompson provides images of typical pianos in the South during this period in “Piano Music in the South during the Civil War Period, 1855-1870” (DMA thesis, University of South Carolina, 1997), *passim*.

¹⁰ Malvina Waring, “A Confederate Girl’s Diary,” in *South Carolina Women in the Confederacy*, vol. 1, ed. Mrs. Thomas Taylor (Columbia, South Carolina: 1903), 281.

Fig. 1. "Happy Family Polka" front cover



Indeed, the idea of performance demands explanation if we are to understand the piano girl and why she played what she did. The stage on which the piano girl performed was the

parlor—an area that Karen Halttunen finds stood as a necessary place in a closely proscribed social world. She identifies the “antebellum crisis of social confidence” as a critical moment in the cultural history of the United States, a time when Americans confronted an unfamiliar world of strangers. Proper genteel people needed a new system of cultural forms in order to deal with the moral and psychological pressures with which they were threatened. On the street, proper men and women might meet with undesirable people, without even knowing they were undesirable, because it was relatively simple to masquerade in public as someone worthy of introduction.

The parlor, however, mitigated disastrous situations through a series of elaborate rituals, the knowledge of which indicated approval. The perilous hypocrisy that dwelt in public areas such as the city street was neutralized by the sincerity of social intercourse in the parlor—what Halttunen calls the “sentimental ideal.”¹¹ The parlor, with its myriad rules on proper etiquette, served as a means of establishing “us” and “them.”¹² Most significantly, the parlor itself functions as a stage, but not a public one. It is not a stage for musical and dramatic theatrical performances, but rather one on which the play of society unfolds.

The idea of the parlor as a performance venue in a complex, intertwined world in which reality is masked by the appropriate denial of performing clearly has implications for musical experience. The parlor provided the necessary staging for the performance, and its rules governed how the “theatricality of the performance was politely denied.”¹³ As such, although a young woman may perform musically for the gathered, socially approved, group, she is not a “performer,” at least not in the sense of an opera singer or professional pianist because she is not displaying her accomplishments publicly. Moreover, she would not display with a virtuoso talent.

REPERTORY

A variety of sources assist in determining what music young women played in the parlor. Most surviving antebellum piano music exists as printed sheet music, often bound in collections. These volumes, whose contents usually span a couple of decades, reveal much about what was considered fashionable among southern women. Vocal music often appears alongside piano

¹¹ Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1850-1870* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), 193. The complicated systems of calling cards and their specific uses kept disagreeable people away. On the culture of calling cards, see Halttunen, *Confidence Men*, 112-15 and 194.

¹² Contemporary literature identifies objectionable characters as “confidence men” (“con men”) and “painted women” (women of somewhat loose morals).

¹³ Halttunen, *Confidence Men*, 101.

solos, although some albums are restricted to piano music alone. The few manuscripts that have survived, such as *Cunningham*, mirror the repertory found in contemporary bound collections.¹⁴

Women learned to play from a standard list of piano tutors, not unlike the piano students of the 1950s-70s learned from the John Thompson series. Among the inventory advertised for his Augusta store in 1861, Blackmar includes “Piano Instruction Books” by the following authors: Bertini, Grobe, Beyer, Hunten, Burgmüller, Cramer, Richardson, Latour, and Baker. Records from the South Carolina Female Collegiate Institute confirm that Bertini and Hunten were used as instruction books there.¹⁵ Bound collections also include these names, as the collection belonging to “B. Allston” (SMB 14) currently housed in the Charleston Museum reveals; its contents include Cramer and Hunten.

The bound volume that once belonged to Mary E. Hunt of Jonesville, North Carolina, includes exercises in scales and cadences (up to three flats or sharps).¹⁶ After several showy compositions, the entire *Pupils Daily Exercise, for the Piano Forte. Consisting of Cadences & Scales of Major & Minor Keys. Ascending and Descending. Properly Finger'd* appears. The fingering used is the English-style, with the thumbs marked “x” and “1” for the index finger.¹⁷ While no publication year is printed on these exercises, they date from earlier than most of the other music bound in the volume (1840s-1850s).¹⁸

Occasionally, a single volume contains music by only a few composers. For example, a volume that belonged to Louisa Cheves [McCord] of South Carolina contains works by Clementi and Kuhlau.¹⁹ Four different books are bound into this single volume, and they include *Sonatinen par M. Clementi* (Op. 36, 37, 38. Revues et doigtées par Louis Köhler, pp. 1-67); *Sonatinen von Fr. Kuhlau* (Revidirt und mit Fingersatz versehen von Louis Köhler und F.A. Roitzsch. Band I,

¹⁴ Georgia Historical Society, 1361 SM, uncatalogued music, which dates from c. 1840 and belonged to Sarah Cunningham of Savannah. On this manuscript, see Candace Bailey, “Sarah Cunningham’s Music Book: A Manuscript Collection of Music for a Young Girl of Scottish Descent in Savannah, c. 1840,” forthcoming in *Early Keyboard Music*.

¹⁵ *A Barhamville Miscellany. Notes and Documents Concerning the South Carolina Female Collegiate Institute, 1826-1865. Chiefly from the Collection of the Late Henry Campbell Davis*, ed. Henning Cohen (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1956), 19.

¹⁶ Music Library, New Series, Vol. 13, University of North Carolina.

¹⁷ The German practice of numbering the fingers 1-5 gradually became the standard in the United States during the course of the nineteenth century.

¹⁸ The UNC library estimate of the date is c. 1822.

¹⁹ In the collection of the Charleston Historical Museum, SMB 5.35 and 5.29. Cheves (1810-1879) was an influential southern intellectual of many talents, including writing. See Leigh Fought, *Southern Womanhood and Slavery: A Biography of Louisa S. McCord, 1810-1879* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003).

pp. 69-135) ; *Sonatinen von Fr. Kuhlau* (Revidirt und mit Fingersatz versehen von Louis Köhler und F.A. Roitzsch. Band II, pp. 137-187); and *Beliebte Rondos für Pianoforte von Fr. Kuhlau* (mit fingersatz versehen und herausgegeben von F.A. Roitzsch, pp. 189-240).²⁰

More typical, however, are collections that include a variety of music for both solo piano and solo voice (with piano accompaniment) and occasional choruses. These volumes abound in collections throughout the South and the piano works in them include variations on favorite melodies (including the operatic repertory), dances, sentimental pieces, and an occasional work by what we would consider a “classical” composer (such as Handel). The publisher A.E. Blackmar’s Augusta store advertised the following exemplary collections in 1861: Louis Jullien’s *Music for the Millions*, Oliver Ditson & Co’s *Parlor Companion*, and Elias Howe’s *Drawing Room Dances*.

In bound collections, the most common types of solo pieces are polkas and schottisches, an interesting combination since polkas were not considered quite appropriate music for southern belles at public dances. In contrast, at balls quadrilles were the most acceptable dances, next the schottisches, followed by round dances. According to Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease, “nice girls might perhaps dance the schottische; more daring ones were permitted to waltz; but only the most liberal of chaperones smiled on the polka.”²¹ Jane North, wife of a South Carolinian planter, would not allow her daughter Carey (Jane Caroline North) to either waltz or polka.²² Despite her youthful protestations, later in life Carey continued her mother’s customs for her own daughters, noting it was not the dance but those who “polked” who were the problem. Yet numerous polkas were purchased and played, even for dancing, in private homes. Lucy Brown’s bound collection (see Table 1) contains a typical representation of repertory, including polkas and schottisches.²³

²⁰ I am grateful to Ms. Rebecca McClure of the Charleston Museum for her assistance in working with this volume.

²¹ Jane H. Pease, William H. Pease, *A Family of Women: The Carolina Petigrus in Peace and War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 61. The difference between playing the dance and dancing the dance has not, to my knowledge, been investigated, but is certainly worth consideration.

²² Ibid.

²³ The provenance of Lucy Brown’s book is Clinton, North Carolina.

