EXPLORING THE COMPOSITIONS OF THOMAS "BLIND TOM" WIGGINS

Connor Austell, DMA

Blind from birth and born into a society that did not recognize his personhood, Thomas Green Wiggins is perhaps the most unlikely composer in American history. Contemporary accounts indicate that he was psychologically non-normative in some way; modern scholars generally hypothesize that he was autistic.[1,2] In the face of these adverse conditions, Wiggins made a hugely significant mark on American music, and his consequential legacy has, sadly, yet to be fully appreciated.

Born into slavery in Harris County, Georgia in 1849, Wiggins, along with his family, was sold to wealthy Columbus lawyer Colonel James Neil Bethune. Bethune soon observed astonishing musical capabilities in the boy, finding he was able to repeat anything he heard spoken, sung, or played on the piano in the Bethune home.[3] Upon making this discovery, he enrolled Wiggins in piano lessons and began trotting him out on concert tours across the South. This pattern of being taken from city to city and forced to perform concerts while enjoying virtually no agency of his own continued for the rest of his life, first as an enslaved person and then under a series of conservatorships.[3] In spite of these circumstances, Wiggins composed as many as one hundred works for the piano in his lifetime. These works were dictated by Tom's piano teachers, including one Joseph Poznanski of New York, and around thirty specimens are known to survive today.[4]

---

[1] Stephanie Jensen-Moulton, "Finding Autism in the Compositions of a 19th-century Prodigy: Reconsidering 'Blind Tom' Wiggins," in *Sounding Off: Theorizing Disability in Music* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 201.
[2] Gordon Graham, "Music and Autism," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 35, no. 2 (2001): 39-47, doi:10.2307/3333671.
[3] Geneva H. Southall*, Blind Tom, the Black Pianist-composer (1849–1908): Continually Enslaved* (Lanham, Md.; London: Scarecrow, 1999), 1.
[4] Daphne A. Brooks, "Puzzling the Intervals": Blind Tom and the Poetics of the Sonic Slave Narrative," in *The Oxford Handbook of the African American Slave Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) 11, doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199731480.013.023 2014.

Much ink has been spilled over the last two decades recounting the details of Wiggins' life. This is, of course, not without sound reasoning. For better or for worse, the story of Thomas Wiggins is one that is uniquely American. His biography presents us with a narrative that could only have occurred during the Civil War and Reconstruction eras. These tremendous "growing pains" of the nation, as which these eras are sometimes referred, are pains most poignantly experienced by Black Americans. Far more significant than a mere account of the Black American experience, this man's life presents an interesting problem for psychology, not only regarding the mind of Wiggins specifically, but in explaining the collective cognitive dissonance felt by the millions of Americans who stood in utter disbelief at the idea of a Black person creating such a profound art, one supposedly reserved for society's most deeply discerning individuals.

Fascinating as his biography is, the scope of this study carries a more specific aim: to survey Wiggins' compositions for piano. The patronizing mentality described above has historically served as a roadblock preventing these pieces from being considered on their own terms, and as a result, this body of work ought to be considered ripe for study. Herein lies the spirit of the present article. It should be viewed as an attempt to start, rather than finish, the conversation concerning the piano compositions of Thomas Wiggins.

Examining these elusive works presents some inherent difficulties. First and foremost, as the manuscripts were notated by someone other than Wiggins himself, we are compelled to accept his transcribers' notation as the authoritative voice on his conception of the music. Fortunately, the reception of the music-consuming public does provide something of a "check" on the resulting product. Due to his extensive touring, thousands of Americans would have witnessed the composer himself perform his original compositions on the concert stage, which presumably inspired amateur pianists in the audience to seek out scores for his works. Based on this marketing strategy,

there would likely be some record of unsatisfied customers if in fact the sheet music they purchased did not resemble what they had heard. We can assume, of course, that Wiggins may have improvised alterations to the music in performance, as was a widespread practice for soloists of this era. Another matter to consider is reluctance on the part of the composer. Wiggins was not entirely comfortable with the publishing of his works; this is likely the impetus behind his extensive employment of pseudonyms in his publications. It has been suggested that because of this attitude, he may have simplified his music during the transcription process in order to prevent the dissemination of his original ideas.[5] While these limitations present an obstacle for the researcher, it is entirely possible to work within their confines.

