Robert Heller’s Magical Mystery Tours

Jessie Fillerup
University of Richmond, jfilleru@richmond.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarship.richmond.edu/music-faculty-publications

Part of the Music Commons

Recommended Citation

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Music at UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Music Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu.
Robert Heller’s Magical Mystery Tours

JESSIE FILLERUP

In January 1854, the Germania Musical Society—a touring orchestra based in New England—welcomed a new pianist, Robert Heller, to its ranks. To audiences in Boston, little would have distinguished Heller in his debut from the other piano virtuosos they had seen: he held a diploma from the Royal Academy, London, and played solo works by Mendelssohn and Thalberg. Liked by audiences and tolerated by critics, he secured fifteen engagements with the Germanians, two of which marked the American premieres of Beethoven’s Fourth and Fifth Piano Concertos.1 But when a critic pointedly claimed, in Dwight’s Journal of Music, that Heller’s name had “magical associations,” he distinguished the pianist from his tuxedoed peers with language meant to diminish his artistic stature.2 Heller was not the first virtuoso to be compared to wizards and magicians, but the insinuation stung because it had real merit. He had started his career as a conjurer.

The musical part of Heller’s pedigree was no illusion. Born William Henry Palmer in Faversham, near Canterbury, England, he had studied at the Royal Academy in his teens. During his adult life, he gradually accumulated a musical library that included Kalkbrenner’s treatise on harmony, Czerny’s edition of Bach’s Well-Tempered Clavier, and arrangements for audiences, though they also performed lighter fare, like polkas and waltzes. Their joint appearances with prominent European artists, including Jenny Lind and Ole Bull, promoted “the professionalization of musical performance.” See Good Music for a Free People: The Germania Musical Society in Nineteenth-Century America (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2010), 2.

1The Germanians, as Nancy Newman explains, helped introduce German orchestral repertoire to American

solo instruments and ensembles of music by Haydn, Beethoven, and Mozart. After completing his conservatory studies, he fashioned a *nom de théâtre*, perhaps by combining the names of two musical and magical luminaries: the Hungarian composer-pianist Stephen Heller and the French illusionist Jean-Eugène Robert-Houdin. He also pilfered a number of Robert-Houdin’s tricks and began working as a theatrical magician in England at age twenty-two. An 1851 review of Heller’s London act warned audiences not to expect any novelties but added that the young magician performed “with great neatness, and the audience is deceived quite as completely as they have hitherto been under the magical influence of [Ludwig] Döbler, [Robert-]Houdin, and [Henri] Robin.”

After receiving some positive notices in London, Liverpool, and Kent, Heller departed for the United States in September 1852 and remained there for much of his career. Though he described his occupation on the ship’s passenger manifest as “professor of music,” he listed his stage name, Heller, in place of Palmer, signaling his intent to pursue a different sort of life. Not long after arriving in the United States, he started his magic act, immersing himself in the Gallic persona of his magical namesake by donning a black wig, darkening his light moustache, and adopting a fake French accent—perhaps because he believed Americans would prefer a French magician to an English one. Early advertisements for his North American shows said nothing of his musical expertise, instead focusing on his European heritage and his apparent similarity to Robert-Houdin. Throughout the 1850s, Heller wavered in his dedication to theatrical magic, committing and re-committing himself to an exclusively musical career, like a sinner habitually seeking absolution. (He was the rare magician whose disrepute stemmed almost entirely from another line of work.) By 1860, he resumed a full-time career as a conjurer, re-tooling his act to emphasize his musical abilities—indeed, making them seem as if they were a natural outgrowth of his conjuring. If the “possibility of going over the brink of visual excess is basic to the virtuoso role,” as Lawrence Kramer has noted of Franz Liszt, Heller turned this excess into a feigned supernatural display.

The sight of musicians at a magic show would have been unremarkable in Heller’s time. Music—typically operatic overtures, marches, waltzes, polkas, and quadrilles—opened and closed most conjuring acts; interludes between effects, performed by a wide range of instrumentalists and singers, provided a diversionary respite. For magicians who used patter [a form of verbal misdirection], music introduced the effect, its auditory frame defining invisible boundaries and establishing a tone and tempo. Acts billed as “silent” were accompanied by music throughout, reflecting similar practices in pantomime. Magicians themselves sometimes performed musical numbers, whether as interludes or as part of the act, with varying degrees of skill. Some invented their own novelty instruments, which served the dual purpose of delighting spectators and shielding the magician’s
musical performances from the judgment of music critics. Yet even by these standards, Heller’s achievements were unusual: no other musician or conjurer could lay claim to a similar level of achievement in both domains.

Recent accounts of nineteenth-century American music-making have explored a broad range of styles, genres, and practices, offering destratified views of musical experience shaped by listeners, performers, managers, and advertisers. But few if any of these histories have identified the magic show as a venue for hearing, performing, and commodifying music—especially piano music—during this period. The cultural influence of magic shows and their broad cultural and geographic reach underscore this oversight. Consider as a parallel phenomenon the influence of touring piano virtuosos, whose recital programming between the 1840s and the 1870s changed to reflect the tastes and behaviors of American audiences, as R. Allen Lott has described. When Heller toured domestically, featuring conjuring tricks and piano pieces in the same act, his musical performances reached millions of spectators in at least seventeen U.S. states and territories, as well as every major American city. Between 1864 and 1865, he christened 585 Broadway in New York City the Salle Diabolique and gave more than 365 shows; by one newspaper account, around 2500 people attended a single performance.

Advertisements for his act represented virtuoso pianism as a magical spectacle while making targeted appeals to spectators’ gender, cultural proclivities, and political allegiance. Toward the end of his life Heller became an international sensation, embarking on a world tour in the manner of a celebrated virtuoso, with stops in London, Cairo, and Hong Kong, among other cities.

The purpose of this article is to examine how Heller’s magic shows mediated mid-century entertainment genres and trends in piano performance. His musical acumen helped him seamlessly blend the magic show with other spectacles, including minstrelsy, burlesque, and the piano recital. Advertisements and accounts of his acts demonstrate how he framed musical performance, a conventional feature of the magic show, as an extraordinary attraction. They also reveal the strategies a mid-nineteenth-century performer might employ to negotiate the crowded landscape of consumer culture and American popular entertainment, especially during the tumultuous years of the Civil War. One such strategy included joining forces with “Blind Tom” (Thomas Greene) Wiggins, the Black musical prodigy whom Heller had briefly tutored; they performed together in Louisville during one of the magician’s last appearances in the South. Throughout the 1860s, Heller was influenced by gendered musical practices and regional attitudes toward race and politics, leading him to market his act toward middle-class women, music lovers, Unionists, and those who had been scarred, physically and emotionally, by the Civil War.