Table 1. Contents, Piano book of Lucy M. Brown. Clinton (?North Carolina), 1840s-1860s. (UNC-CH, Music Library, 19th-Century Sheet Music Collection, Old Series, Vol. 5)

Composer	Title
Charles D'Albert	"The Bride's Polka"
A. J. Fowler	"Syracuse Polka"
William Vincent Wallace	"Wallace's Polka"
Charles Grobe	"The Aurora Borealis Polka"
A. Gorla	"Miranda, polka des salon"
George C. Stenz	"Heliotrope Polka"
Charles J. Merz	"Deliciosa, or Leonore Polka"
Francis H. Brown	"Happy Family Polka"
Carl Bergmann	"Love Polka"
Henri Herz	"Military Polka"
J. A. Fowler	"Cottage Polka"
Johann Strauss	"Tambour Polka"
G. Marcailhou	"La Catalane Polka"
Albert Holland	"Florida Polka"
Johann Strauss	"Kathinka Polka"
Ricardo Linter	"Jenny Lind's Swedish Polka"
Joseph Labitzky	"La Clochette Polka"
C. Lenschow	"Betty Polka"
Johann Munck	"The Atlantic's Return Schottisch"

J. J. Wm. Bruhns	“The Syanna Schottisch”
Allen Dodworth	“Bolero, or the Dodsworth Schottisch”
Francis H. Brown	“The Rival Schottisch”
George P. Knauff	“Irene Waltz”
Johann Strauss	“Rosabel Waltz”
Charles Grobe	“Couleur de roseWaltz”
Luigi Ricci	“Tadolini’s or Ricci’s Celebrated Waltz”
Henri Herz	“Lutine Valse brillante”
Ferdinand Beyer	“Evening Star Waltz”
A. Wallerstein	“The fairest maiden redowa waltz”
Charles D’Albert	“The New German Redowa”
Henry Bellman	“The Orphean Gallop”
Joseph Munck	“Kossuth Grand March”
Wm. C. Glynn	“Bayeaux’s Quick Step”
Gustave Blessner	“The Union Quick Step”
Heinrich Proch	“Alpine Horn, or Le Cor des Alps”
Charles Grobe	“Salut a New-York”
James Bellak	“La Source Valse”
Vincenzo Bellini	“Norma, selections”

Henri Cramer	“Il Desiderio”
Rossini	“La Cenerentola. Non piu mesta”
Giuseppe Verdi	“Les Charmes de l’Opera Ernani. Four hands, one piano”
Friedrich Burgmuller	“Redowa Polka. Four hands, one piano”
Geo. J. Corrie	“Mignonette Polka. Four hands, one piano”
J. B. Duvernoy	“Deux melodies Italiennes. Four hands, one piano”
Aug. Heilmann	“Electric Light Dance” [1894]
Henri Herz	“La Belle Bohemienne. Four hands, one piano”

Pianists provided music for most gatherings in the home, and such entertainment could occur at any time and in various types of company. Similarly, how music was used varied; young women not only performed piano solos, but also accompanied others or themselves while singing, or provided music for dancing. The company in which young women played could be all female or mixed genders. In the following description, Jane Caroline North (“Carey”) relates a morning event while visiting at Hot Springs in 1851. Her testimony illustrates a typical, if comical, performance situation that occurred early in the day, in mixed company. A married woman first provided the music for dancing, but the pulse being uneven, the diarist stepped in to assist the matron. They played in mixed company, and North assisted a man in dancing lessons. She then sight-read some music, and finally accompanied herself while singing. The hostess joined in the song, much to the humor of those in attendance.

Emily Elliott asked me to Polka with her, Mrs Vanderhorst played for us & a funny morning we had. Mr Elliott & his daughter Caroline who has been indisposed since their arrival were here at first the only persons present & Mr E took lessons in the schottisch from me as Mrs V. played rather irregularly. I played the tune that she might get the time.

Mrs Van went into extacies [sic], pronounced my touch & time perfect. After playing some dances for the Elliotts to practice by I tried at her request some of her music, among others "Sleeping I dreamed of Love," she urged me to sing, refusing was of no avail, the old Piano dreadful, but getting desperate I began (not being much in awe of my judges) what was my consternation when Mrs Van piped up too! Words cannot describe our duet at the end of the first verse Mr Elliott snatched up his hat & rushed from the room. I was suffocating with laughter... [She later played polkas and schottische.]²⁴

These gatherings, whether for dancing or not, often included mixed company, as several other entries from Jane Caroline North's diary reveals.²⁵ Rarely was the music limited to a single type of performance, instead it usually included singing, dancing, and piano solos.

Adaptations of popular songs and opera arias also ranked high in southerners' esteem, as can be seen in the latter pieces in Brown's piano book. These reflect a general trend throughout the entire United States, and many are of the sort described as "brilliant but not difficult." These types of works usually include a number of variations on a popular theme, such as "Auld Langsyne," or melodies from operas, as made fashionable by touring pianists. In particular, Henri (Heinrich) Herz's works appear regularly in collections owned by young women and in other references.²⁶ The passage below, Herz's setting of Rossini's "Cinderella Waltz," typifies the sort of piece one expects to find in books of piano music owned by women in the antebellum South.

²⁴ Jane Caroline North, "First Journal," in *An Evening When Alone: Four Journals of Single Women in the South, 1827-67*, ed. Michael O'Brien (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 171.

²⁵ Ibid., 199. "I played a good deal tonight. Mr Gordon expressed himself as very much indebted" [Saturday, 20 September 1851]. The same is true of a visit to West Point in North's second journal in which she writes that the evening was spent dancing polkas, quadrilles, schottisches, and redowas [Tuesday, 23 August 1852]. A redowa is a dance in a fast triple meter, somewhat like the mazurka.

²⁶ Allen Lott persuasively argues that Herz's style of playing was much more delicate than that of other touring pianists, particularly Leopold de Meyer, so it is not surprising to find his works in volumes for young ladies. (R. Allen Lott, *From Paris to Peoria: How European Piano Virtuosos Brought Classical Music to the American Heartland* [New York and London: Oxford University Press, 2003], *passim*.) Moreover, Ellis discusses a more feminine style of playing (*jeu li  *) in Katharine Ellis, "Female Pianists and Their Male Critics in Nineteenth-Century Paris," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 50 (1997): 379ff.

Fig. 2. "Cinderella Waltz," arr. by Henri Herz

The Celebrated
CINDERELLA WALTZ,
Composed by
Rossini
Adapted for the
Piano Forte
by
H. HERZ.
*Philadelphia Pub. & Sold by Geo. Willig 171 Chestnut St.
& to be had at E. Johns & Co. New Orleans.*

**ALLEGRETTO
MODERATO.**

p *dolce*
poco marcato.

Ped.

f *p*

What is generally missing from most collections of piano music from the mid-nineteenth century owned by young women is what we would consider “classical” literature today. Only rarely does abstract music composed for the piano make its way into a young woman’s book. It is essentially a popular music culture, not an overly sophisticated one.²⁷ Farnham mentions that “by mid-century it was possible to find young women learning to play Beethoven and Schumann,” but this comment needs clarification.²⁸ For example, while a few popular waltzes by Beethoven made their way into collections owned by young southern women, the sonata movements did not. As Ellis finds in her work on French female pianists, Beethoven sonatas were not considered appropriate for women, being entirely too masculine in conception and indeed in the physicality required to perform them.²⁹

This opinion seems to have been the case on both sides of the Atlantic.³⁰ That women were not to perform masculine music is confirmed by a statement in an 1859 etiquette book: “do not sing songs descriptive of masculine passion or sentiment.”³¹ How far this extended to piano music has yet to be determined, but it surely must have had some influence, and the lack of Beethoven and other “masculine” composers in women’s books evinces gender distinctions within the piano repertory.

Pieces by Heller, Cramer, Kuhlau, and Clementi are more typically found in southern women’s volumes than those by Beethoven or Schumann. Of the major composers for piano now considered part of the canon, only Chopin appears in any source I have examined. The manuscript (SMB 34, f. 72) in the Moravian Archives at the Archie K. Davis Center in Salem, North Carolina, contains his D-flat prelude from Op. 28, entitled “Etude” in the manuscript; this is hardly one of the composer’s most demanding pieces. The source itself is exceptional for numerous reasons, but chiefly because it represents the musical education and expectations of

²⁷ See Katherine Preston’s comments on the changes in American music, particularly a growing divide between vernacular and cultivated music, at this time. Katherine K. Preston, *Opera on the Road: Traveling Opera Troupes in the United States, 1825-60* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993 and 2001), 317.

²⁸ Christie Farnham, *Education of the Southern Belle: Higher Education and Student Socialization in the Antebellum South* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 87.

²⁹ Ellis, “Female Pianists and Their Male Critics,” *passim*. In 1819, Sophia Hewitt (daughter of James and sister of John Hill) performed Beethoven’s Sonata in A-flat, Op. 26, in Boston, but this was much the exception rather than the rule. Even when Thalberg played the German “classics,” he limited his choices to about three: Beethoven’s *Moonlight* Sonata, Chopin’s Funeral March, and some of the Mendelssohn *Songs without Words*. Loesser, *Men, Women, and Pianos*, 466 and 502.

³⁰ Tick notes advice against playing sonatas in the parlor, quoting the *Boston Musical Visitor*, 7 July 1844, p. 113; Tick, *American Women Composers*, 30.