Taken as a whole, Wiggins' output was consistent with the prevailing tastes of the day. American audiences enjoyed short, charming character pieces that provided escapism from their daily lives which, during the 1850s, were becoming gradually more stressful as national divisions grew deeper. The composition of programmatic character pieces seems to have come naturally to Wiggins: it is widely reported that he composed his first original work, *The Rainstorm*, at age five. Wiggins seems to have been profoundly sensitive to the auditory world around him; this is a thread which runs consistently through accounts of his personality. Indeed, his powers of retention and imitation were such that he was known to imitate not only musical sounds (with perfect pitch) but also political speeches and works of literature in Greek, Latin, German, and French.[6]

One of the pianist's most enduring character pieces is his *Sewing Song (Imitation of the Sewing Machine)*. Sewing machines were not yet a ubiquitous feature of the American home during Wiggins' childhood; they were actually a rather costly appliance. This fact notwithstanding,

[5] Ibid., 12–13.
[6] *The Marvelous Musical Prodigy, Blind Tom: The Negro Boy Pianist, Whose Performances at the Great St. James and Egyptian Halls, London and Salle Hertz, Paris Have Created Such a Profound Sensation* (Baltimore: Sun "Book" and Job Printing Establishment: 1876), 11–12.

a privileged family such as the Bethunes would have had little trouble affording one, so it is probable he would have heard one growing up. Perhaps he associated the sewing machine with Mrs. Joseph Poznanksi, the work's dedicatee and spouse of his instructor/transcriber.

Figure 1. Wiggins, Sewing Song mm. 14–16 (Source: Library of Congress)

Sewing Song is a whimsical character piece in E-flat with a machinic descant that calls to mind Mendelssohn's Op. 67 No. 4 ("Spinning Song") and Schubert's G-flat major Impromptu. The figuration of the chords and the overarching tertian harmonic structure seems distinctly Schubert-inspired as it traverses the keys of G major (the chromatic mediant) and B major (an enharmonic respelling of the chromatic submediant) from the piece's home key of E-flat. One may find fault with the unconventional voice-leading and repetitive nature of the piece, yet it nonetheless makes for effective parlor music and contains moments of sincere beauty. Viewed within the wider context of music history, this piece anticipates the mimicking of industrial-age machinery that would become commonplace in music of the early twentieth century, as observed in pieces such as Arthur Honegger's *Pacific 231*, George Antheil's *Ballet Mécanique*, and Frederic Rzewski's *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues*.

Upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that *Sewing Song* is the product of deliberate, logical decision-making. The architecture of the music is clear and effective while the thematic building blocks are artfully manipulated into a cohesive whole. A ternary form (*ABA*) is apparent

on the highest structural level; within this larger structure, the music lends itself well to segmentation into 16-bar subsections. The form can be expressed thusly: *A* (*aba′* transition) *B* (*cd*) *A* (*aba′* coda) where *a* is a sixteen-bar parallel period and each of the subsections that follow are likewise sixteen bars. The overall scheme is realized in Table 1.

Highest Level	Middle Level	Lowest Level
	Introduction	
A **(E-flat major)**	a (measures 16-31)	a
		b
		a
		c (V is tonicized)
	b (32-47)	d (standing on IV)
		e (loose diminution of *d*)
		a′ (modulation to mediant)
		c′ (return to tonic)
	a′ (48-63)	a′′
		e′
		a′′′
		c′′
	Codetta (64–71)	
B **(B major)**	c (72–87)	f (loose inversion of *a*)
		g
		f
		g′
	d (retransition) (88-103)	g′
		chromatic modulation
		fragmentation of *a*
		cadenza, half cadence
A **(E-flat major)**	a (104–119)	a
		b
		a
		c (V is tonicized)
	b (120–135)	d (standing on IV)
		e (loose diminution of *d*)
		a′ (modulation to mediant)
		c′ (return to tonic)
	a′ (136–151)	a′′
		e′
		a′′′
		c′′
	Coda (152–158)	

Table 1. Structural analysis of Wiggins' 'Sewing Song'