With few extant sources in Heller’s hand, his life and work must be assembled from a patchwork of newspaper reviews, programs, and a variety of promotional materials, including handbills, broadsides, and classified advertisements. These materials confirm the scope of Heller’s influence, which included areas west of the Mississippi River, like California, Nevada, Utah, and Texas—undiscovered country to other piano virtuosos. His formative appearances in the 1850s indicate how he blended conjuring and musical virtuosity in a show that was at once novel and legible, hewing in

---


many ways to the conventions of other popular theatrical entertainments.\textsuperscript{13} Having fused his musical and magical identities, he had little inducement to pry them apart; indeed, his musical expertise opened up marketing and performance opportunities unavailable to his conjuring competitors. In addition to his shows, he published several salon pieces for piano during the 1850s and early 1860s that demonstrate an awareness of current stylistic and topical trends. He similarly sized up the tastes of musical amateurs and the cultural and political views of spectators throughout the 1860s—particularly when advertising and programming his own arrangement of “Dixie” during and after the Civil War.

\textbf{The Conjuring Virtuoso}

During the 1850s, Heller rotated through a variety of musical and conjuring engagements, at times delving into both domains in a single show. For a few years, Heller did what many fledging artists do, cobbling together a living by teaching and performing. Between 1852 and 1853, he gave around 200 performances as a magician in New York City at his Saloon of Wonders, located at 539 Broadway, while continuing to work as a pianist. His musical performances included a major benefit concert in 1852 and, in the following year, a spot as a featured soloist with the Dodworth Band, both at Metropolitan Hall.\textsuperscript{14} In January 1854, he started his collaboration with the Germania Musical Society, which ended when the orchestra disbanded several months later.

According to reviews in \textit{Dwight's Journal of Music}, Heller met with mixed success in Boston. \textit{Dwight's} critics never forgave him for failing to sound like the Austrian pianist Alfred Jaëll, who had thrilled audiences during his American tour in the early 1850s. Among the many complaints were Heller's “feeble” lead-in to the “Hallelujah chorus” at the Germanians' farewell concert and his performance of Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto, which compared unfavorably with Charles Hallé's, given recently in London.\textsuperscript{15} Compliments about Heller's playing were rare and praise typically countered with annoyances, especially concerning repertoire—which, on one occasion, consisted of a “rather senseless hodgepodge” containing none of the promised Chopin and concluding with variations on a “hacknied Donizetti serenade.”\textsuperscript{16} In one review, reserved admiration for Heller's performance of Beethoven's Fifth Piano Concerto was coupled with an attempt to undermine the pianist by reminding readers of his former career path:

[The piece] seemed finely rendered; certainly on the part of the orchestra; and Mr. Heller marched through the difficulties of the piano part with ease and steadiness, rendering the letter faithfully, if not the spirit, of a music for which he never seems to have sympathetic fire or delicacy, or sense of light and shade enough, with all his \textit{prestidigitation}—an apt term, that French one, for one who learned at the magician's trade the sleight of hand that now avails him as a pianist!\textsuperscript{17}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{15}] A review from January 1853 noted that Jaëll “is now, we suppose, generally acknowledged the foremost pianist who has visited this country. Evident to any one, who once hears him play, in whatever music, is the brilliancy of his touch, the liquid purity and smoothness and consummate finish of his passages, the well-conceived, clear, elegant rendering of the whole piece, with just regard to light and shade and fair proportion, and full bringing out of every point, and above all, the happy certainty and ease with which he does it.” See “Concerts of the Past Week,” \textit{Dwight's Journal of Music}, vol. 2, no. 16 (22 January 1853): 124. See also “The Farewell Concert of the Germania Musical Society,” \textit{Dwight's Journal of Music}, vol. 5, no. 2 [15 April 1854]: 14; “Music Abroad,” \textit{Dwight's Journal}, vol. 5, no. 5 [6 May 1854]: 36.
\item[\textsuperscript{16}] “Sixth Germania Concert,” 118.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Dwight’s opinion notwithstanding, Heller did draw adherents, including a reviewer who favorably compared him and Gottschalk to one of the latest upstarts from abroad, August Gockel.18

When the Germanians ended their season in April 1854, Heller returned to conjuring, spending a year trying to establish a regional reputation. He made the most of his European heritage in cities like Richmond, Virginia, where one local newspaper suggested that “the art cabalistic appears to have descended through several generations from one of his ancestors, a celebrated German alchymist and astrologer.”19 Reviews of his magic show in early 1855 indicate that he started incorporating more virtuoso pianism, promising a “magic musical soiree” with Heller as “pianist and magician.”20 Advertisements provided few details about his repertoire, seeking instead to attract music lovers by alluding to an ill-defined canon of music by the “great composers.”21 Heller no doubt had many reasons for including more music in his act. Perhaps he merely wanted to test the waters, seeing whether he could withstand the rigors of daily concertizing before turning to an exclusively musical career (which he would soon attempt). A desire to distinguish himself from rival conjurers might also have been a key incentive, especially at a time when music started playing a more central role in magic shows. In the early 1840s, the Scottish magician Professor Anderson began listing the titles of specific musical works and the names of ensembles in his advertisements, often programming the same types of pieces that the conductor Louis Jullien featured in his series of orchestral concerts in London, inaugurated in 1840.22 To broaden his stage appeal, Anderson had frequently hired novelty acts—bell ringers, a female violin virtuoso, and a brass band of sax horns, among others. He and Robert-Houdin both commissioned new piano pieces to be featured in their shows, giving away sheet music as souvenirs or making it available for purchase. As magicians increasingly highlighted musical performance in their acts, Heller could offer something distinct from his rivals.

Yet a third motivation for emphasizing music may have stemmed from the finger-wagging of a subset of critics who, in 1855, hailed his wisdom to pursue a musical career. One described Heller as a “pianist of distinction . . . with the view of resuming his regular profession of music, which he temporarily abandoned under a magical delusion.”23 Construing his theatrical career as a delusion was more than rhetorical bluster. Though the practice of conjuring had gained some respectability, its long history of charlatanism was further compounded by recent public excitement over confidence men, whose “feats of deception involved some combination of false appearances and verbal manipulation,” as James W. Cook notes.24 The methodological similarities between magicians and grifters were not lost on the public, prompting disapproving remarks like those in the editorial: surely no virtuoso with Heller’s gifts would be a conspirator in fraudulent schemes. By turning part of his act into a piano recital—and, moreover, featuring music that would be readily identified as “classical” by composers like Mendelssohn, Thalberg, and Beethoven—Heller practiced a kind of reputation laundering. Perhaps he patterned his approach after that of P. T. Barnum, who promoted Jenny Lind’s American tour during 1850–51, just a few years before Heller started adding more music to his act. Daniel Cavicchi claims of the Lind-Barnum pairing that it allowed Barnum, “a grizzled veteran of the popular exhibition business and the inventor of ‘humbug,’ or

18“Mr. Gockel is by no means as finished an artist as Mr. Gottschalk or Mr. (Heller) Palmer.” Review in Spirit of the Times, 23 April 1853, 120; quoted in Lawrence, Strong on Music, vol. 2, 425, n. 117.
19Heller, “The Wizard,” The Daily Dispatch, 13 December 1854, p. 2. Whether he sought further employment as a recitalist or accompanist is hard to discern; the fact that he toured regionally with his conjuring act indicates a willingness to travel should a musical career have required it.
20Classified advertisements, Daily National Intelligencer, 2 February 1855 and 12 February 1855.
21Classified advertisement, Daily National Intelligencer, 12 February 1855.
22These practices are examined in greater detail in the author’s “Marimbo Chimes and the Wizard’s Monster Band,” 297–98.
23“Mr. Heller” [editorial], Daily National Intelligencer, 22 March 1855, 1.
24Cook, The Arts of Deception, 201.
19th Century Music

Commercial fraud, to shed the more unsavory aspects of his reputation."²⁵ By wedding conjuring to the piano recital, Heller sought a similar result, easing spectators’ concerns over shifty hocus-pocus while appealing to their aspirational musical tastes.