³¹ Emily Thornwell, *Lady’s Guide to Perfect Gentility in Manners, Dress, and Conversation, in the Family, in Company, and at the Piano-Forte, the Table, in the Street, and in Gentlemen’s Society...* (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1859), 97.

women in Moravian seminaries (including the Salem Female Academy where at least two of the owners of this book, Amelia Adelaide Van Vleck and her sister Lisetta Maria attended).³²

The case of Belle Hannah McGehee illuminates in many aspects of southern pianists. She lived on Burleigh Plantation, near Milton, North Carolina, and her piano book was compiled in the 1850s and 1860s.³³ McGehee's volume includes only piano music, but most of it requires a high level of technical proficiency.³⁴ She apparently played music more difficult than the simple polka, yet she did not include compositions by Beethoven or Schubert among her repertoire.

Table 2. Table of Contents, Piano Book of [Bell]e Hannah McGehee. Burleigh, near Milton, North Carolina, 1850s-60s. (UNC-CH Music Library, 19th-Century Sheet Music Collection, New Series, Vol. 8)

Composer	Title
Louis Moreau Gottschalk	"The Banjo"
A. Henselt	"La Gondole, op. 13/2"
Richard Hoffman	"By the sad sea waves"
Anon.	"Threeb, Waltz for the Piano" [MS, ?owner or teacher]
Gustav Lange	"Pure as snow, op. 31"
Richard Hoffman	"La gazelle"
Hermann A. Wollenhaupt	"Grand March de concert, op. 19"
W. Kruger	"La harpe eolienne, op. 25"

³² This particular source includes works composed by the sisters themselves, as well as several works by Stephen Heller. The Moravians in Salem seemed to differ in attitudes towards women in general, and the musical education and opportunities to use that education far exceeded what was available and expected in most institutions and should not be understood as exemplary of most southern training. On the education of women in Moravian institutions, see Smith, "Music, Women, and Pianos: The Moravian Young Ladies' Seminary."

³³ Music Library, New Series, Vol. 8, University of North Carolina.

³⁴ Other identified collections in the UNC Music Library also originate in sparsely populated areas, such as Clinton and Jonesville, North Carolina.

J. Blumenthal	“Les deux anges”
James M. Wehli	“March des Amazones”
S. Thalberg	“Home! Sweet home!, op. 72”
Louis Moreau Gottschalk	“The last hope”
Alfred Jaell	“Le carnaval de Venise, op. 22”
Hermann A. Wollenhaupt	“Mazeppa, Grand Galop de Concert, op. 43”
William Vincent Wallace	“Grande Polka de Concert”

Burleigh Plantation was in Caswell County, on the North Carolina-Virginia border; nearby Milton was on the railroad route in Danville, Virginia—a major rail center during the mid-nineteenth century. While its relative obscurity today places Burleigh far from the musical life of Charleston or even Richmond, its significance as a place of commerce can be demonstrated the advertisement in the *Raleigh Register* mentioned above (5 January 1850). The list of North Carolina references for the piano dealers of Kuhn, Anthony & Co. of Baltimore includes both Mr. Holden and Dr. Thornton of Milton.³⁵ Even though removed from any major town, piano girls in and around Milton obviously had opportunities to acquire the most up-to-date music and instruments available, a fact that suggests an avid interest in piano music for young women.

PIANO LESSONS

In schools, piano instruction often cost almost as much as full tuition in other subjects, and sometimes it even equaled tuition. The list of expenses from the Danville Female College in Kentucky, 1862-1864 exemplifies the various costs a young woman could incur while at school. In 1855, twenty-five dollars covered tuition, but piano or guitar added another twenty-five for instruction and a five-dollar fee for rental of the instrument at Mansfield Female College in Louisiana.³⁶ These numbers typify the rate for music lessons at seminary. At the South Carolina

³⁵ Moreover, Belle McGehee married the music professor Robert S. Phifer after the war. The composer Frederick Delius spent some time at their home as he made his way north from Florida, marking Burleigh as perhaps not-quite-so-average when it came to music on the plantation.

³⁶ Harp instruction surpassed this at forty dollars each session. Farnham, *Education of the Southern Belle*, 87.

Female Collegiate Institute, which was considered an expensive school, piano instruction was \$50, use of the piano was \$6, and “introduction to the Music Department” was \$5. These prices can be compared to board, which cost \$67.50, dancing for \$10, and all other subjects (together) \$32.³⁷ Such numbers testify to the importance attached to piano instruction, and they remain high even through the economically oppressive war years.

Lessons could be arranged in a number of ways when young women were not in school. In smaller towns, a school’s teachers were often members of the owner’s family. Writing retrospectively in the latter years of the nineteenth century, Letitia Burwell comments that “Mrs. Lomax had several accomplished daughters who assisted in her school, and the harp, piano, and guitar were household instruments.”³⁸ Independent music teachers often inhabited larger towns. When James Aykroyd moved from New Bern to Hillsborough in 1823, he advertised lessons on the piano (\$12 a quarter with lessons every other week) and voice (\$3 for the same amount and frequency of lessons).³⁹ In Savannah, Mlle Angela de Busserole “from Paris” advertised in 1861 that she would teach French, singing, and piano “at Mrs. Jacob Miller’s, 108 S. Broad St. or at the residence of the ladies who may favor her with their patronage.”⁴⁰ Not surprisingly, in the most proper homes, men tutors were not left alone with women pupils, as the case of Anita Dwyer Withers shows: “I commenced taking Music lessons from Mr. DeConoel [C.T. DeCoëniél]. Miss Susan sits in the room” [Monday, 21 October 1861].⁴¹ At this time, Withers was married, not single, but her diary supports the code of conduct in the South that restricted women from being alone with men not of their own household, whether or not they were married.

Still other music teachers actually became a part of the household of the students. Letitia Burwell records two thoughts concerning a German professor who lived with the family in *A Girl’s Life in Virginia before the War*. How much influence foreign teachers’ choice of repertory had on southern taste has yet to be explored, but clearly, from Burwell’s statement, her German music professor brought new music with him. Burwell is writing from Bedford County, in the western region of Virginia (just below the Shenandoah Valley), which shows how far such foreign-born musicians were willing to travel for work. Similarly, Withers begins her diary in

³⁷ *A Barhamville Miscellany*, ed. Cohen, 15-16. The editor seems to be quoting 1828 prices. Here again, guitar or harp lessons are more than piano, running \$60.

³⁸ Letitia M. Burwell, *A Girl’s Life in Virginia before the War* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1895), 192.

³⁹ Advertised in the *Hillsborough Recorder*, 25 June 1823. Aykroyd had previously run a music store in New Bern; Music Library, Old Series, Vol. 29, University of North Carolina, includes several pieces with his dealer’s stamp.

⁴⁰ *Savannah Newspaper Digest*, 1 January 1861.

⁴¹ Anita Dwyer Withers Diary, 1860-1865, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, 21 October 1861.

San Antonio, Texas, a fact that validates the significance musical accomplishment held in the lives of young women all over the South. This phenomenon is even more striking when one considers that most women of the plantation class were not given the opportunity to meet with other women of similar social standing, but led rather isolated lives on remote plantations miles from anyone of similar stature.⁴²

PLAYING LIKE A “LADY”

These comments demonstrate devotion to a degree of musical accomplishment, but they do not indicate the level of playing these women achieved. If we were to judge from the available sheet music that falls under the titles “polka” or “schottische,” we might conclude that for the most part, very few technical demands were made on these young women.⁴³ Evidence suggests, however, that a substantial percentage of these young women rose above that level, and, on further examination, clues surface revealing a much more advanced repertory that begs still further questions of deportment and audience. Jane Caroline North casually included a reference to sight-reading for the Vanderhorsts (above)—as if doing so was nothing extraordinary. The piece in question is given in part in Figure 3. It is not particularly challenging, but if she is playing and singing simultaneously and apparently with no trepidation, we are able to judge her abilities somewhat. She probably represents the piano girl. But a host of references in other diaries and in sheet music collections themselves reveals a significant undercurrent of serious accomplishment, far beyond the basic expectations of the piano girl—one in which talent is allowed to flourish. More significantly, it appears that this accomplishment was a personal one, rarely vetted before the public, as surviving recital programs of the period do not include the same repertory.

⁴² On the physical isolation of southern white women, see Joan E. Cashin, “Into the Trackless Wilderness: The Refugee Experience in the Civil War,” in *A Woman’s War: Southern Women, The Civil War, and the Confederate Legacy*, ed. Edward D.C. Campbell, Jr. and Kym S. Rice (Richmond: The Museum of the Confederacy, 1996), 32ff.

⁴³ Some of the larger, grander dances composed or arranged for concert performance hardly fit the bill for dancing in the parlor and almost certainly would not have been used as such.

Fig. 3. "Sleeping I Dreamed Love," by Wallace

12

SLEEPING I DREAMED LOVE.

Words by M^{rs} M. E. Hewitt. Music by W. V. Wallace.

ANDANTE
CON
EXPRESSIONE

Solfeggio.

Sleep...ing, I dream'd love— dream'd love, of thee;

O'er the bright waves, love, float...ing were we;

1378.

