

EDITORIAL DIGEST & MANUSCRIPT FILE

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Sketch of STEPHEN FOSTER

Has America any folk song? Certain disturbances have militated against the creation of it. Just as music is often the offspring of sorrow, so prosperity often annihilates the marked types of existence which culminate in folk song.

America is handicapped in the production of folk song both by its business activity and by the fact that it is a gathering of many nations who are not yet amalgamated into a distinct type; at best its folk songs are sectional rather than national; the life of the west, the south, the north each represents a different phase which would produce different music, if it produced any.

But the North, the Eastern and Middle States, is too definitely commercial to reflect the life in pathetic music; the west has not yet developed a singer who can picture the ranch life in beautiful tones, only the South, possessing characteristic surroundings and a race of natural singers in its colored population has developed something akin to an especial folk music; distinctly different from the music of other nations. It has been objected that the singers in this case are not Americans but Africans; yet we may be sure that though the Negroes had remained in Africa a thousand years more, they would nevertheless produce Sais music; it is the direct outgrowth of American surroundings in Southern life. Besides not all the singers are negroes; the note is so definite and clear that many writers and composers living in the North have caught its effect and reproduced it with infinite beauty and charm. Among these one stands pre-eminent Stephen C. Foster.

Foster's father was Irish, his great grandfather coming to America from Londonderry. His father was a tasteful player upon the violin, lived sometime in Virginia, then settled in Pittsburgh and here the best American folk song writer was born upon a most appropriate date July 4 1826. The Southern elements which speak so eloquently from many of

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his songs came from his father, a descendant of one of the oldest Maryland families. Foster was timid and shrinking in his ways, never the least self-assertive and modest. Although educated in Athens Penna Academy and in Jefferson College, Cambridge, Penna, Foster was always a desultory student and largely self-taught. He taught himself to play the flute at seven years of age. Later on he familiarized himself with the compositions of the German classical composers. He acted as bookkeeper for his brother for some time. His first great success in composition was "Oh Susannah", after this he poured out song after song. "My old Kentucky Home" and "Nassa is the sole sole ground" proving how thoroughly he was in sympathy with the Southern life and how well he could picture it in tone. He often attended Negro camp meetings and studied music at the ~~colored~~ ^{colored} people with assiduity. He married in 1854,

The life which began so cheerfully ended with shipwreck. The appetite for alcoholic stimulants grew strongly upon him. He was unfortunate in business. In 1860 we find him separated from his family because of his uncontrollable habit and keeping a little grocery in New York. Pecuniary difficulties caused him to sell his most popular songs for a "song".

His masterpiece must be considered "The old folks at home" "Way down upon the Swansee River" of which about half a million copies were sold. It is "simple" and does not stray far from the tonic dominant and subdominant harmonies. ~~XXXXXX~~ He died in New York Jan. 13th 1864.

He is often referred to as the Burns of America - a man who sang the purest poetry of humble life. And as it was said of the Scottish poet: "The light that led astray was light from heaven" can be applied to him.

National Music of America
Lewis C. Elson
L.C. Page & Co. Boston 1899

Lewis C. Elson

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Steve Foster

The bulk of his music other than "Sable" and Ethiopian style
XX are sentimental, sarkish, flori
and entirely unrecognizable as the work of the same man!

Little Biographies, Vol #1

He came to New York sometime early in 1853. He turned out
more songs than he had ever published before; 105 new songs were
published in the last three years of his life, including 41 after his
death.

American Travadore,
P. 326

XX

Exactly when Stephen came to New York we cannot tell, ^{Approx} ^{ntly}
time
it was some after August 10th, 1860, for an entry of his date in
his manuscript ~~book~~ "Was at Warren at the Gaskell House. Nor have we
any idea why he left Pittsburgh. XXXXX

With August 1860 and Stephen coming to New York all records
of the song writers career ~~cease~~ ^{cease}, and we are left with an absence of
contemporary evidence that is as baffling as the wealth of documents
up to the period was almost unbelievably fruitful.