At first, integrating more music into his magic act led to neither fame nor fortune, though Heller was successful enough to have sustained a regional touring career. Instead, he left conjuring and spent five years pursuing music in Washington, D.C. The reasons for his change of occupation are unclear. If he had been storing his conjuring apparatus at the Chinese Museum in Philadelphia, as historians of magic have suggested, then he might have lost it to the July 1854 fire.²⁶ The magicians of magic have suggested, then he might have changed his name and move to Washington to flee his creditors.²⁷ But if that were the case, they would not have had far to look: Heller worked in nearby cities, like Richmond and Baltimore, before relocating, even placing a classified advertisement in a D.C. newspaper, publicly shedding his alias: "Mr. W. Henry Palmer, hitherto known as Robert Heller, has much pleasure in informing his friends and the public in general that he has determined on locating himself in this city, and is prepared to receive pupils for instruction on the pianoforte, harmony and composition."²⁸

Heller advertised his “last soirée” in March 1855 with a two-part program: first, a piano recital featuring Beethoven’s “Pathétique” Sonata, a Thalberg fantasia, selections from Mendelssohn’s Songs without Words, and a few of Heller’s own compositions, followed by a series of magical effects, including the Second Sight illusion, a mind-reading trick popularized by Robert-Houdin.²⁹ A lengthy preview of the concert in Washington, D.C.’s Evening Star noted, without pejorative commentary, that Heller would include conjuring effects “by way of rendering his entertainment the more attractive.”³⁰ The preview also criticized those who appreciated neither “delicate, comprehensive, and highly finished music” nor the “professional merits” of Heller himself—remarks that anticipated Dwight’s brand of criticism.

Whatever the reason for Heller’s change of career, prospective piano students did not come rushing to his door, attested by another ad posted a few months later that adopted a more humble posture and left out any reference to his former identity: “Mr. Wm. Henry Palmer begs to inform his friends and pupils that he is now prepared to resume his professional duties.”³¹ He acquired students, but many seemed not to keep up with their bills. In 1857 he married one of them, Anna Kieckhoefer, the daughter of a German immigrant and prominent banker who enjoyed having a musical son-in-law.³² Three months before his marriage Heller published a


²⁶ The apparatus would have consisted of machines or devices constructed for stage illusions. See, for example, Henry Ridgely Evans, “Adventures in Magic and the Occult Arts: Baron von Kempelen and His Chess Playing Automaton,” The Linking Ring 12, no. 9 [November 1892]: 699. The automaton mentioned in Evans’s title was lost in the same fire.

²⁷ Dean Carnegie, email to the author, 14 November 2018. Carnegie quotes a portion of the letter, which he viewed when it was sold at auction, in a web entry on Heller at http://www.themagicdetective.com/2011/01/go-to-heller-part-1.html. The letter is addressed to Mrs. Blanchard of Portland, Maine. Heller could have made her acquaintance two years before settling in Washington: a former assistant reports that after their first engagement in New York City, they toured a number of cities in the northeast, including Portland. See M. H. Levett, “Robert Heller’s Brother Alive: Personal Recollections of His First American Appearance,” M.U.M. 8, no. 74 [May 1919]: 1.

²⁸ Classified advertisement, Evening Star, 14 May 1855, p. 2.

²⁹ Classified advertisement, Evening Star, 21 March 1855, p. 3.

³⁰ “Local Intelligence,” Evening Star, 22 March 1855, p. 1.

³¹ Classified advertisement, Evening Star, 24 August 1855, p. 3. Around the same time, Heller started to place ads for his piano classes, noting his plans to hold a mid-year exam to assess the progress of each student in front of their family and friends, giving prizes to those who showed the greatest proficiency—a practice common at the Paris Conservatoire. See “The Pianoforte Classes of Mr. Wm. Henry Palmer,” Evening Star, 21 September 1855, p. 3.

³² Heller’s daughter, Mary Adelaide, born in 1863, recounted how Heller would visit the Kieckhoefer home, kindling a romance with the youngest daughter. See Mary Adelaide Palmer Blanchet, “My Father—Robert Heller,” The Sphinx, vol. 42 (10 March 1943): 16.
notice indicating he had grown both short of funds and weary of his current occupation:

Mr. Wm. Henry Palmer deeply regrets being compelled to resort to this means of calling the attention of his pupils to the early settlement of their bills now considerably past due; for, besides the annoyance and waste of time to which he is subjected by their remissness in paying their dues, he feels that it will be incumbent upon him to deny himself the pleasure of imparting any further instruction to those who are dilatory in their payments.33

His burgeoning irritation notwithstanding, he continued teaching in Washington for another three years, perhaps feeling an obligation to his new wife and family to persist in a career that would not require extensive travel.

When not working as a piano teacher or collection agent, Heller served as organist at the Church of the Epiphany under the rector Charles H. Hall, playing at services attended by political figures illustrious and notorious, including Edwin Stanton and Jefferson Davis. Other local churches often called on him to give improvised demonstrations on newly acquired organs.34 He published several compositions during these years as well, including flashy showpieces and two songs featuring his own lyrics.35 Only one of his piano solos, “The Presidents Mounted Guard Quick Step,” might be described as “brilliant but not difficult”—a favorite blurb of nineteenth-century music publishers, designating pieces that imply a higher degree of skill than the pianist possesses.36 Most would fall into the same category as a pair of pieces he published in 1858, which a New York periodical recommended for “professors and first-class amateurs.”37 Scales, arpeggios, octaves, and leaping figures abound in Heller’s music, which is usually marked allegro and would often exceed the technical capabilities of “piano girls” and their musically inclined mothers, the most avid consumers of sheet music in mid-century America.38 Way-side Flowers, for example, a “pleasing fantasia on the drinking song in Lucrezia Borgia,” starts out promisingly enough for the amateur but soon accumulates enough arpeggios, leaps, and rapid runs to rival a Thalberg fantasy. Laughing Waters, published in 1863 but probably composed much earlier, similarly offers the pianist little respite: thirty-second note scalar figures populate the lento introduction, while the remainder of the piece, played allegro ma non troppo, features leaping accompaniment and brilliant right-hand passagework. (A catalog of Heller’s published and unpublished compositions, as well as a partial list of repertoire for piano and organ, appears in Appendix A.)