Throughout the small ternary form (mm. 16–63) that bookends the piece, subtle techniques are used to create unity while allowing for contrast. This is evident in the way the principal motive (mm. 16–19) is varied with each repetition, while each subsection concludes with the consequent phrase in its entirety (also varied), effectively binding the music together. *b* (mm. 32–47)

introduces a contrasting motive closely related to the principal motive and subjects this to diminution and modest chromaticism. A novel modulation in mm. 37–39 utilizes augmented sixth chords in C to give the expectation of preparing G as a dominant, but then proceeds to tonicize G instead. What follows is a false return to the principal motive ('a') in G major before we at last hear this motive in the home key of E-flat.

A lyrical episode in B major (mm. 72–103) plays a role akin to the development of a sonata form. The melody, based on an inversion of the principal motive, climbs to the treble and reaches a climax on A before undergoing modulation and fragmentation as we retransition to the music which began the work. Though it may be constructed of humble building blocks, applying even modest scrutiny to its inner workings reveals *Sewing Song* to be a composition of surprising thematic economy and harmonic ingenuity.

While his own works were featured regularly in his performances, the bulk of Wiggins' performing repertoire was composed of Western European classical music of the type favored by other touring pianists of the era such as Charles Halle and Ignaz Moscheles (both of whom he is known to have encountered during his travels in Europe).[7,8] As a result, the fingerprints of Beethoven, Chopin, Liszt, Mendelssohn, and Schubert can be found in the compositions of Wiggins. One illustrative example is *Rêve Charmant (Nocturne)*, which borrows heavily from the melodic language of Chopin.[9] A comparison of mm. 16–19 of *Rêve Charmant* with mm. 3–6 of Chopin's Nocturne in A-flat, Op. 32 No. 2 reveals clear similarities in texture, meter, and melodic content. The left-hand accompaniment figure bears a particular resemblance to Chopin's idiom,

---

[7] George A. Kelly et al., "Testimonial Letters," *The Black Perspective in Music* 4, no. 2 (1976): 177–80, doi:10.2307/1214504.
[8] Southall, *Blind Tom*, 43–45.
[9] *Collection of published music including 17 piano pieces and 3 vocal selections by Blind Tom (1849-1908)*, Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress Photoduplication Service, 1976, Microfilm.

and the contour of the melody is retained: both feature a lower neighbor followed by an ascending leap and stepwise descent.

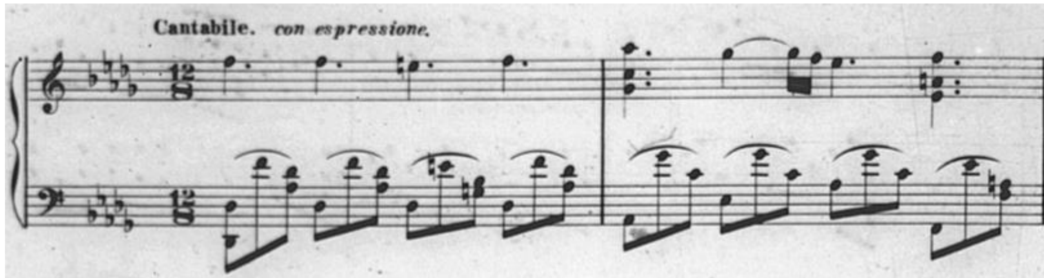

Figure 2. Wiggins, Rêve Charmant mm. 16–19 (Source: Library of Congress)

Figure 3. Chopin, Nocturne in A-flat mm. 3–6

The subordinate theme is closely related to the principal theme and references another of Chopin's nocturnes. Specifically, the ascending arpeggiated figure in bar 25 of *Rêve* echoes mm. 2 and 4 of Chopin's Nocturne in F-sharp, op. 15 no. 2.