My Grandmothers Memorines Mrs Jane
Foster
N. Y. Clymer, March 1877
p.199-200

Foster's ~~XXXXX~~ sympathies were with the Union in the War and
he wrote many songs for the Northern Side. One was a setting ~~for~~ ^{for}
the famous poem "We are coming Father Abraham 300,000". Another,
"We're a million in the field" - "Was my brother in the battle and
"When the dreadful war is ended and others of this kind
American Travadour

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The melodies of Stephen C. Foster ^{meet} all the require-
ments to be classed as ^{genuine} ~~genuine~~ American folk lore, except one...

XX they are known
to the world,
as the compositions of Stephen C. Foster. Folk songs are never
"composed", ^{nor} are they ever attributed as the work of one man.
The folk song makers XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX the masses of
the people in all land, remain always anonymous. I believe it
would be ^{more} ~~wise~~ XXX
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX just to credit Foster ^{with} ~~with~~ recognizing the worth
of the genuine Negro folk song, rather than the creation of it.

Take two instances:

Stephen Foster wrote ^{Camptown} ~~Camptown~~ races in 1850
A song resembling it was gathered in the first collection
of Slave Songs of the United States in 1867 but the
songs were collected several years before the Civil War.
XXXXXXXXXX Slave Songs #75

Land Re-Header as

#7 Fisk Jubilee Collection

Then there's the song Ellen Bayne - which bears a mighty strong
resemblance to John Brown's Body - "say Brothers will you ^{meet} ~~meet~~
Battle Hymn of the Republic A Methodist hymnal "borrowed"

Republic

borrowed

He often attended camp meetings of the Negro and studied music
of the colored people with assiduity (National Music of America
267 Elson

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When child bond
"When Stephen was a child, his father had a mulatto bond girl
named ~~Oliver~~ Olivier Pipe, the illegitimate daughter of a W.I. Preacher.
Liebe as she was called, was a devout Christian and a member of
a church of ~~abolitionists~~. The little boy Foster was fond of this sort
of singing and she was permitted to take Stephen to church with
her. Here he stored up in his mind "many a gem of purest ray be-
rene drawn from these caves of Negro melody." A number of strains
heard there and which he said to be were ~~to be~~ to be lost were
later incorporated into two of his songs "Hard times come again ~~me~~
more." And "On ~~ways~~ carry me along."

Marian Foster
My Father - page 50-49

The best of Foster's songs, ~~consisted~~ consisted of "a small amount of original
compositions, but for the most part adaptations of tunes in vogue
among the hardshell baptists in Tennessee and at ~~minstrel~~ ~~meet-~~
ings in Kentucky. The best of them all is Uncle Ned, a pure Negro
folk song.

Stephen Foster, a biography
H. K. Milligan

These songs were intended for entertainment "character" songs,
in swinging time, "minstrel songs" - they called for burnt ~~corn~~
and extravagant jocular setting, of punning dialogue peculiar to
the ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ minstrel type of entertainment. They were sung
by minstrel singers even before the songs were published

Stephen Foster, Biography, songs and
Musical Composition Pittsburg
1896

~~Start here~~
On a voyage to New Orleans in 1852 Stephen observed a good many
incidents of Southern life which he afterwards utilized as points
for political-simile in song.

Stephen C. Foster dead at 11.00 o'clock last night a ~~police~~ ~~man~~
heard groans in the cellar of a house, he was passing and upon entering
he found a man bleeding to death. He had evidently arisen from ~~his~~
and for water and fallen across a broken pitcher and suffered a gash in
the throat. He was taken to Bellevue. He had a purse with thirty six
cents and a prospective line for a song on a paper wrapper, with his ~~name~~
XXXXXXXXXX from which identification was made. Relatives in Pa. ~~claimed~~ ~~the~~
body.

NY Herald Tribune Jan. 10th, 18
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