

EXPLORING THE PIANO COMPOSITIONS OF THOMAS “BLIND TOM” WIGGINS

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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 indefinable 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 later under a series of conservatorships.³ In spite of these circumstances, Wiggins managed to compose as many as one hundred works for the piano in his lifetime. These works were transcribed by his piano teachers,

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.

including one Joseph Poznanski of New York, and around thirty specimens are known to survive today.⁴

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", to which this national upheaval is sometimes compared, 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,

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.

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 the 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. The cultural dynamic in 1850s America was becoming gradually more volatile as national divisions grew deeper, leading audiences to seek light, nostalgic music that provided an escape from such concerns. Like the songs of Stephen Foster, the programmatic character pieces of Wiggins offered an effective antidote. Creating in this genre seems to have come naturally to Wiggins: it is widely reported that he composed his first original work, *The Rainstorm*, at age five. Wiggins was by nature 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

⁵ Ibid., 12–13.

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 in the 1850s still a costly appliance and not yet a ubiquitous feature of the American home. That said, a privileged family such as the Bethunes would have had little trouble affording one, so it is probable Wiggins would have heard it growing up. Perhaps he associated the sewing machine not with the Bethunes but with Mrs. Joseph Poznanski, the work's dedicatee and spouse of his instructor/transcriber.

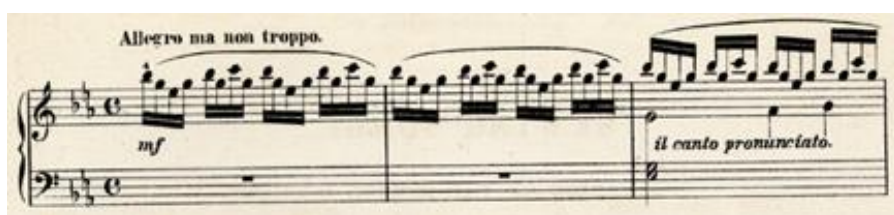


Figure 1. Wiggins, *Sewing Song* mm. 14–16 (Source: Library of Congress)

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 overarching tertian harmonic structure recalls the latter composer in particular as the music 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 work's unconventional voice-leading and repetitive nature, yet it nonetheless makes for effective parlor music and contains moments of sincere beauty. From our current vantage point, it can also be

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.

recognized as an anticipation of 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*.

His tendency to produce this type of music likely contributed to Wiggins' image as a clever mimic rather than a creative artist in the minds of his contemporaries. Upon closer inspection, however, it becomes clear that *Sewing Song* is in fact 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)
		d'
		a' (modulation to mediant)
		c' (return to tonic)
	a' (48-63)	a''
		d''
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

	b (120–135)	a
		c (V is tonicized)
		d (standing on IV)
		d'
		a' (modulation to mediant)
		c' (return to tonic)
	a' (136–151)	a''
		d''
		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) represents a continuation theme drawn from the principal motive, introducing some embellishment 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 instead proceeds to tonicize G: another Schubertian trick. 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.

Harmony plays a fundamental part in the work's effectiveness, with each tertiary modulation arriving as an injection of whimsy into the otherwise mechanistic subject matter. Recognizing this brings us nearer to the essence of the music: *Sewing Song* seems to occupy this imaginary realm straddling the border between objective reality and fanciful dreamscape, an impression established from the beginning by the rigidly uniform right-hand obbligato juxtaposed against harp-like arpeggios in the left hand.

Epitomizing this is a central episode in B major (mm. 72–103) appearing in a role akin to the development portion of a sonata form. Richard Taruskin in *Music in the Nineteenth Century* recognizes a tonicization of the flattened sixth scale degree as a shift towards introspection, a

fitting description for this moment in which the whirl of a mundane household appliance gives way to unbridled fantasy⁷. Here a lyrical melody based on an inversion of the principal motive climbs to the treble and reaches a climax on A before undergoing modulation and fragmentation, initiating a retransition to the music which began the work. Though *Sewing Song* may be constructed of rudimentary building blocks, applying even modest scrutiny to its inner workings reveals the piece to be a composition of remarkable 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).^{8,9} 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.¹⁰ 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, and the contour of the melody is retained: both feature a lower neighbor followed by an ascending leap and stepwise descent.

⁷ Richard Taruskin, *Music in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 2010), 69.

⁸ George A. Kelly et al., "Testimonial Letters," *The Black Perspective in Music* 4, no. 2 (1976): 177–80, doi:10.2307/1214504.

⁹ Southall, *Blind Tom*, 43–45.

¹⁰ *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.