Yet despite these technical challenges (or perhaps because of them), Heller’s music still may have drawn amateur women pianists in good number. In Susan Petigru King’s novel, Lily (1855), the title character—described as “no great musician” but possessing “taste, if not execution”—sits at the piano, “patiently deciphering a passage in Thalberg.”39 A columnist in Harper’s Magazine advised female pianists to “practice in private music far more difficult than that you play in general society.”40 The extant libraries of amateur women pianists sometimes contained virtuoso

33 Classified advertisement, Evening Star, 30 June 1857, p. 2.
34 See, for example, a classified advertisement in the Daily National Intelligencer, 14 April 1856, for a concert at Trinity Church on Third and C streets, featuring Heller at the new organ.
35 Some were probably written many years earlier. An 1848 review of Palmer playing a concert in Canterbury noted that Heller’s three mazurkas, published in 1863, “reflect great credit on the young composer.” See the provincial reviews in The Musical World 23 (3 March 1848): 154.
37 “New Music,” Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper, 13 March 1858.
repertoire, probably intended for personal study, where they might exercise the kind of vigorous physicality that had to be restrained in the presence of others, as Candace Bailey suggests. Heller’s compositions might have appealed to women pianists in the domestic sphere in the same way Thalberg’s did for Lily, and for young women like her.

Two of his pieces would not have required hours of laboring at the keyboard: “The Soldier’s Adieu” (1855) and “I Have Sworn to Love Thee Ever” (1863), both ballads with sentimental texts and accessible [if not easy] piano accompaniment. “The Soldier’s Adieu” was especially prescient, anticipating the Civil War-era theme of families separated when a husband or son enlisted. Musically, it contained the programmatic flourishes typical of battle pieces, bass notes signifying cannons and tremolos evoking the chaos of clashing forces. Accompanying the single line of text about the battle itself—“when the cannon’s earthly thunder shak’s the battle plain”—were measured right-hand tremolos and octaves played *tremolando*, sustain pedal depressed throughout for maximum resonance. The primary difference between Heller’s piece and the Civil War ballads soon to come was its focus on a husband and father figure in place of the more popular mother-son pairing.

To market his music to American [and specifically female] musicians, Heller started using French titles and descriptions, apparent in *Souvenir d’hiver, valse brillante* (1857, with the subheading “dedié à Sigismond Thalberg par Robert Heller”) and two pieces from 1858, *Caprice sentimentale* and *Stude [sic] de bravura, morceau de salon* (1858), both of which included the phrase “pour le pianoforte par W. Henry Palmer [Robert Heller].” Heller’s French turn, driven in part by his longstanding Francophilia, also aimed to capitalize on his European background. The 1855 concert preview of his “last soirée” as a conjuring pianist had lauded his “transatlantic fame” as a composer, his music “distinguished by a display of taste, science, and skill” reflecting the “real ‘musical world’ abroad.” This view, held by music lovers who found American cultural life insufficiently cosmopolitan, was accompanied, perhaps not coincidentally, by a surge in sales of French musical editions in the United States. Between 1837 and 1856, the United States imported the second-highest share of French editions; in the years 1836 and 1850, it purchased one-fifth of the market, the most of any country. Heller’s Washington-era compositions offered the linguistic appeal of an export, particularly on title pages. *Laughing Water*, for example, featured quite a bit of French on the cover (“morceau de concert pour le piano par Robert Heller”) but very little inside the actual composition itself: with the exception of “brilliante,” a term easily legible to anglophones, tempo and performance markings were in Italian, the musician’s vernacular. It seems Heller adapted for the musical world his early-career strategy of impersonating Robert-Houdin in his magic shows, imprinting his published music with apparently French bona fides.

After five years building a musical career in Washington, Heller returned to conjuring.

---

41 In her study of antebellum women pianists in the south, Candace Bailey points to evidence from diaries and sheet music libraries suggesting that women played technically challenging repertoire but rarely performed it—for men or even, perhaps, for other women. See “The Antebellum ‘Piano Girl’ in the American South,” *37.
42 Both the tremolos and the thundering bass notes were, as Elizabeth Morgan argues, drawn from the musical vocabulary of melodrama. See “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): 393.
44 “Local Intelligence,” *Evening Star*, 22 March 1855.
in 1860, this time for good. Rumors swirled that an unhappy marriage drove him back into the arms of his first love—magic, and with it, a Bohemian lifestyle. But Heller’s decision was best summed up when he once responded to a question about why he had not pursued an exclusively musical career by “placing his hand upon his pocket.” He announced in a May 1860 advertisement his “return to public life”—a curious turn of phrase, suggesting that the past five years of composing, teaching, and performing had been spent in a hermitage. Yet in a way, Robert Heller had gone underground, partly effaced by Palmer, the British-born, conservatory-educated piano virtuoso. In the early 1850s, before his years in Washington, Heller had published compositions under his conjuring stage name: for example, the cover of Josephine Mazurka (1852, part of a set of two pieces called Twilight Musings) prominently displayed a portrait of the composer wearing a wide-lapeled black coat, white waistcoat, and white tie—apparel that might befit conjurers and musicians alike (plate 1). While he attributed most of his publications to Palmer between 1855 and 1860, many still displayed the Heller name, in parentheses and smaller print, suggesting he maintained a double identity throughout the Washington years despite rarely performing as a conjurer. Advertisements for prospective students issued from Palmer, the pedigreed musician; compositions and ads for musical performances featured both names, Palmer appearing more frequently in reviews.

Heller cultivated a bifurcated professional identity that might be flexibly deployed, much like the twentieth-century composer Vladimir Dukelsky’s practice of attributing his operas, ballets, and orchestral works to his birth name and his songs and musicals to a nom de plume, Vernon Duke. As Aaron Ziegel notes, Duke’s use of two musical personas was “an artifice of creative protection,” developed from his desire to achieve success as a popular and classical composer. Heller faced a similar predicament, knowing that no matter how much he dressed up his conjuring act as respectable family entertainment, he would draw criticism from some quarters. To maintain his teaching business, he rejected his

---

46 Secondary sources date his return to theatrical magic from 1861, but newspapers indicate he had started to perform by 1860 in Washington, D.C. and Jackson, Mississippi. See notices in the Semi-Weekly Mississippian, 23 November 1860; The Daily Mississippian, 27 November 1860, and Evening Star, 4 May 1860.

47 Benjamin Perley Poore’s posthumous account of Heller summarizes the rumor-mongering. See “A Reminiscence,” Huntsville Gazette, 2 January 1886, p. 4. Another newspaper account claimed that after Heller returned to conjuring, he abandoned his wife and children, leaving his wife to die broken-hearted. Part of this story had to be corrected, as Anna Heller was alive and living in Paris. See “A Queer Story about Heller,” The Washington Post, 1 November 1878, p. 2, and the corrective editorial published the following day.