Figure 4. Wiggins, Rêve Charmant mm. 24–25 (Source: Library of Congress) **Figure 5.** Chopin, Nocturne in F-sharp mm. 1–2

The aspects in which Wiggins deviates from the nocturnes of Chopin are as notable as the similarities. For instance, Wiggins chooses to cast *Rêve Charmant* in a sonata-rondo form, rather than the ternary form typical of Chopin's nocturnes. One of the most characteristic features of Wiggins' composition is a penchant for repetition, so perhaps the use of a sonata-rondo form better accommodated this tendency than a ternary form would have allowed. The construction of this nocturne utilizes a scheme best described as $ABACB'A$. The use of this specific pattern bears some historical significance: Malcolm S. Cole, a recognized authority on rondo forms, identifies this pattern as the form Mozart favored in his rondo movements during the last five years of his life.[10] This choice to deliberately take a genre popularized by Chopin and reimagine it in a form associated with the compositions of Mozart speaks to Wiggins' familiarity with classical forms, and perhaps his desire to develop a distinct musical identity. He departs from both Mozart and Chopin by bookending the piece with an introduction and coda, each one page in length (the introduction in question is discussed at length below.) Given the fact that most of his known compositions are crowd-pleasing parlor pieces and character pieces, his decision to compose a nocturne may reflect a desire to be included in the same conversations as figures such as Chopin.

The introductions preceding *Sewing Song* and *Rêve Charmant* represent something of a curiosity in that neither seems particularly idiomatic to Wiggins' compositional style. In the former case, the introduction sets up the fanciful mood of the music yet bears little motivic relation to it; in the latter case, important rhythmic and melodic motives are foreshadowed, but the extroverted nature of the music betrays the intimate character of the nocturne which follows.

[10] Malcolm Stanley Cole, "The Development of the Instrumental Rondo Finale from1750 to 1800. (with) Appendices," PhD Diss., Princeton University, 1964, https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/development-instrumental-rondo-finale-1750-1800/docview/302274078/se-2?accountid=14537, 219.

Indeed, both introductions come across as being “tacked on” after the fact, and one might reasonably suspect that these passages are the work not of Wiggins but of one of his transcribers or editors. They may well have been added to account for the improvised preluding expected of nineteenth-century performers.

Discerning the truth of this assertion is not so simple as it might appear. The tertian tonal relationships found in the opening bars of *Rêve Charmant* fall squarely in line with Wiggins' harmonic tendencies (as noted in our discussion of *Sewing Song*). The D-flat major chorale which begins the music quickly introduces A-naturals, G-naturals, and E-naturals, leading to a decisive (and curiously emphatic) cadence on F major. Here the chorale begins afresh, this time embellished with subtle imitative counterpoint, a device with scarcely any precedent in the music of Wiggins. A chromatic descent here leads us to the dominant A-flat.

Similar tertian relationships are explored in the opening bars of *Sewing Song*. The music begins with an extended half-diminished harmony setting up a dominant pedal, the combination of which evokes a whimsical atmosphere. The tonic E-flat minor finally arrives in measure five but appears only briefly before cadencing on the relative G-flat major. For the next several bars, tension is effectively prolonged through chromatic bass movement that descends to a Neapolitan waypoint before leading us to the long-awaited dominant harmony.

As we have seen, a case could be made both for and against Wiggins' authorship of these singular introductory passages, and, ultimately, stylistic evidence alone does not a strong argument make. More information will be needed in order to firmly resolve this question.

The bulk of Wiggins' surviving compositions consist of miniatures and salon pieces, marches, waltzes, gallops, schottisches, etc. The best of this music exhibits a vivacity and playfulness that would surely have delighted audiences, especially under the composer's nimble

fingers. The weakest samples bear few marks of originality or invention. Regardless of the content, concert-going amateurs would doubtless have been thrilled to pick up a piece of music bearing Wiggins' name at their local music store. Tom would likely not have been quite so thrilled by the amount of music bearing his name—he preferred to publish his work under a series of pseudonyms (with some including a title such as "Dr."). Despite his wishes, publishers typically gave his name pride of place on the cover in large type while printing the composer's chosen pseudonym in a miniscule font.

These pieces are often characterized by left-hand leaps of the type typically found in waltzes and in the emerging genre of ragtime. It should be understood, however, that the syncopations of ragtime are not in evidence here. Meter is often a quick simple-duple or triple. A number of these pieces bear programmatic titles, though the relation between title and content can be tenuous (excepting the pieces discussed at length above). Examples of this trend include *Daylight* and *Wellenklange (Voice Of The Waves)*. Both are waltzes (the former is notated in 6/4 but the meter is best understood as a simple triple) and have little content clearly suggestive of any extramusical element.