That some young women aspired to a more difficult repertory is certain. When she had the opportunity to hear Louis Moreau Gottschalk (“the young Créole”) play at a “grand concert” in Washington, DC, Virginia Clay-Clopton noted: “the concert was a memorable one... At that time Gottschalk’s popularity was at its height. Every concert programme contained, and every ambitious amateur included in her repertory, the young composer’s ‘Last Hope.’”⁴⁴ Most of the repertory falls easily under the fingers, even the more technically demanding pieces. While many of the simpler arrangements are in C, many of the moderately-difficult works are in a flat key, such as A-flat or possibly D-flat major. Such keys lend themselves comfortably to certain types of passagework and figuration, such as extended arpeggios on tonic and dominant, and contain an equally convenient closely-related key for the trio or B section.

Hand crossing is surprisingly common, begging the question of how one accomplishes such a physical move in a low-cut evening dress, presumably with a potential beau standing nearby if not over the shoulder (see Figure 4). Circumstances suggest that this type of passage was either not played in mixed company or that a more conservative attire—such as a walking costume—was the norm for performance of solo piano music in the parlor. (Such dressing for piano performances seems reasonable, considering that many of the spontaneous performances in the venue were the results of the ubiquitous calling on acquaintances that was necessary in southern cities and towns.) Many contemporary portraits exhibit young women in high-necked bodices (often of a dark color), often with a lace or white collar around the throat. While this sort of dress would not expose the performer too much, the fact that the armscye was cut so low that arms could not be lifted too high further complicates the physical gesture and suggests that playing lengthy figurative passages that extend the entire keyboard, weighty octave playing (as might include the use of the upper arms and even back), and cross-hand sections would not have been played in mixed company.

⁴⁴ Virginia Clay-Clopton, *A Belle of the Fifties; Memoirs of Mrs. Clay, of Alabama, Covering Social and Political Life in Washington and the South, 1853-66* (Chapel Hill: Academic Affairs Library, University of North Carolina-CH, 1998), 49. In this same entry, Clay comments on how fortunate she was to be able to hear Grisi and Mario, Bozio, Jenny Lind, Parepa Rose, Forrest, Julia Dean, Agnes Robertson, and later (p. 102), Anna Bishop, Ap Thomas, Bochsa. S. Frederick Starr recalls this anecdote concerning the popular work: “Once [“The Last Hope”] hit the music stores...the composition was a success...Audiences who in 1853 had wanted only pyrotechnics at fortissimo volume now demanded that Gottschalk play this melancholy air at every concert. Soon ‘The Last Hope’ began to dog Gottschalk mercilessly. He admitted that ‘even my paternal love for “The Last Hope” has succumbed under the terrible necessity of meeting it at every step, of playing it every evening, and hearing it played every day (Gottschalk).’ When he deleted it from the program in a small Wisconsin town, someone passed up a note from the audience asking, “Will Mr. Gottschalk oblige thirty-six young ladies who have studied ‘The Last Hope’ by playing said piece?” Soon he abandoned himself to fate and accepted the fact that “The Last Hope” was one among other inevitable afflictions of my life.” S. Frederick Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 195. See also Loesser, *Men, Women and Pianos*, 500-501.

Fig. 4. Wood engraving from February 1851 edition of *Godey's Lady's Book*



Other aspects of antebellum piano literature demand further questions. A number of the more difficult pieces require large leaps from the lower bass to at least the middle of the keyboard in a fast tempo, which is hardly ladylike. Additionally, many compositions include dynamic levels of *ff*, or greater, which further strain the idealized picture of the graceful, quiet, subdued southern belle. The raucous Verdi-like accompaniment of *Fantaisie pour le piano sur le Bonnie Blue Flag*, attributed to Cardona but dedicated to Mary Célèste Dimitry (who also, curiously, held the copyright) provides an example of how difficult it is to reconcile the inherited vision of the piano girl with the music she played. Granted, we have no evidence that Dimitry actually played this work, but the fact that she owned the copyright suggests that she did.

Fig. 5. *Fantaisie pour le piano sur le Bonnie Blue Flag*, arr. by A. Cardona

8

Ped. *f* Ped.

Ped.

Agitato. *cres - cen - do.* Ped. *f*

Ped. *p* *cres - cen - do.*

7.

Whether or not we can positively prove that a woman played this work, there are others where the owner's name appears on the cover and fingerings or other markings confirm that the piece was indeed played, almost certainly by the owner.

A composition that challenges the propriety and docile nature of the southern belle's behavior is "Freedom's Tear Reverie" by the famous Confederate (by way of Europe) composer Theodore von La Hache. La Hache dedicated this work to his pupil, Miss Bettie Mahan, and it is tempting, if not provable, that she would have tried to play it. On the other hand, why would La Hache dedicate such a gymnastic composition to a young female student—would not a polka or waltz be more appropriate? Simple parlor gems, as many pieces were labeled, would seem more suitable for a young lady, not this grandiose "reverie." The technical feats include very fast scalar passages, repeated notes in octaves, large chordal leaps, and chromatic octave figures marked fortissimo/sforzando and stretto, and two places where the right hand trills (fingers 4 and 5) while simultaneously playing a melodic line.

Furthermore, the sentiments required to make this work believable are assiduously marked in the score. Among the markings are *Con tristezza*, *agitato*, *con molto sentimento*, *strepitoso*, *martellato*, *con fuoco*, and a peculiar *dolce marcato*. These indications challenge ideas about southern women and, if women did play these types of pieces (and evidence suggests that they did), several conundrums arise. How can one remain ladylike while playing *martellato* and *con fuoco*? Such physical display seems beyond the demure southern belle, and as seen above, her clothing did not permit it. Moreover, an anonymous etiquette manual of 1839 advises young women not to raise their arms above the waist, not to let their hands appear stiff, and to avoid excessive bodily activity. These physical motions were forbidden. In contrast, they were urged to use their hands only in expressive ways, and not too often.⁴⁵ As such, the markings in "Freedom's Tear Reverie" seem to go beyond the reserved nature that society demanded of belles.

⁴⁵ Halttunen, *Confidence Men*, 97.

Fig. 6. "Freedom's Tear Reverie," p. 5, by La Hache

Fig. 6. "Freedom's Tear Reverie," p. 5, by La Hache

The musical score is written for piano and features five systems of music. The first system includes the instruction "Fieramente." and "rall". The second system includes "ffz", "Ped.", "stringendo.", and "rall.". The third system includes "ffz", "stringendo.", "rall.", and "con fuoco.". The fourth system includes "ffz", "Ped.", "lento.", "stretto.", and "rall.". The fifth system includes "pp", "Ped.", and "rall.". The score is marked with various dynamics, articulation marks, and performance instructions.

Such a work as La Hache's "Freedom's Tear Reverie" could not be accomplished if the performer adopted a stance such as that demonstrated in the February 1863 edition of *Godey's Lady's Book*.⁴⁶

Fig. 7. Wood engraving from February 1863 edition of *Godey's Lady's Book*



ON "BRILLIANT EXECUTION"

Clay-Clopton further comments that among the attendees at a command performance at the White House by Blind Tom, the famous black pianist, were Miss Phillips of Alabama and her cousin Miss Cohen of South Carolina, "who were brilliant amateur players with a local

⁴⁶ In "Music and the Feminine Sphere: Images of Women as Musicians in 'Godey's Lady's Book', 1830-1877," *Musical Quarterly* 75 (1991): 103-129, Julia Eklund Koza refers often to musical ability being a path to courtship, and on the feminine characteristics of the appropriate music for young women. She does not comment on the issue of physical deportment and piano repertory.

reputation.”⁴⁷ These two “pianists” performed a “brilliant and intricate duet” (unnamed).⁴⁸ Such works incorporate some of the devices noted earlier, such as beneficial key choices, or others such as staccato melodic lines when trilling in the same hand.

The use of the label “brilliant” twice in one entry brings to mind descriptions of piano music made by various writers throughout the nineteenth century. As early as 1823, the editor of the *Monthly Magazine of Music*, a London publication, appealed to music professors not to be persuaded by “importunate mothers” who demand that “the *showy* thing of three minutes must be procured.”⁴⁹ Indeed, in *Men, Women and Pianos: A Social History*, Loesser includes a section (#21) entitled “Brilliant but not difficult,” as he examines music and music pedagogy in England.⁵⁰ He traces the phrase “brilliant but not difficult” to Moscheles, who complained that mothers of students asked for “something with a pretty tune in it, brilliant but not difficult.”⁵¹ Ellis also describes such pieces in vogue in Paris at this time. She draws attention to the marketing tradition of variations on popular operatic themes to women as “brilliant but not difficult” pieces in relationship to Herz and others, noting that in these pieces “the female pianist gives the impression of displaying more technique than she really has.”⁵² Advertisements by American publishers and critiques by American reviewers attest that these works were equally popular in the United States.