48 “Mr. Heller’s Opinion of the Steinway Piano,” The Pittsburgh Gazette, 28 March 1862, p. 3.

49 Advertisement, Evening Star, 4 May 1860, p. 2.

50 One month before announcing his “return to public life,” Heller participated in a Grand Sacred Concert at Trinity Church, billed as Palmer throughout, he served as conductor and organist, playing, among other things, a “Descriptive Impromptu of the Destruction of the Egyptians in the Red Sea.” See the classified advertisement in Evening Star, 17 April 1860, p. 2.

conjuring alias altogether, but he approached his publishing career differently, recognizing that his musical and magical halves might be partners instead of rivals.

**Marketing and Merchandising**

In 1860, when he resumed work as a magician, he advertised a June concert where “Mr. W.H. Palmer, in his mystical character of Robert Heller, will introduce the wonderful invention known as the Great Second Sight Mystery.”  

Heller then phased out Palmer quickly; few mentions of his musical alias appear in the press after 1860. But even though Palmer’s name was sacrificed to professional reinvention, his musical virtuosity became an integral part of Heller’s magic act, which linked the conjoined realms of consumer goods and domestic music-making, emulating the approach of Clementi, Kalkbrenner, and Herz—virtuosos whose affiliation with piano manufacturing magnified their fame. In many cases, florid newspaper ad copy emphasized Heller’s association with social and cultural elites, connecting his choice of piano manufacturer to the musical discernment of spectators and the instrument’s retail price. One advertisement, for the *Chicago Tribune*, proclaimed that Steinway had shipped for Heller’s show a “superb grand piano made exclusively for concert use and pronounced by the musical critics and connoisseurs of the Eastern cities to be far superior” to the company’s previous models. “Every lover of music,” the ad advised, “should hear it.”

Here, Heller exploits the view—promulgated by sub-groups of self-deprecating Midwesterners and haughty coastal elites alike—that the New England area had superior cultural and aesthetic tastes.

The domestic music-making and avid concert attendance of middle-class American women, in particular, gave Heller ample motivation to promote his own musical sophistication, which he expressed through repertoire and preferred instrument brands. At a performance in Pittsburgh, he discoursed at length on the quality of the Steinway piano, inspiring a review that might be mistaken for an advertisement: the critic named the Steinway dealer who had furnished the instrument and recounted how Heller pronounced it “one of the best, indeed he thought the best he had ever used.”

In this instance, Heller may have emphasized his connection to highbrow musical culture because Professor Anderson, best known for his bluster and puffery, was performing in Pittsburgh at the same time. Anderson was one of the first conjurers to link the magic show to popular concerts, like those staged by Louis Jullien, but he was able to profit by association only. Heller could make more lofty claims, not merely evoking impressive instruments and cultivated tastes but creating the musical experiences associated with them.

He commodified his celebrity by forging mutually transactional relationships with piano purveyors and manufacturers—a phenomenon known today as co-branding, whereby the “connotative meanings of two signification systems fuse into a new one.”

Touring the United States, he favored Steinways and Chickering; abroad, he usually played Érard and Collard & Collard. His programs were flanked by advertisements from piano dealers who recognized in Heller’s act an opportunity to reach potential customers. These ads, which included brands like Steinway, Bradbury, and Knabe, sometimes featured Heller’s name among those of other virtuosos who had tested and endorsed the instruments, including Thalberg, Gottschalk, and Strakosch (plate 2). At times, Heller’s publicity materials advertised his preferred pianos at the expense of the “house” brand, which would be dutifully and inconspicuously listed in small print.

---

53 Classified advertisement, *Chicago Tribune*, 18 October 1865, 1.
54 “Mr. Heller’s Opinion of the Steinway Piano,” 3.
55 Classified advertisement, *The Daily Clarion* (Jackson, MS), 17 January 1868. The ad appeared nationally, but I have chosen this particular citation to show its wide regional distribution. See also Marcel Danesi, *Brands* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 95.
His affiliation with brands like Steinway functioned much like his choice of classical repertoire, communicating refinement through semiotic shorthand. The Heller-Steinway alliance generated a lucrative commercial opportunity at a time when the brand’s share of the market was rapidly expanding. In 1860, a Steinway piano was still a fairly rare commodity: only thirty-five instruments (thirty squares, five grands) were manufactured in its New York City factory each month, contributing just over 400 pianos to the 21,000 produced annually. Yet by the mid-1860s, Steinway exceeded rival Chickering in sales, raising its profile among professional and amateur musicians alike by securing a series of patents, collecting prizes at international exhibitions, and opening its New York concert hall in 1866.\(^{56}\) Heller’s endorsement of Steinway, promoted through his relentless U.S. tours in the 1860s, brought virtually unprecedented national exposure; indeed, his advocacy could have encouraged Steinway to expand its artistic partnerships, underwriting Anton Rubinstein’s American tour in 1872.\(^{58}\)

It would be years after Heller’s death before another conjuring musician, Edward Maro, would devise a similar collaboration with Washburn Guitars. One of his advertisements


\(^{58}\)Lott, \textit{Paris to Peoria}, 173.
19th Century Music

ca. 1900] featured endorsements from Emma Calvé, Jean de Reske, Samuel Siegel, and Arling Schaeffer, accompanied by the notice that “Mr. Maro uses Washburns exclusively.” But despite Maro’s ingenuity and musical versatility—inventing a number of instruments and playing the saxophone, guitar, mandolin, violin, and others with a fair degree of skill—he remained a regional talent, touring the Northeast and Midwest on the Lyceum circuit. That Maro was unable to conjure celebrity from his own musical expertise demonstrates the exceptional nature of Heller’s fame, amplified during his national tours through marketing strategies that targeted specific cultural trends and navigated volatile political currents.

By 1860, Heller had crafted an act perfectly calibrated to the tastes of American audiences. A typical program, organized in three or four parts, opened with stage illusions and often involved variations on Robert-Houdin’s effects, like the Inexhaustible Bottle (popular with audiences because it produced a seemingly endless supply of liquor). Music, specifically piano performance, came next, followed by minstrelsy and mind-reading effects (plate 3). By 1867, Haidee Heller, his mistress and assistant, collaborated on the Second Sight effect and Living Pictures, which featured Haidee in a frame enacting a series of characters, accompanied by Heller at the piano. Not a skilled mechanic himself, Heller developed the Wood Minstrels—a marionette band whose name parodied the popular Wood’s Minstrels troupe—in place of the musical automata created and exhibited by rival illusionists (plate 4). The band’s performances hewed closely to the thematic and structural design of minstrel shows, incorporating humor, a variety of musical numbers, and a burlesque conclusion that parodied the second-act chorus of Gounod’s Faust.