Water in the Moonlight is a meditative character piece in B-flat major. It bears some similarity to the *Sewing Song* in the sense that melodic interest is treated as secondary to the impressionistic effects of the accompaniment. This lyrical miniature is a ternary form in which "shimmering" effects may be perceived in the sixteenth-note triplets decorating the initial theme. The contrasting middle section stands harmonically on the dominant of F followed by a reprise with "shimmers" returning in the guise of grace note arpeggios. The score, published in 1866 by S. Brainard's Sons (who also handled the publication of *Battle of Manassas* the same year), was evidently edited with more care and attention to detail than other items in Wiggins' catalogue.

Romantic touches such as lengthy *crescendi* and *diminuendi*, increased articulation markings, and precise tempo indications pepper the score. It is, of course, unlikely that these markings were prescribed by Wiggins himself, although they may have been observed in his performances.

Another work suggestive of natural phenomena is *The Rainstorm*. This work, according to the popular legend propagated by the Bethunes, was composed when Tom was five years old. The veracity of this claim notwithstanding, this piece bears some noteworthy traits. Wiggins' musical narrative is spun through a ternary form, with contrasting sections chronologically denoting calm weather, the passing storm, and the return to clear skies. Beginning with a naïve, frolicking principal theme in a compound duple meter, the young Wiggins here achieves a remarkable thematic unity by retaining this theme throughout the entire piece. The "storm" music central to the narrative sees the initial theme being passed between the bass and the treble as diminished harmonies are heard in the form of shuddering tremolos in the background. Chromatic passages in parallel fourths feature heavily throughout this section. The music becomes increasingly chromatic as the tempest reaches its climax, culminating in rapid octave passages. Once the energy of the storm is spent, a dominant pedal finally ushers in the reprise in the tonic key. While the musical material which makes up this piece could be considered largely textural and lacking in complexity, *The Rainstorm* nevertheless represents a highly imaginative compositional endeavor by a precocious young artist.

The outbreak of the Civil War in 1861 dramatically upended everyday life for most Americans, and Thomas Wiggins was no exception. He continued to tour, although this became limited to cities south of the battle lines, and a considerable percentage of the funds generated from his appearances were diverted by General Bethune to support the Confederate cause.[11] News from

[11] Southall, *Blind Tom*, 3.

the frontlines reached him, as did the music. The effect this had on his composition is evident in pieces such as his variations on the Civil War traditional *When this Cruel War is Over* and his original work titled *Battle of Manassas*.

During his lifetime, *Battle of Manassas* was among Wiggins' most popular compositions. The liner notes for the score, first published in 1866, contain a detailed account of its genesis: Wiggins was in Nashville for a few months, during which time the battle in question was referenced often. As he listened to these conversations, he absorbed the stories he heard and imagined the sights and sounds of the battlefield, a process which manifested in this piece depicting the incident.[12] *Battle of Manassas* is unique among nineteenth-century battle pieces insofar as it is a pastiche of popular melodies of the Civil War era. It is extraordinarily effective in portraying the events of the battle as they occurred from beginning to end. First, both armies approach one another, each heard as a drum and fife corps entering from far in the distance. The Confederate army marches to the tune of "The Girl I Left Behind Me" while the Northern army marches to "Dixie;" each army approaches with a long, gradual crescendo on its respective tune. In bar 63, Wiggins inserts his own meditative Adagio of a lyrical character, with the words "The eve of Battle." The ensuing conflict employs the tunes of "Yankee Doodle", "La Marseillaise", and "The Star-Spangled Banner" as well as the sounds of trumpets, drums, cannons, and trains—the inclusion of extramusical elements such as these contribute to the music's overall theatrical character.

Depictive "battle pieces" of a melodramatic nature enjoyed considerable popularity among amateur keyboardists during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and became quite marketable in America during the Civil War. Civil War-era battle pieces commonly portrayed

[12] Thomas Wiggins, *The Battle of Manassas: For the Piano* (Cleveland: S. Brainard's Sons, 1866).