An 1861 advertisement from Blackmar’s firm illustrates how publishers marketed such works. When listing “Her Bright Smile Haunts Me Still; Improvisation,” a composition by the most prolific composer in New Orleans at the time, La Hache, Blackmar describes it as “Brilliant, Showy and moderately difficult.” Another representative example of the “brilliant but not difficult” piece is *La Louisianaise* by the composer William Vincent Wallace.⁵³ Composed for and dedicated to “Mme. G. Johns” of New Orleans, its subtitle is *Valse Brillante*—which appears in larger letters than *La Louisianaise*. Despite the indication that the work is “brilliant,” it in fact does not require much more than basic pianistic ability. The first page (Example 5)

⁴⁷ Mary Branch Jones Polk also mentions Blind Tom, noting that she brought him to Columbia, South Carolina, to perform at a benefit for the Hospital Association during the war. Mary Branch Jones Polk, *Memories of a Southern Woman* “*Within the Lines*,” and *Genealogical Record*, 27.

⁴⁸ Clay-Clopton, *A Belle of the Fifties*, 104.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Loesser, *Men, Women and Pianos*, 290-291.

⁵⁰ Loesser, *Men, Women and Pianos: A Social History*, 291-292.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 291. Loesser dryly remarks that this phrase “could be the slogan of the nineteenth century.”

⁵² Katharine Ellis, “Female Pianists and Their Male Critics in Nineteenth-Century Paris,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 50 (1997): 356n.

⁵³ This work is not among Wallace’s listed works in biographical references, but is part of the collection at the Charleston Museum, SMB 21.29.

A different marketing ploy, but one intimately tied to the present subject, is the use of the names of locally known amateur women pianists. An illuminating example of this practice exists in two piano solos dedicated to Rose Kennedy of New Orleans, by two different composers. Kennedy's pieces include William Vincent Wallace's *Grande Polka de Concert* (dedicated to "Madlle. Rose Kennedy (de la Nouvelle Orleans" in 1850) and Maurice (Moritz) Strakosch's *Sea Serpent Polka* (dedicated to Miss Rose Kennedy of New Orleans in 185-).⁵⁴ That two works by two different composers were dedicated to the same woman in New Orleans in the 1850s suggests that she may have been quite a skilled performer. Eliza Ripley mentions Rose Kennedy in some detail in *Social Life in Old New Orleans*, calling her piano playing "incomparable." She notes that Rose did indeed play the *Sea Serpent Polka* for her friends, noting that "it was not an inspiring bit of music, but her wonderfully deft touch would make melody out of anything that had crotchets and quavers in it." She also refers to the *Grande Polka de Concert* by Wallace.⁵⁵

Ripley further comments on piano instruction in New Orleans at this time. She notes that one teacher insisted on marking up the students' music to the point that some sheets "are so spotted with black pencil marks they are a sight!" Even more intriguingly, Ripley says that, in addition to being required to learn Strakosch's *Mazourka Sentimentale* and E. Johns's *La Valse Autrichenne*, all Mme. Boyer's students learned "other bits a thousand times more difficult and intricate, like Gottschalk's *Bamboula*."⁵⁶

This remark again demonstrates the paradox between how southern belles were supposed to behave and how they may have appeared when playing the piano. If Ripley and her acquaintances did indeed learn Gottschalk's famous *Bamboula*, they must have challenged southern attitudes towards ladylike behavior. An account of the composer and his music in the *Graham's Magazine* (1853) acknowledges that *La Bamboula* is Gottschalk's "most original" and "most national" composition. In order to appreciate it, the author of the article, H. Didimus (Edward Henry Durell), recommends that one watch the *Bamboula* being danced, in order to fully appreciate its wildness.⁵⁷ He continues:

⁵⁴ Strakosch (1825-1887) was an American impresario who moved to New York in 1848 from what is now the Czech Republic. He later married Adelina Patti, one of the most popular singers of the century, and he toured with her and other artists (such as Ole Bull) during the middle years of the century. The latter copy of this work lists its origins as Nashville, and the contemporary owner's name was Martha.

⁵⁵ Eliza Ripley, *Social Life in Old New Orleans: Being Recollections of My Girlhood* (New York: Appleton & Co., 1912), 148.

⁵⁶ Ripley, *Social Life in Old New Orleans*, 151.

⁵⁷ After taking a degree in law from Harvard in 1831, Durell (1810-1887) moved to the South in 1834 (Mississippi) and to New Orleans in 1836. He remained there until the secession, which he adamantly opposed. He contributed to periodicals with some frequency and authored several other texts.

Let a stranger to New Orleans visit, on an afternoon of one of its holydays, the public squares in the lower portions of the city, and he will find them filled with its African population, tricked out with every variety of a showy costume, joyous, wild, and in the full exercise of a real saturnalia. As he approaches the scene of an infinite mirth, his ear first catches a quick, low, continuous, dead sound, which dominates over the laughter, hallo, and roar of a thousand voices, while the listener marvels at what it can be doing there. This is the music of the *Bamboula*, of the dance *Bamboula*; a dance which takes possession of the negro's whole life, transforms him into a savage of the banks of the Congo, and reinvests him with all the instincts, the sentiments, the feelings which nature gave to his race, to sleep for awhile, to be partially obliterated by the touch of civilization, but to remain forever its especial mark. Upon entering the square, the visitor finds the multitude packed in groups of close, narrow circles, of a central area of only a few feet; and there, in the centre of each circle, sits the musician, astride a barrel, strong-headed, which he beats with two sticks, to a strange measure incessantly, like mad, for hours together, while the perspiration literally rolls in streams and wets the ground; and there, too, labor the dancers, male and female, under an inspiration or a possession, which takes from their limbs all sense of weariness, and gives to them a rapidity and a durability of motion that will hardly be found elsewhere outside of mere machinery. The head rests upon the breast, or is thrown back upon the shoulders, the eyes closed, or glaring, while the arms, amid cries, and shouts, and sharp ejaculations, float upon the air, or keep time, with the hands palling upon the thighs, to a music which is seemingly eternal. The feet scarce tread a wider space than their own length; but rise and fall, turn in and out, touch first the heel and then the toe, rapidly and more rapidly, till they twinkle to the eye, which finds its sight too slow a follower of their movements. Ah! the abandon of the *Bamboula*; the transformations of the *Bamboula*; no wilder scene, no more exciting exhibition of the dominancy of sheer passion, uncultivated, savage, is to be found in the tales of travel-era, It is the morale of this; the poetry of this, with all its associations, that Gottschalk strove to embody in his composition.⁵⁸

Later in the same article, *La Bamboula* is said to be capable of exciting young men's emotions beyond control, with its suggestion of dancing girls with tambour and cymbal.

This wild dance, associated with African dance movements, carries associations that are far removed from those considered appropriate for young women of the upper classes. Authors of etiquette manuals recommend that young ladies not move quickly, with broad gestures, not even to lift their arms above the level of their waists. This dance personifies a completely opposite representation. Were the young women who played *La Bamboula* exerting some sort of resistance to tradition? For whom did they play such a composition?⁵⁹ Eliza Ripley comments