Most magic shows featured music in abundance—particularly pantomime acts, which were accompanied throughout. But the quantity

59 Advertisement, Harry Ransom Center for the Humanities (HRC), Magic Collection, Box 17, Maro.
60 On Maro’s career, see the author’s article, “Marimbo Chimes and the Wizard’s Monster Band,” 307–08.
of music in Heller’s shows probably exceeded what was typical for magicians using patter: up to half of his two-hour shows included some kind of musical performance, whether by the marionette minstrels, the goblin drum, or the magician-pianist himself. Functionally, Heller’s music also played a different role than in most magic shows. While his competitors considered the interludes between effects an ideal place to feature music, Heller incorporated the piano recital into the act itself—though it lasted only about twenty minutes, reflecting an awareness that instrumental music could tax the spectator’s attention. He played some of the numbers from his programs with the Germania Musical Society, including operatic paraphrases by Thalberg—music that might be described, in Lawrence Levine’s words, as “simultaneously popular and elite.”

Beethoven and Mendelssohn, both composers he had played in Boston, were notably absent from the magic show. In their place, Heller offered arrangements of popular songs like “Home, Sweet Home,” character pieces, and burlesques, many of which he had composed himself.

One of his most frequently programmed pieces, *The Piano-forte Practice of a Boarding School Miss*, parodied the vexing, obligatory musical labor shared by many middle-class girls and women. Some advertisements and reviews described the piece as a “travestie,” evoking the cross-dressing female impersonators who had become fixtures in comic genres and minstrelsy. M. H. Levett, a former assistant, recalled the piece as a comic imitation, Heller embodying a young female pianist toiling over “A Maiden’s Prayer,” by Tekla Bądarzewska-Baranowska. As Levett noted, the “rapid accomplishment of the easy passages, the slow and labored pounding out of the more difficult ones, and the frequent nerve-racking intrusion of false notes, was made excruciatingly funny.” The piece concluded with the girl deciding to advance the clock on the piano by half an hour, enabling her early release. When impersonating her, Heller seems to have avoided a mocking or derisive manner—a strategic choice given the proportion of women in the audience, which mirrored the demographics of mid-century recital and concert attendees. (An 1862 review of Heller’s show, for example, pointed out how the audience “was largely composed of

---


ladies, and it was refreshing to see a bevy of beauties in the gallery.”

If 

Boarding School Miss became a perennial favorite with spectators, the fullest measure of its farcical humor was reserved for the women with a first-hand knowledge of the girl’s predicament, some of whom had no doubt plugged away at “A Maiden’s Prayer” themselves. After an 1866 performance in Hartford, one critic described how “the young ladies present ‘who have been there’ appeared to enjoy it most of all.”

The success of 

Boarding School Miss reveals how musical performance and magical spectacle converged in Heller’s theatrical recitals. His virtuoso pianism appealed to the largely white, middle-class, female audiences of the piano recital whose experience with female impersonation would have stemmed primarily from minstrel shows. Importing a stripped-down form of impersonation into the piano recital might not seem especially audacious, given that virtuosos like Leopold de Meyer, who reportedly ate an ice cream cone with one hand while playing fantasias with the other, had already habituated audiences to a wide range of curiosities. But by blending the magic show with travesty at the piano, Heller turned 

Boarding School Miss into a sort of conjuring trick, transforming himself into a comic spectacle with few contemporary parallels as he played pianist, actor, and magician at once. The piece was a key attraction, routinely mentioned in reviews; it drew music lovers to the magic show and helped to strengthen the link Heller sought between conjuring and family-friendly entertainment.

Though he could have created a version of the piece featuring a young female musician—perhaps a singer, with Heller playing her long-suffering accompanist—he reserved the comic number exclusively for himself, reflecting broader preferences in his musical programming. Despite the growing trend to name musical performers in magic advertisements, Heller only listed them sporadically. While musicians in other acts sometimes drew positive notices, Heller’s musicians, who played during interludes, were rarely acknowledged—unless a malfunction trained an unfavorable spotlight on them. The message Heller seemed to be selling was “le concert, c’est moi.” Reviewers, for the most part, bought it.

But his savvy for musical marketing was not absolute. One way to increase the sales of his published compositions would have been to feature them in his act—a strategic co-branding with mutual benefits that would have rebounded to the Heller and Palmer identities alike. Other magicians had pursued music publishing with some success: Professor Anderson had hired the composer Victor Kneringer to pen a polka and a waltz for his North American tour in 1850, and Robert-Houdin had commissioned a suite of quadrilles from Adolphe-Clair le Carpentier in the 1840s. Both magicians had made the piano arrangements available for purchase at their shows and in local music stores; indeed, Carpentier’s quadrilles were sufficiently popular that they were listed in a music catalogue nearly twenty years after Robert-Houdin had retired. By the early 1860s, Heller had already published a few salon pieces, including Josephine Mazurka and The Presidents Mounted Guard Quick Step, that would have served as suitable accompaniment for his act, but no evidence of their use in that capacity has surfaced. He could also have substituted one of the “classical” fantasias or paraphrases in the recital portion for a bravura composition like his own Souvenir d’hiver, which featured the sort of pianistic barn burning typical of Thalberg’s pieces, most evident in the alternating octave passages and rapid left-hand leaps on the final page (plate 5). Souvenir was even dedicated to Thalberg—an homage partly meant to confer the benefit of association on its composer. At the very least, Heller could have sold the published compositions at his shows or mentioned the names of publishing firms in his advertisements, as he did on one occasion for Charles Fradel’s Goblin Drum Polka.

But it seems that his desire to intertwine his musical and magical identities had its limits: the only original Heller compositions featured in his shows were unpublished pastiches, like 

Boarding School Miss.
After reigniting his conjuring career in 1860, Heller quickly established himself with regional audiences in Washington, D.C. and Baltimore before branching out to the Midwest and the South, with stops in Cincinnati, Lexington, Louisville, Jackson, and Memphis, among other cities. As he expanded his tour nationally, he was unwittingly poised at a precarious moment in American history. In December 1860, he arrived in New Orleans and was performing in Galveston and Houston when Texas seceded from the Union in February 1861. [Heller's tours throughout the United States and abroad are traced in Appendix B.] He seemed undeterred by these disruptions, remaining in Texas and even returning to New Orleans in April, despite Louisiana having already seceded in late January. During his stay, a scornful notice in a New York newspaper pointed out how one of his advertisements there described him as a "citizen of the South, and married to a Southern lady." If the account is accurate, it shows Heller commodifying his politics and

personal relationships to ingratiate himself with Southern audiences. (It also shows him embroidering the truth: Anna Kieckhoefer hailed from Washington, the vulnerable yet indispensable headquarters of the Union's war effort.)