Union victories. This outcome was naturally more palatable for the Northern publishers and audiences who were at this time the only parties of concern given the Northern embargo in effect preventing the publishing of works written in the South.[13] Wiggins' contribution to the genre, which portrays a Confederate victory, is an outlier in this respect. (It should be noted that Wiggins would have possessed an incomplete, partisan understanding of this conflict that reflected the view of his handlers.) Most battle pieces were published shortly after the occurrence of the event they were meant to depict; it is likely the aforementioned embargo may account for Wiggins' *Manassas* not receiving publication until 1866.

Francis Kotzwara's *Battle of Prague* was one of the most well-known battle pieces of the nineteenth century, and its influence can be found in many of those that followed. A number of characteristic features in Wiggins' *Manassas* are traceable to this piece: scene-setting inscriptions for each section, trumpet calls, familiar march tunes, and imitations of cannon fire are present in both works. *Manassas* contains some innovations on this familiar form, such as Wiggins' exploitation of dynamics and register to create a spatial effect—the most striking example of this occurs in mm. 89–108. Labeled in the score as "Gen. Beauregard's trumpets," this passage features a fortissimo trumpet fanfare in G major. Beauregard's trumpets are answered by those of his adversary, labeled "Gen. McDowell's trumpets in the distance." This answer is heard in a pianissimo dynamic a perfect fifth lower, a choice which cleverly accounts for the expected disparity in audio frequency given the distance between the two armies.

A particularly jarring effect used by Wiggins is the inclusion of tone clusters to evoke the thunder of cannon fire. While Kotzwara depicts cannon volleys in his *Battle of Prague* with octaves

[13] Elizabeth Morgan, "War on the Home Front: Battle Pieces for the Piano from the American Civil War," *Journal of the Society for American Music* 9, no. 4 (2015): 384-385.

in the bass register, Wiggins directs the performer to “strike [the keyboard] with both hands” when directed to do so by a special symbol. There is precedent for the use of clusters to this effect within the battle piece repertoire: Bernard Viguerie’s *La bataille de Marengo*, which enjoyed some popularity for a time and underwent several reprints, utilizes a similar symbol for cannon fire.[14] Both pieces include a note in the margins imploring the performer to strike a cluster of notes in the bass register of the piano with the left hand (in the case of *Manassas*, with both hands when possible). Wiggins chooses to go one step further than Viguerie with his tone cluster deployment. In passages depicting conflict, Wiggins inserts clusters intermittently as an accompaniment to the melodic material. These “battle scenes,” with their simultaneous layers of drums, cannon fire, and fife tunes, paint a rich portrait in the listener’s mind with an efficacy that anticipates Ives. Additionally, Wiggins occasionally places “cannon fire” clusters augmented by fermatas in the interest of developing the narrative, seeing them perhaps as a convenient method of achieving a scene change (to use dramaturgical terms). This technique can be traced back to Viguerie.

Figure 6. Cannon symbol in Wiggins’ 'Manassas' bataille' (Source: Library of Congress)

Figure 7. Cannon symbol in Viguerie’s 'La

Ultimately, it appears the imaginative composer found the piano limiting, and he felt a need to turn to other means in order to realize his intentions. In an effort to transport his listeners

[14] Ibid., 396.

to the battle lines, Wiggins would make noises with his mouth imitating the churning of a steam engine and whistle of a locomotive. This may strike the modern listener as bizarre and out of place, and indeed, such vocalizations occurring in a piano piece are uncommon even today. Considering the context, however, the invocation of a locomotive towards the end of this work makes perfect sense: the arrival of General Kirby Smith's troops by rail was considered the most decisive moment in the battle, one in which the tide was turned in favor of the Confederate forces.[15] The manner in which it is depicted by Wiggins illustrates the re-energizing of the Confederate troops, who bear down on the Union army, forcing them to retreat. The composer depicts this hurried flight with a flurry of Lisztian octaves played *Il piu Presto Possibile*. This startling, almost humorous passage is set in the previously unexplored tonality of F and recalls the "Dixie" theme before culminating in two final cannon shots. The effect of this unexpected gesture is to effectively throw the tonality of the entire piece into question. Once could argue that the tonality was never a settled matter to begin with, as the key centers of C, G, and D are each firmly established at various points in the piece.