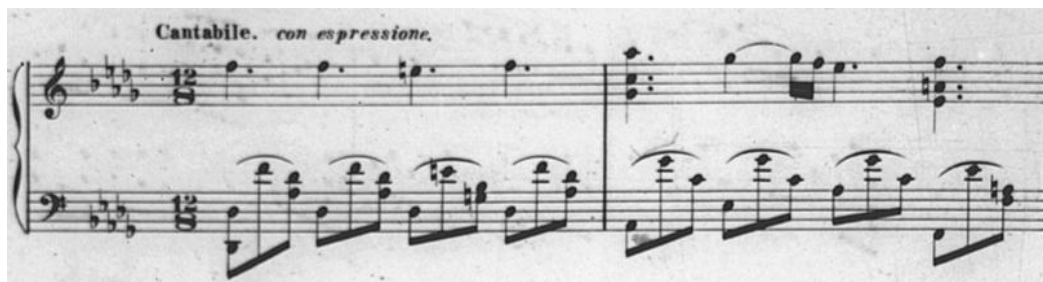


Figure 2. Wiggins, *Rêve Charmant* mm. 16–19 (Source: Library of Congress)



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*. There exists historical precedent for this specific pattern: 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.¹¹ His choice to take a genre popularized by Chopin and reimagine it in a rondo form speaks to Wiggins' familiarity with classical forms, and perhaps his desire to establish 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 (this introduction is discussed in greater detail below.) Given the fact that most of his known compositions are crowd-pleasing parlor pieces, his decision to compose a nocturne may on some level 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 risks spoiling the intimate character of the nocturne which follows. 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

¹¹ Malcolm Stanley Cole, "The Development of the Instrumental Rondo Finale from 1750 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.

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 an 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 examples, likely composed under duress, 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 was apparently horrified by the idea of another playing his music and thus 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 *Wellenklinge (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 a 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 Colonel Bethune to support the Confederate cause.¹² News from the frontlines reached him, as did the music. The effect this had on his composition is evident in

¹² Southall, *Blind Tom*, 3.

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 (if dubious) 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.¹³ *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, making for a theatrical listening experience.

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. As a rule, Civil War-era battle pieces commonly portrayed 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

¹³ Thomas Wiggins, *The Battle of Manassas: For the Piano* (Cleveland: S. Brainard's Sons, 1866).

effect preventing the publishing of works written in the South.¹⁴ 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.

One of the most influential battle pieces of the nineteenth century was Francis Kotzwara's *Battle of Prague*, first published ca. 1778 and available in America since at least 1798. A number of characteristic features of 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, including exploitation of dynamics and register to create a spatial effect. Labeled in the score as "Gen. Beauregard's trumpets," the passage in question (mm. 89–108) consists of a fortissimo trumpet fanfare in G major followed by a responding fanfare from his adversary, labeled "Gen. McDowell's trumpets in the distance." McDowell's answer is heard in a pianissimo dynamic a perfect fifth lower, cleverly accounting for the expected disparity in audio frequency across such a great distance. Worthy of note is the implied positioning of the observer on the side of Confederate general P.G.T. Beauregard.

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 in the bass register, Wiggins directs the performer to "strike [the keyboard] with both hands" when

¹⁴ 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.

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.¹⁵ 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 anticipating Ives. Additionally, Wiggins occasionally places "cannon fire" clusters augmented by fermatas as a means of breaking up the action, 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' **Figure 7.** Cannon symbol in Viguerie's 'La bataille' (Source: Library of Congress)

As the piece nears its end, the imaginative composer transcends the limitations of the piano entirely. In an effort to transport his listeners to the battle lines, Wiggins would make noises with his mouth imitating the steam engine and whistle of a locomotive signaling the

¹⁵ Ibid., 396.

arrival of General Kirby Smith's troops by rail, the most decisive moment in the battle.¹⁶

Wiggins' auditory realization consists of *La Marseillaise* accompanied by a churning steam engine punctuated by piercing whistles and thunderous cannon volleys as the replenished Confederate forces bear down on the Union army, forcing them to retreat amid the cacophony. The composer depicts their hurried flight with a flurry of Lisztian octaves played *Il piu Presto Possibile* in a startling, almost humorous passage recalling the "Dixie" theme in the previously unexplored tonality of F before culminating in two final cannon shots. This last-minute key change effectively throws the tonality of the entire piece into question, an issue further complicated by the tone clusters serving in place of clear closing harmonies.

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 of "La Marseillaise" reflects the way in which Confederate sympathizers preferred to view their position in the conflict, i.e. as participants in a righteous uprising against tyranny. It was, however, necessary to alter a few lyrics to fit their narrative.¹⁷ 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?

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ Morgan, *War on the Homefront*, 387.

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. Imperfect execution notwithstanding, 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 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 available editions, we cannot be certain what these revisions may have entailed.

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 (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 *leggiere*) 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. 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 musicians played in the nineteenth-century American cultural landscape. 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.

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