Heller spent too little time in the South to determine whether his new marketing strategy was effective. He left the region not long after the mid-April attack on Fort Sumter that kickstarted the Civil War, though given the advertisements he had placed earlier in the month, the attack itself had not driven him off. An account of Heller stowing away on the Cuba-bound steamship Havana with a circus manager is probably apocryphal, but the fact that three months passed without a trace of him in newspapers is nevertheless evocative. He was usually tracked relentlessly by the press, rendering more credible the notion that he absconded from New Orleans in unconventional fashion.68

In August 1861, he reappeared to public view in Louisville with a new, if temporary, feature in his act: Blind Tom (Thomas Greene Wiggins), a Black, enslaved musical prodigy. Purchased by the plantation owner John Bethune, Wiggins was exhibited as a musical curiosity by Bethune and the concert promoter Perry Oliver. Already a seasoned performer at age twelve, Wiggins played Heller’s arrangement of Dixie at the Louisville concert and, together with the magician, the March from Meyerbeer’s Le Prophète.69 Heller had first met Wiggins in 1860 and had briefly tutored him, according to the journalist Henry Watterson, who recalled meeting them together in Washington. Watterson’s account, while peppered with racial slurs and demonstrably false assertions, also includes verifiable details, such as a list of the pieces that would have been in Heller’s repertoire at the time (Thalberg’s Home, Sweet Home, Mendelssohn’s Spring Song, Liszt’s transcriptions).70 Watterson described how Heller would play virtuoso passages for Wiggins to imitate, noting that even though the boy “learned nothing accurately, nor played with any other expression than they had rendered, what he did was surprising.”

Why did Heller take an interest in Wiggins? Watterson recalled that the magician was “at once perplexed and amazed by [Wiggins’s] extraordinary characteristics.” In this respect, Heller’s opinion mirrored that of American audiences, who marveled at the musical capabilities of a blind, enslaved boy and struggled to reconcile them with the unreserved physicality of Wiggins’s body, which moved through life hopping, bending, twisting, and gyrating. An 1879 review of Wiggins in Atlanta aptly summed up the apparent discrepancies: “He is without an explanation—a singular phenomenon which the curious have grown tired of explaining and which all are now agreed to enjoy as a rare blessing in an ugly shape.”71

In advertisements and reviews, Wiggins was repeatedly described as a “wonder”—a term linked to the nineteenth-century freak show, where people with atypically configured bodies and unusual physical abilities became exhibitions for a public that craved spectacular entertainment.72 If the 1865 edition of Merriam-Webster’s dictionary identified as a...

68The reference to Heller’s stowaway travel, related in Billboard (1906), can be found in William L. Slout, Clowns and Canons: The American Circus during the Civil War (San Bernadino: Borgo Press, 1997), 36.
70Henry Watterson, “Henry Watterson’s Memories of Blind Tom,” The Courier-Journal, 16 June 1908, p. 4. Watterson recalled, at age sixty-eight, his memory of Heller introducing him to Wiggins in Washington, D.C. during the autumn of 1860, claiming that the magician “had just come up with ‘Blind Tom’ in Louisville.” Watterson misplaced the year or season that Heller became acquainted with Wiggins: the most likely date would have been the spring of 1860, when Oliver brought the young pianist to Washington. The notion that Heller taught Blind Tom some of his musical tricks is not well substantiated. See Diedre O’Connell, The Ballad of Blind Tom, Slave Pianist: America’s Lost Musical Genius (New York: Overlook, 2009), 88, 270; Geneva Handy Southall, The Continuing “Enslavement” of Blind Tom, The Black Pianist-Composer (1865–1887), book 2 [Minneapolis: Challenge Productions, 1983], 30.
source of wonder that which “excites surprise; a strange thing; a prodigy; a miracle,” it also pointedly clarified the distinction between wonder and admiration: wonder may not necessarily be “accompanied with love, esteem, or approbation.” At times, critics compared Wiggins to Mozart, another piano prodigy with “unnatural” capabilities—and indeed, many of Wiggins’s pianistic feats, like inverting his hands and playing with his back to the piano, were reminiscent of Mozart’s showmanship, which included simulated blindness. Annette Richards found Mozart’s “automatic genius” akin to the Aeolian harp, a “natural” instrument that sounds without human intervention.73 Richards’s interpretation accords with the language used by Leopold Mozart in his London advertisements, presenting Wolfgang as a “prodigy of nature,” as if he were untutored, inexperienced, and perhaps unconscious of his abilities. This theme, too, became an integral part of Wiggins’s reception.74

By 1861, Wiggins was already a celebrity, having performed at the White House the previous year for President James Buchanan; Heller needed no further inducement to feature him in his magic show. But Heller was no doubt intrigued by Wiggins, and by descriptions of him as a wonder—language that paralleled Heller’s own publicity lexicon. (He would call his final show, staged from 1876 to 1878, Heller’s Wonder Theatre.) For the magician, Wiggins’s evocative combination of musical virtuosity and preternatural feats served a self-reflexive function—with one key difference that might be exploited for Heller’s benefit. In 1924, Harry Houdini, who alluded to Wiggins in a book exposing the practices of mediums, had attributed the pianist’s musicianship purely to a remarkable trick of memory; Houdini saw only, as Jeffrey Renard Allen notes, “Blind Tom the magician, the charlatan, a creator of musical illusion as opposed to music itself.”75 Yet in Wiggins’s time, critics saw not a magic trick or an illusion, but a credible display of supernatural or transcendent power. Mark Twain’s 1869 letter about Wiggins to the San Francisco Alta California, though written several years after the performances with Heller, captures a commonly held view: “Some archangel, cast out of upper Heaven like another Satan, inhabits this coarse casket. . . . It is not Blind Tom that does these wonderful things and plays this wonderful music—it is the other party.”76

Twain’s description recalls the discourse on musical spirit mediums in the nineteenth century, particularly those whose age, gender, or physical health seemed to prohibit vigorous or ambitious music-making. Spirit mediums belonged to the performative arm of the Spiritualist movement, purportedly communicating with the dead through séances and exhibitions. Some mediums displayed this spiritual connection through musical performances that would, for one reason or another, be deemed by spectators to be impossible without supernatural intervention. An account published in 1870 by the spirit medium Emma Hardinge Britten describes how two sisters,

both very slight, fragile persons, suffering under the most pitiable conditions of ill-health, and in their normal state unable to play upon any instrument, became mediums for various phases of ‘the power,’ requiring the most astounding physical force in execution, in addition to which, spirits, in their presence and in darkened rooms, would play upon a double bass violoncello, guitar, drums, accordion, tambourine, bells, and various small instruments, with the most astonishing skill and power.77

The sisters played a handful of instruments reserved for male performers in the nineteenth century, and they exhibited the physical vigor

76 Letter from Mark Twain, *San Francisco Alta California*, 1 August 1869.
associated with musical displays of masculinity. This flouting of gendered and bodily norms, achieved by transferring musical agency to a spirit, could sometimes extend to child prodigies, offering more accessible explanations for their extraordinary feats. The spirit medium Catherine Berry recounts how an eight-year-old child played from memory Thalberg's “Home, Sweet Home” and a number of Mozart sonatas “evidently under inspiration,” recalling descriptions of other musical prodigies—including the child Mozart—whose performances could appear reflexive and involuntary.78

The early reception of Wiggins might be slotted snugly into pre-existing narratives of child prodigies and musical mediums, according with the tendency in nineteenth-century Western thought to treat gender and racial differences as conflated manifestations of the “other.” Like prodigies and mediums, Wiggins seemed to astonish audiences in spite of himself, and his race, blindness, and apparent cognitive disability aligned him with likewise marginalized performers. His similarity to the musical medium could have provided Heller another way to contrast the art of conjuring with spiritualist demonstrations, which many magicians regarded as scams. Heller’s shows already included effects that mimicked the performances of spirit mediums, like the goblin drum, which banged out rhythms without the use of human hands. Effects like these attracted crowds interested in spiritualism while also unveiling the complementary (and sometimes identical) methods behind séances and conjuring—a “debunking” performance of the sort that had grown popular in the wake of musical mediums like the Davenport Brothers.