The incorporation of American traditional tunes into the narrative of *Manassas* bears some historical significance. It is known that both "Yankee Doodle" and "Dixie" were commonly sung on the front lines of the war. Dixie, despite its implied use by Union troops in *Battle of Manassas*, was generally considered to be a Confederate song.[3] What may come across as especially peculiar to modern audiences is the repeated quotation of "La Marseillaise" in the piece. In fact, this oft-quoted anthem was heard frequently in the South during the war and was associated with Confederate pride among the citizenry. The popularity in the Confederacy of "La

[15] Christopher Gabel and U.S. Army Command General Staff College Press, *Rails to Oblivion: The Battle of Confederate Railroads in the Civil War*, Fort Leavenworth, Kan.: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Press, 2002, 9.

Marseillaise" reflects the way in which the South preferred to view its position in the conflict: as leaders of a righteous uprising against tyranny. It was, however, necessary to alter a few lyrics to fit their narrative.[16] The second verse as originally written would indeed have been ill-fitted to the Confederate cause:

> What does this horde of slaves,
> Of traitors and conspiring kings want?
> For whom have these vile chains,
> These irons, been long prepared? *(repeat)*
> Frenchmen, for us, ah! What outrage
> What furious action it must arouse!
> It is to us they dare plan
> A return to the old slavery!

The first and only score edition of Wiggins' *Manassas* was published in 1866 by the Cleveland-based firm of S. Brainard's Sons and then reprinted in 1900 by Musica Obscura. The two editions are virtually identical; probably the rights were transferred to Musica Obscura after S. Brainard's Sons folded in 1895. For reasons that are unclear, these early editions are poorly edited. Certain bars are given incorrect metric value, wrong notes (or entire chords) dot the score, and one staff even features a two-sharp key signature in which the sharps are placed on F and B rather than F and C. For all Wiggins' popularity, it seems his publisher did not see fit to apply even the most basic quality control standards to this print. Given that entire books have been written to document the myriad injustices the unfortunate musician was subjected to, this incident may be viewed as simply par for the course. Nevertheless, despite its faults, the publication of this piece brought music composed by a formerly enslaved individual into countless American homes.

After *Battle of Manassas*, there exists another work informed by the Civil War which occupies a distinctive place within Wiggins' output as his solitary extant set of variations on a

[16] Morgan, *War on the Homefront*, 387.

theme. A fairly substantial specimen relative to his other miniatures, *When this Cruel War is Over* consists of an introduction followed by three variations on the popular Civil War folk song. The 1888 edition credits a certain "L.K." as arranger of this so-called "revised edition"—the identity of L.K. is unclear and, given a lack of other editions, we cannot be certain what these revisions may have entailed. Until another score comes to light, we must content ourselves with this edition.

The piece as a whole is conceived in a highly romantic idiom. Arpeggiated flourishes and dramatic melodic leaps characterize the fioritura style of the introduction. This curtain-raising music proceeds along the same harmonic scheme as the introduction to *Sewing Song*, beginning in B-flat and tonicizing first D (III) and then G (VI). The theme itself, a small ternary form with an extroverted contrasting middle section, is set without much artistic pretense. Each of the three variations that follow places increasing demands on the performer; the third variation and coda are some of the most virtuosic music we have from Wiggins. It is principally the texture and pianism which are modified with each successive variation. In the first variation (strangely marked "*con animato*" using improper Italian grammar,) Wiggins enriches the texture with repeated sixteenth-note chords in the accompaniment and embellishes the middle section with descending arpeggios reminiscent of those found in *Water in the Moonlight*. The second variation (marked *leggiero*) again recalls *Sewing Song*, this time with regard to its texture, which involves an arpeggiated ostinato in the right hand and melody in the left. An unexpected key change occurs at the start of the third variation, which begins without preparation in G-flat major, the flattened sixth of B-flat. The theme, returning now to the treble, is heard in repeating thirty-second notes. This pattern is altered slightly in the B section to include octave reaches on every third note before returning to the A section in the home key of B-flat major.