⁵⁸

H. Didimus (Edward Henry Durell), *Graham's Magazine*, 1853, pp. 64-65.

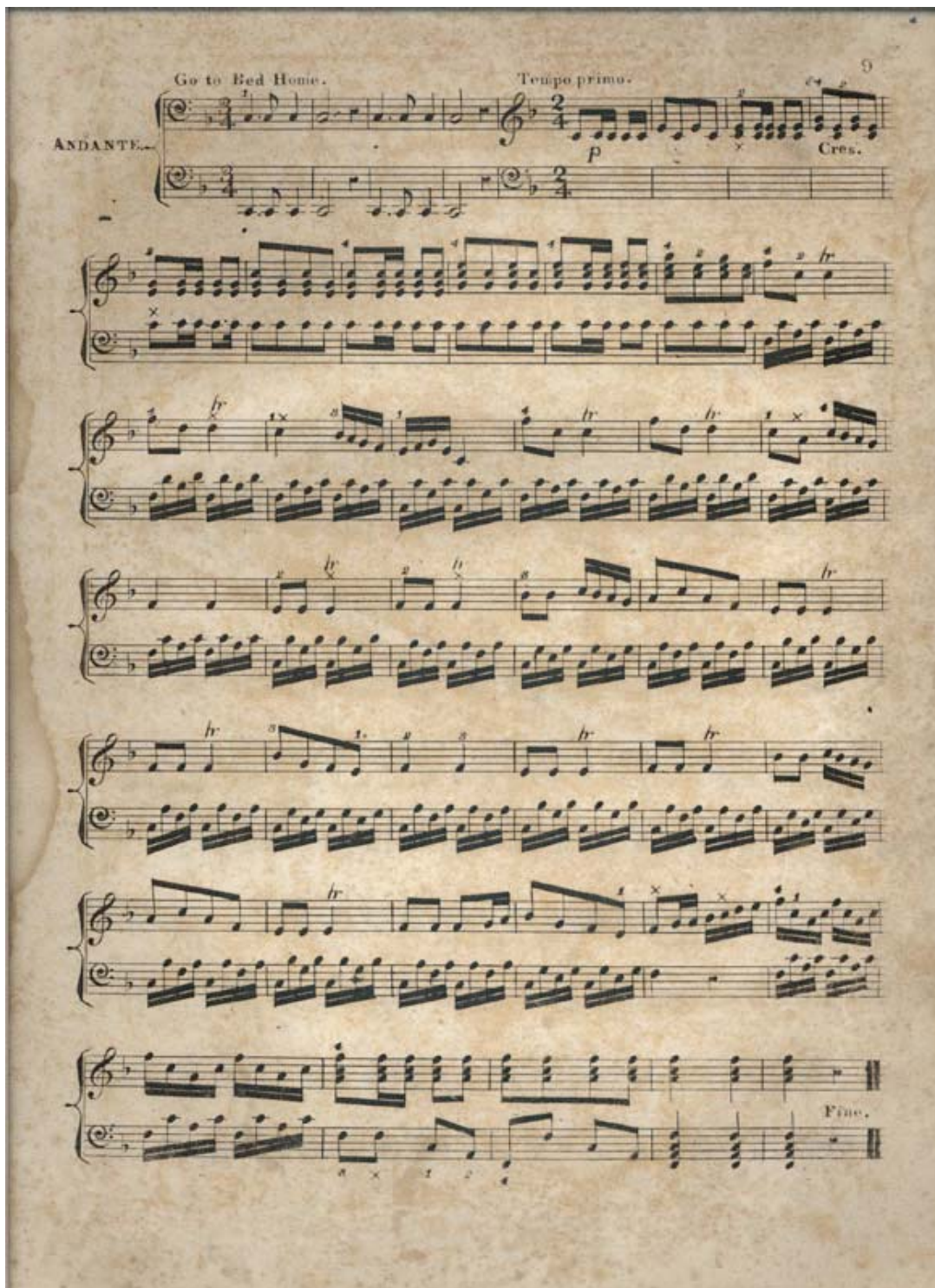
⁵⁹

As with other pieces described in this chapter, *La Bamboula* includes markings of *fff* as well as *tutta la forza* and *pesante*.

earlier in her diary that once she performed the *Battle of Prague*—a work composed in the mid-eighteenth century—and ended it with a “loud bang” (See Fig. 9, following page). The assembled listeners responded with an extended silence that embarrassed her.⁶⁰ If the *Battle of Prague*, an old war-horse over a century old, had to be handled properly, how, then, did she manage *La Bamboula*?

⁶⁰ Ripley, *Social Life in Old New Orleans*, 148.

Fig. 9. Conclusion of *The Battle of Prague*, by Frantisek Kotzwara (1757)



One woman who practiced and studied piano more than was required by contemporary standards was Anita Dwyer Withers. Her diary begins on 4 May 1860 with: “May the 1st was the

first time that I went down to breakfast with my Husband since the birth of our baby. That morning I practised [sic] on the Piano, and took a ride in the afternoon.”⁶¹ Such an entry is typical of her entire diary, for practicing and lessons appear numerous times therein. At the time she began the diary, Withers was living in San Antonio, Texas, and the fact that such an accomplished pianist bloomed in far reaches of the country is yet another fascinating detail yielded by this study. She played for guests, both men and women, and often accompanied her brother Joe, a violinist.⁶²

After a short stay in Washington, DC, the Withers family moved to Richmond when the war broke out. While in Richmond, Withers began piano studies with the DeCoëniél, beginning in October 1861, after he had come to her suggesting that she study with him.⁶³ Tellingly, despite many days of not feeling well for various reasons, Withers rarely missed her piano lessons: “I had a bad head ache all day Friday, but took my Music lesson, and was particularly stupid about it. I went to bed about 5 O’clock” [Friday, 1 November 1861].⁶⁴ She again had lessons the following Tuesday and Friday. After having a tooth pulled out on November 13th, she “remained in bed for two days, missed one Music lesson;” however, by Tuesday the 19th, Withers was well enough for the next lesson.⁶⁵

Later in that month (29 November 1861), Withers wrote that she began learning *Le Réve* [sic].⁶⁶ Published in New York in 1843 and composed by William Vincent Wallace (his op. 21), the work is dedicated to Madame Coralie Frey of New Orleans.⁶⁷ It far exceeds the demands of the piano music described up to this point in this article, with chromatic octaves simultaneously in both hands, multiple occurrences of twelfths to be reached in one hand (quickly), tremolos at fortissimo, intricate workings for fingers 3, 4, and 5 in the left hand, tremolos spanning a twelfth,

⁶¹ Anita Dwyer Withers Diary, 4 May 1860.

⁶² See, for example, the entry for 15 June 1860.

⁶³ Anita Dwyer Withers Diary, 16 October 1861. DeCoëniél considered himself to be the musical muse of the Confederacy; and more patriotic music by him survives than by anyone else.

⁶⁴ Anita Dwyer Withers Diary, 1 November 1861.

⁶⁵ Anita Dwyer Withers Diary, 19 November 1861.

⁶⁶ This is the same melody as seen in “Sleeping I dreamed of love,” a very popular piece of the period. Since Withers uses the pseudo-French title (neither Withers nor the published version use the circumflex, as in *Le Réve*) and she is so focused on her piano lessons, it seems reasonable that she refers to the piano version, not the vocal one with piano accompaniment.

⁶⁷ Wallace (1812-1865) was born in Ireland and died in England, although he spent a considerable amount of time elsewhere, including Australia, New Zealand, Chile, Peru, and the United States, where he toured as both a concert violinist and pianist.

a cadenza of alternating chords (both hands), and markings of *pesante*—hardly what one would expect of a demure southern gentlewoman.

Fig. 10. *Le Reve* [sic], by Wallace

LE RÉVE,
ROMANCE.

3

Andante e con molto Espressione.

WM VINGENT WALLAGE.

Staccato pp

ben marcato il canto.

pp

ppp

ppp

ppp

ppp

ppp

3249

Not only is this grandiose work part of Withers's repertory, but also noteworthy is the fact that it is dedicated to a woman (in New Orleans). This does not mean, of course, that the dedicatee played it, but several other similar dedications suggest that composers might have acknowledged accomplished women pianists who were not allowed to perform as professionals, but who had reached a high level of technical ability.

Returning to Anita Withers, she had a lesson on 28 December 1861, and she subsequently had more lessons on the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th of January 1862. On the 11th, she began a new session of lessons. These continued regularly. On Friday, 17 January, she comments that "I practiced soon after breakfast as usual."⁶⁸ On the 25th, Withers began working on *The Whispering Wind*, published as a *Mazurka Caprice pour le piano par Hermann A. Wollenhaupt* in New York in 1856. Dedicated to Gottschalk, Wollenhaupt accomplished the "wind" effect with delicate right-hand figures reminiscent of Chopin that continue almost uninterrupted throughout the entire composition. Granted, the keys in which the piece moves (D-flat and A-flat) enable an easier glide over such figures, but they are far from the polkas and schottisches mentioned above.

Quite unexpectedly, Withers notes on Saturday, 29 March 1862 "I determined to visit Salisbury—I took my last Music lesson (p. 67)." There is no mention of why the lessons ceased. Perhaps the difficulties in trying to maintain music (and other skills) while keeping house that were expressed by other young women finally caught up with Anita Withers. She had suffered the loss of her first-born with great sadness, and a subsequent miscarriage (or two) must have weighed on her as well. Indeed, only one more mention of her playing and singing appears in the diary, and that is on Wednesday, 17 September 1862.⁶⁹ Increasingly, the war and its consequences take space in the journal, as does the birth and death of children in the vicinity.⁷⁰

Withers is a real example of a female pianist with more than adequate abilities and interest, if her choice of repertory and frequency of mention in her diary may be used to judge. Hannah McGehee's book also contains an admirably challenging repertory, including large-scale works by Gottschalk and Hermann A. Wollenhaupt. To these names, Herz and Thalberg may be added as part of the typical *atypical* repertory. The quote about the fictional Lily Vere practicing Thalberg also hints at an accomplished player, although King presents her as at least technically

⁶⁸ Anita Dwyer Withers Diary, 17 January 1862.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ In "Our Richmond Correspondence," *The Charleston Mercury*, 17 October 1861, "Hermes" writes that the recent Torriani concert was "thinly attended," hinting that musical life was indeed falling off in the capital city as a result of the war. These concerts were organized by Signor Torriani and included amateur performances as a morale boost throughout the South. See also, *The Charleston Mercury*, 27 September 1861. A bitter comment appears in the *Richmond Enquirer* on 12 February 1864, the winter has been one of "reckless frivolity" and "a carnival of unhallowed pleasure," owing to various dances in the city, noting further that "all the hideous deformity of Washington society is being fastened upon old Richmond. There was a virtue in the olden hospitality of this city unknown in the hollow formalities of this Yankee custom."