Figure 8. Variation three, measure one of ‘When this Cruel War is Over’ (Source: Library of Congress)

Each of the compositions covered in the preceding pages merits further study and greater exposure to the concert-going public. Until his creative process is better understood, the picture we have of Thomas Wiggins will remain woefully incomplete. Numerous questions surround the historical account of this music, especially as regards the transcription and publication process. Other matters still poorly understood pertain to musical influences, performance practice, and composition timeline. I would argue these questions are well worth investigating. Thomas Wiggins represents arguably the most important Black American artist prior to the Harlem Renaissance, and his achievements stand as a crucial countercurrent to common perceptions of the role Black individuals played in nineteenth-century America. More broadly, the ascendance into the upper echelons of the classical music world of a man born into the lowest caste of American society speaks to music’s ability to transcend societal barriers. Let us ensure that his contributions are not forgotten.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Allen, Jeffery Renard. "Silence: On the History of Hearing and Seeing Blind Tom." *The Black Scholar* 45, no. 1 (2015): 44-50. https://doi.org/10.1080/00064246.2014.997603.

Brooks, Daphne A. "Puzzling the Intervals": Blind Tom and the Poetics of the Sonic Slave Narrative." The Oxford Handbook of the African American Slave Narrative. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199731480.013.023 2014.

Cole, Malcolm Stanley. "The Development of the Instrumental Rondo Finale from1750 to 1800. (with) Appendices." PhD Diss., Princeton University, 1964, https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/development-instrumental-rondo-finale-1750-1800/docview/302274078/se-2?accountid=14537.

Collection of published music including 17 piano pieces and 3 vocal selections by Blind Tom (1849-1908). Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress Photoduplication Service, 1976. Microfilm.

Gabel, Christopher R., and U.S. Army Command General Staff College Press. *Rails to Oblivion: The Battle of Confederate Railroads in the Civil War*. Fort Leavenworth, Kan.: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Press, 2002.

Graham, Gordon. "Music and Autism." *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 35, no. 2 (2001): 39–47. doi:10.2307/3333671.

Jensen-Moulton, Stephanie. "Finding Autism in the Compositions of a 19th-century Prodigy: Reconsidering 'Blind Tom' Wiggins." In *Sounding Off: Theorizing Disability in Music,* 199–215. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Kelly, George A., Charles Halle, I. Moscheles, H. S. Oakley, and John Law. "Testimonial Letters." The Black Perspective in Music 4, no. 2 (1976): 177-80. doi:10.2307/1214504.

K., L. Arranger, and Thomas Wiggins Composer. When This Cruel War Is Over. Boston: Oliver Ditson & Co, 1888. Notated Music. https://www.loc.gov/item/2023782031/.

The Marvelous Musical Prodigy, Blind Tom: The Negro Boy Pianist, Whose Performances at the Great St. James and Egyptian Halls, London and Salle Hertz, Paris Have Created Such a Profound Sensation. Baltimore: Sun "Book" and Job Printing Establishment: 1876.

Morgan, Elizabeth. "War on the Home Front: Battle Pieces for the Piano from the American Civil War." *Journal of the Society for American Music* 9, no. 4 (2015): 381–408. doi:10.1017/S1752196315000346.

Southall, Geneva H. *Blind Tom, the Black Pianist-composer (1849-1908): Continually Enslaved*. Lanham, Md.; London: Scarecrow, 1999.

Wiggins, Thomas. *The Battle of Manassas: For the Piano*. Cleveland: S. Brainard's Sons, 1866.

Wiggins, Thomas. “Sewing Song.” Columbus State University Archives and Special Collections. http://digitalarchives.columbusstate.edu/items/show/3.

Wiggins, Thomas. *Water in the Moonlight*. Chicago: S. Brainard’s Sons, 1866.

Viguerie, Bernard. The Battle of Maringo: A Military & Historical Piece for the Piano Forte With Accompaniments for Violin & Violoncello. [Monographic. Printed & Sold by G. Gilfert at His Piano Forte Warehouse No. 216 Broadway Oposite St Pauls Church, 1802] Notated Music. https://www.loc.gov/item/2015561382/.