inferior to her cousin Alicia, who, incidentally, is morally inferior to Lily. How much credence we should place on the name “Thalberg” associated with pianists is questionable, for George Upton wrote (retrospectively) in 1908: “The Thalberg fantasies were all the rage for a time... Every little piano thumper tackled them.”⁷¹

Dr. James Norcom wrote to Mary B. Harvey on 25 May 1848, “The truth is, Miss Mary, that woman, in her proper sphere & office, is the grace, the ornament, the bliss of life. Out of it, she may shine and dazzle,” but “she will soon cease to command attention and admiration, if she lack those characteristics of feminine softness & delicacy & modesty which so eminently distinguish her from our rougher sex. If these divine & love inspiring attributes be wanting, the woman disappears, & we behold in her place, ... an hermaphrodite, a creature acknowledged by neither sex, & a terror & reproach to both...”⁷² This advice is close to the novelist Sue King’s “taste,” “sweet,” “correct,” and “unpretending” to describe Lily Vere, who was neither a “great musician” nor capable of much “execution.” King provides a keen comparison between her two pianists, for the description of Lily Vere’s playing quoted at the beginning of this article is followed immediately in the novel with a comparison of her cousin’s:

Alicia did not sing, but she played brilliantly, and read music fluently; was rather indifferent about it, and lacked that love of the art which, though restricted from want of *genius*, gave interest to Lily’s playing.

It is the same Alicia who remarks on the next page:

What is the use of study? Somehow every one marries so early, and then you give up music and every thing. Look at all the women we know at home [Charleston]. They are taught French, music, drawing, ‘geography and the use of the globe,’ and as soon as they marry, they shut the piano, never open a French book, give their paints away, and might a great deal better have had all the money spent on these accomplishments put in the Savings’ Bank instead. It is a great waste of time and dollars to study.⁷³

King judged as Norcom did—Alicia may be one of Upton’s “piano thumpers” whereas Lily is one of Huneker’s “piano girls.” It seems Upton and Huneker describe different types of players, either ones with taste or ones who “shine and dazzle,” who are “brilliant.” Many young

⁷¹ Quoted in R. Allen Lott, “The American Concert Tours of Leopold de Meyer, Henri Herz, and Sigismond Thalberg,” 2 vols. (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1986), 328.

⁷² James A. Norcon Papers: James Norcom, Sr., to Mary B. Harvey, 25 May 1848. Quoted in Johnson, *Ante-Bellum North Carolina*, 229.

⁷³ King, *Lily: A Novel*, 72.

women took piano—to not do so would have been an indicator of bad taste. But that ever-elusive signifier—taste—includes more than a lack of ability, it also includes knowing what to play when, and how much for whom. *The Lady's Guide to Perfect Gentility in Manners, Dress, and Conversation, in the Family, in Company, and at the Piano-Forte, the Table, in the Street, and in Gentlemen's Society...* gives very explicit advice on matters of taste, as the following excerpts demonstrate:

CHAPTER II. GENTILITY AND REFINEMENT OF MANNERS IN ALL THE RELATIONS OF HOME AND SOCIETY⁷⁴

An Elegant and Correct Taste.

Importance of taste – Taste is exhibited in the minutest as well as in the most important particulars of conduct; it influences the affections; it gives a bias to the opinions; its control over the inclinations is absolute (p. 65).

Effect of cultivation – Taste, there can be little doubt, depends, in a great measure, on association... And persons of superior cultivation have not only established for themselves a higher standard of grace or excellence, to which they refer, but they have attained to a quicker perception of the relation of things to each other (p. 66).

Value of correct taste in society – A correct taste is more properly the result of a general moral and intellectual culture, than of any direct rules or discipline (pp. 67-68).

Naturalness – The first great fundamental rule of good taste is *to be natural*; and it is from an infringement of this that many of our worst mistakes proceed. (p. 68)

Diffidence preferable to ostentation – Beware, also, of an ostentatious manner. By this is meant that kind of manner which savors too much display; which indicates a disposition to make yourself too conspicuous; and which, in short, is the acting out of a spirit of self-confidence and self-conceit. This...when seen in a young lady, is quite intolerable. (p. 75)

Considering such disparate items as clothing, social strictures on mixed company, public display, a multi-layered view of southern women pianists begins to emerge. As seen above, certain types of dresses were worn for specific occasions—fancy dress gowns restricted movement too much to have allowed a woman to perform *Le Réve* on an occasion when such attire was necessary. Even the everyday attire women wore for their requisite calling on friends did not allow for much motion in the upper arms. As such, it is doubtful that in the company of men women wore clothes that would have allowed them to perform the more demanding pieces. A paragraph in *Godey's Lady's Book* in 1859 promotes that “to instruct on the piano-forte, there must be actual strength, as well as powerful talent,” and men should therefore teach piano, whereas women are able to teach singing. This description suggests that “real” piano playing

⁷⁴

Emily Thornwell, *The Lady's Guide to Perfect Gentility in Manners, Dress, and Conversation, in the Family, in Company, and at the Piano-Forte, the Table, in the Street, and in Gentlemen's Society...* (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1859), pages as referenced.

involved serious physical exertion—something ladies did not do.⁷⁵ Guion Griffis Johnson noted in his 1937 study on North Carolina social history, “certainly by the [1830s], it had become definitely unfashionable for a lady to exert herself physically.”⁷⁶

What is more, in her article “Music and the Feminine Sphere: Images of Women as Musicians in ‘Godey’s Lady’s Book’, 1830-1877,” Julia Eklund Koza includes several sections on specific topics, such as women composers and women professional singers, but none on pianists, which further illustrates the lack of a real model of the professional woman pianist in the United States at this time.⁷⁷ One might find exceptions to this idea in pianists such as Amy Fay (admittedly born in the South but raised in the North), but certainly not south of the Mason-Dixon line. There are only a few references to professional female pianists. One is to Herminie Petit, who might have had a career as a performer but settled into the role of teacher upon the death of her father. Another is Octavie Romey, who performed substantial pieces in public concerts in New Orleans during the Civil War. Both were foreign-born, though, and not held to the same rules as a southern lady of the planter class, such as Lily Vere represents.

Evidence from diaries and collections, however, advocates that ladies certainly played a more technically demanding repertory, but not in front of men and perhaps not even in front of other women. Mixed company performances in the parlor were the norm, be it for dancing, singing, or solo performance.

That being said, a careful reading of contemporary commentaries on women and musical performance illuminates a subtler undercurrent of class status that clearly delineates what proper ladies play and what performers do. *The Lady’s Guide to Perfect Gentility* includes a chapter entitled “The Lady at the Piano-Forte,” and the advice of the author, Emily Thornwell, gets directly to the issue at hand:

⁷⁵ The entire quote is worth reviewing: “As a general rule, men are more competent to teach than women, in *routine*; out of routine, women are the best teachers. To instruct upon the piano-forte, there must be actual strength, as well as powerful talent; but in the case of a woman possessing and controlling a fine voice, she is the most orthodox woman-teacher, it stands to reason.” *Godey’s Lady’s Book* 59 (1859): 370-71.

⁷⁶ Johnson, *Ante-Bellum North Carolina*, 230.

⁷⁷ Julia Eklund Koza also made the observation that women are associated with teaching singing, whereas men are aligned with instrumental music, in “Music and the Feminine Sphere: Images of Women as Musicians in ‘Godey’s Lady’s Book’, 1830-1877,” *Musical Quarterly* 75 (1991): 117. Adèle Hohnstock is an exception, but her playing was reportedly described by Liszt as “more forcible than those of any lady he had ever heard” (*New York Tribune*, 19 December 1848). Nonetheless, such physicality would not have appealed to southern women as something to be emulated. Earlier (22 March 1832), evidence survives of Madame Lonati performing solo piano pieces in Richmond in between “Daguerre’s Magical Pictures from Paris,” according to *Music of the Old South*, 136, cited from the *Whig*. Other professional women pianists did perform in the United States, and Loesser describes a few in Boston in *Men, Women and Pianos*, 466-467, but I have found no records that they performed in the South. See also pp. 472-473.

Invitation to sing or play – Never exhibit any anxiety to sing or to play. You may have a fine voice, have a brilliant instrumental execution, but your friends may by possibility neither admire nor appreciate either.⁷⁸

The use of the term “brilliant instrumental execution” brings back to mind the comment that Lily Vere “had no execution,” but taste. We might be tempted to think King’s description implies that Lily really couldn’t play very well, but what she could manage was to play with feeling, or “taste.” But this shows our own biases and how far removed we are from the mid-nineteenth century’s attitude towards such matters. Contemporary evidence suggests that society preferred the piano girl to play with taste, rather than execution and brilliance. Despite Thornwell’s chapter title, the paragraph above is the only recommendation pertaining directly to pianists here. Later, under “Hints and Rules on Polite, Easy, and Graceful Deportment,” she counsels young ladies to “let your performance be brief,” but nothing further about the actual playing.⁷⁹

More to the point, it seems that “brilliant” did not necessarily imply a positive description, but perhaps a crasser one. This interpretation is confirmed by a sarcastic article under the “Centre-Table Gossip” section of *Godey’s Lady’s Book* of 1852. The following excerpts are taken from this piece, *Directions to Modern Piano-Forte Players*. “Always expect to be asked to play in every company...if the invitation to the piano does not come, inquire of your hostess or her daughter if she plays or what the manufacture of the piano is...if the hint is taken, assure the lady you are ‘quite out of practice’ and ‘play little at any rate,’ and ‘never without your notes’ [which you do not have, but after a suitable time searching] find them in your muff [where you were keeping them to show to Adelaide].” You should take ten minutes to remove and situate your gloves, fan, bouquet, etc. Never ask about your hostess’s tastes, “you are there to display your own talents, not inquire of theirs.” “Commence by a dashing and extemporaneous prelude (learned by heart from Hertz [sic]).” Say the piano is out of tune to cover any mistakes you might have made. “Invariably select a piece twenty pages long; it will give you time to make an impression.” “Remember that, in the modern school, attention to time, expression, and correctness is not considered essential to brilliant execution.”⁸⁰

⁷⁸ *Lady’s Guide to Perfect Gentility*, 97.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁸⁰ “Centre-Table Gossip: Directions to Modern Piano-Forte Players,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book* 46 (1852): 569.

“Brilliant execution” again, along with the reference to Herz, insinuates that such a performance is undesirable for the young lady—the amateur.⁸¹ It is a marker reserved for professionals, such as the repeated references to the “brilliant execution” of Adelina and Carlotta Patti.⁸² Even worse commentary on women pianists is found in a slightly later (1869) piece published by Balmer & Weber in St. Louis. Composed by George W. Brown with words by William Arlington and entitled “She played on 9 pianos,” the lyrics and the front cover seem to embody the image of Upton’s “piano thumper:”

⁸¹ As in *Lily*, a story entitled “The Loves of an Apothecary” contrasts the young woman who plays brilliantly with one who does not, and the brilliant performer is clearly the less desirable of the two. *Graham’s Magazine* 1852, p. 516.

⁸² In his account of the Patti sisters, Orr quotes several reviews that use “brilliant” (and “execution”) repeatedly, as does his own commentary—the word “brilliant” occurs eight times in four pages. Orr, *Alfredo Barili*, 30-33. Similarly, descriptions of Anna Bishop’s singing often criticize her for her overly technical “brilliant execution.” Prior to her arrival, one reviewer commented that she would come to the United States “in order to amuse us with her vocalization” (*Spirit of the Times*, 18 June 1847; quoted in Vera Brodsky Lawrence, *Strong on Music: The New York Music Scene in the Days of George Templeton Strong, 1836-1875*, volume 1: *Resonances 1836-1850* [New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988], 467). Bishop’s propinquity to add ornaments, particularly shakes, resulted in her vocal style being mimicked in burlesques (see Lawrence, *Strong on Music*, 530). Richard Grant White, writing for the *Courier & Enquirer* in 1847, said that even before Bishop arrived, “the whole chromatic scale of puffery, from the lowest to the highest semi-tone on the fingerboard, [had] been run up with brilliant variations;” and sarcastically added that at soirées in which Bishop sang, “a display of vocalization was given, so brilliantly that nothing could eclipse it, except the diamonds, rubies, pearls, and emeralds displayed in profusion” (*Courier & Enquirer*, 11 August 1847; quoted in Lawrence, *Strong on Music*, 471). The critic Henry Cood Watson decried the Belgian soprano Madame Laborde’s performance in 1848 as “mechanical, cold, and inhuman” with a “finely executed cadenza” that was an “intrusion” and “outrage” (*Albion*, 2 September 1848; quoted in Lawrence, *Strong on Music*, 507).

Fig. 11. Front cover of "She played on 9 pianos"



“She played on 9 pianos” by William Arlington, 1869

Oh couldn't she punish pork and beans,

and oysters raw or stew.

Her size was quite respectable,

and her age was twenty-two;

Her lips were thick like pickled tripe,

her parents taught her manners,

She was the gal to slaughter the notes,

and she play'd on nine pianos.

Chorus

Pianos, pianos,

She play'd on nine pianos

One two three four five six seven eight

Oh! She play'd on nine pianos.

Oh one and all attention give,

and a song I now will sing,

For I've hit upon a subject

which I think's the very thing.

You may talk about your handsome gals

your Hetties, Kates, and Hanners,

But the sweetest gal I ever saw,
 oh! She play'd on nine pianos.

Her fingers were like lobster claws,
 her thumbs they were both double,
 And where she caught them in the keys,
 oh "golly" there was trouble
 Her hands were wide, so deep and thick,
 as red as any tanner's;
 She was the gal with mice in her hair,
 and she play'd on nine pianos.

Both the lyrics and the front cover of "She played on 9 pianos" suggest the type of woman Upton might have been describing as a "piano thumper," and the image is not a complimentary one. The publisher may have also intended to extend the insult into racial matters with the textured hair and reference to thick lips.⁸³ Contrast the vision of the woman pianist in "She played on 9 pianos" with that of the young entertainer in the "Happy Family Polka" (see Fig. 1). Even though the latter piece dates from slightly later than the period under investigation, I believe it illustrates the ideal situation in which young women played the piano. The young woman (we do not know if she is a family member, a governess, or some other person connected with the family seated by the fire) sits politely, with excellent posture, performing some piece almost solely for her own enjoyment—certainly no one appears to be listening to her. She might exhibit the model "piano girl." Her performance does not draw attention to her, does not distract the others within hearing, yet continues on as pleasant background music.

A description of a music recital at the Oxford Female Academy (Mississippi) in 1842 notes that even though the repertory performed was simple, the students had learned their selections well. The author further comments that "the style of music preferred in that day was simple melody rather than the class that calls for showy execution—finger gymnastics—or the purely classical." This remark, found in Mrs. I.M.E. Blandin's *History of Higher Education of Women in the South Prior to 1860*, illustrates the distinction between execution and ladylike-

⁸³ I am grateful to Linda Austern who suggested the racial stereotyping in this picture.

piano playing.⁸⁴ Execution equals finger gymnastics, but not pretty music. It also confirms that young women of this class did not play classical music, which would have suggested over-exertion.

An article in *Dwight's Musical Magazine* of 1856 specifically warns against brilliant execution.

It should then be your care, at all times and places, when you are requested to play, to lay aside all false modesty, and do your best. Never play carelessly, because only your friends are within hearing, or you are alone.

Try also to play every note as neatly as possible—don't slur over the keys in such haste that you are obliged to leave out half the notes, in aiming for what is so often miscalled a *brilliant execution*. We are aware that to many, this last sentence will seem somewhat heretical; yet we venture to say a "brilliant executionist" may be a very poor musician, if we take this last term as indicating one who makes *music*. A truly great artist scorns the idea of simply "showing off," or "playing for effect," as it is sometimes called—everything in fact, which detracts in any degree from the beauty of the music, in order to display a real or fancied power of execution in himself.⁸⁵

The combined evidence (diaries, collections, sheet music, advice on proper attire and existing costumes, comments from published sources) supports the theory that most southern women did not demonstrate all of their talents when playing in mixed company and probably not even when performing before female acquaintances. Southern women distanced themselves from any activity that might be linked to a career, to earning money, or as being in any way professional. Nor did they allow themselves to be seen as having any other masculine characteristics, such as power. All bodily movements were restrained so as not to appear to "work" in any way, to do so would be to contravene class boundaries (and "superior cultivation"). The gentle, sweet, correct, and unpretending piano girl would almost never have displayed her abilities, even if she possessed a virtuoso talent. To play the piano with serious physical exertion ("ostentatious" and "conspicuous" display) would be to transgress upon masculine territory, which southern women were extremely reluctant to do. Advice in *Harper's* (1851) directed young women to "practice in private far more difficult [music] than that you play in general society."⁸⁶ A young woman who played with "brilliant execution" might cause her to move from the title of "piano girl" to "piano thumper"—hardly a desirable moniker in any period.

⁸⁴ Mrs. I.M.E. Blandin, *History of Higher Education of Women in the South Prior to 1860* (New York and Washington, DC: Neale Publishing, 1909), 196.

⁸⁵ *Dwight's Musical Magazine*, 1856, p. 379.

⁸⁶ "Mems for Musical Misses," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, September 1851, 489.