By performing with Wiggins, Heller could have produced an analogous contrast: the boy’s extraordinary musical “tricks” positioned him as the fraudulent medium to Heller’s honest deceiver.

A few weeks after performing with Wiggins, Heller gave a free concert in Louisville, delighting the crowd with his rendering of “Dixie.”79 Two months later he was in Cincinnati, playing an organ concert to benefit the Guthrie Gray regiment of Ohio. Cincinnati became an alternative home for Heller in the early 1860s, inspiring Washington’s Evening Star to report that he planned to relocate permanently and establish an Academy of Music there.80 [No such plans materialized.] In October 1862, eighteen months after he had publicly declared himself a citizen of the South, he apparently took up arms during a September raid on Cincinnati: though he was a “stranger, an alien, an Englishman, a foreigner,” as a local newspaper put it, he “threw aside his rights of exemption and quietly associated himself with the West-End Shooting Club.”81 [To celebrate his contributions, the club members and officers marched into one of his performances, causing “numerous ebulitions” to erupt from the magician.] Shortly before the conflict, martial law had been declared in the city, ordering citizens to labor and soldiers to prepare for battle. A proclamation from the mayor directed that “every man, of every age, be he citizen or alien . . . is expected to take part.”82 Heller would have been obliged to labor, not to fight.

To what extent can Heller’s political views be inferred from his impromptu enlistment with the West-End Shooting Club? After leaving Louisville in 1861, he never again performed in the South—although, like many entertainers, his boycott may have stemmed less from personal conviction than concerns about disrupted travel and box office receipts. His benefit performances for Northern causes could suggest pro-Unionist views, but might also reflect opportunities to endear himself to Northern audiences.83 Other forms of evidence

78Catherine Berry, Experiences in Spiritualism: A Record of Extraordinary Phenomena Witnessed through the Most Powerful Mediums, 2nd enlarged edn. (London: James Burns, 1876), 130.
that might shed light on his politics, like racial segregation at his shows, paint a similarly murky picture. Few of Heller’s advertisements announced a separate “colored gallery,” and those that did involved performances in Southern theaters before 1855. Other touring magicians, by contrast, promoted racially segregated galleries in Northern and Southern cities as late as 1867—among them Signor Blitz, Macallister, Professor Herrmann, and Professor Anderson, the “Great Wizard of the North,” whose posters were torn down in Southern cities where he was presumed to be a Unionist. [Anderson was from Scotland and claimed to have received his nom de théâtre from Sir Walter Scott.]

Yet a newspaper report from 1865 suggests that segregated audiences persisted at Heller’s shows even when no separate galleries were advertised. According to the report, Heller’s agent was arrested in Salem, Massachusetts after two Black men complained that they were denied the opportunity to purchase tickets. The agent was the first to violate a new law “prohibiting any distinction in places of amusement, on account of color or race.” In response to the complaint, the agent claimed that “he had simply followed a New York custom,” implying that racial exclusion was typical at Heller’s shows and, perhaps, at those of other entertainers as well. [The state of New York passed its own anti-discrimination law in 1873.]

If no reliable conclusions about Heller’s politics can be drawn from these disconnected incidents, his marketing strategies during and after the war likewise prove elusive. During this time, he adapted his piano repertoire—or at least, the way he marketed it—to suit the presumed political dispositions of spectators. Though Heller’s own views remain opaque, his advertisements for musical arrangements of “Dixie” demonstrate how a nineteenth-century entertainer negotiated cultural, geographical, and political factors during and after the Civil War.

**Musical and Magical Variations on “Dixie”**

Heller’s strategic programming of “Dixie” indicates that he knew its fraught political history. He performed it less frequently than repertoire mainstays, like his fantasia on _The Last Rose of Summer_ or his comic burlesque, _Boarding School Miss_. Originally written by Dan Emmett to be performed in minstrel shows for Northern audiences, “Dixie” became the unofficial anthem of the Confederacy during the Civil War. In Louisville, Heller performed his “Dixie” fantasia in August 1861, when audiences were increasingly linking the song to Southern sovereignty. Alternative versions started circulating in the North, with titles like “The True ‘Dixie’ for Northern Singers” and “The Union ‘Dixie,’” in an attempt to keep the song from becoming a metonym for the Confederacy. Escalating tension over its political and cultural significance may have led Heller to suspend the piece from his programmed repertoire as the war carried on. Over a three-year period, from September 1861 to August 1864, only two references to Heller playing “Dixie” have turned up—not in advertised performance schedules.

New York Sanitary Commission, a relief group for Union soldiers, in 1864.

See, for example, classified advertisements in the _Richmond Dispatch_, 13 December 1864.

See, for example, classified advertisements for Macallister, _Times-Picayune_, 12 April 1856, p. 3; Fakir of Ava, _The Tennessean_, 3 April 1857, p. 2; Professor Herrmann, _The Philadelphia Inquirer_, 28 November 1861, p. 8; Professor Anderson, _The Baltimore Sun_, 25 March 1853, p. 3; Signor Blitz, _Alexandria Gazette_, 24 February 1865, p. 3; Prof. Carlo Graffo, _The Daily Journal_ [Wilmington], 8 January 1867, p. 3.

News item, _Chicago Tribune_, 3 August 1865, p. 4.


programs, but as encores performed in 1862 in two Northern cities (Springfield, Illinois and Buffalo, New York). The fact that Heller withdrew the piece from his publicity materials and formal programming suggests that he wanted to take the temperature of the audience before launching into a potentially divisive selection.91

Gottschalk, one of the few virtuoso pianists active in the United States during the war years, faced a similar quandary about how to handle “Dixie.” In 1862, while touring Québec, he responded to requests for the piece by playing his concert paraphrase The Union, and he dropped “Dixie” from his repertoire soon after—a decision reflecting his decidedly pro-Unionist beliefs.92 Heller’s political views of the piece were more ambiguous. Having emigrated from England in his early twenties, he had no nativist allegiance to a particular region. The years he lived with his wife and children before embarking on his tours were spent in a Northern city, Washington, D.C., that housed many Southern partisans. Had he expressed any personal compunction about performing “Dixie,” it might have appeared in correspondence that can no longer be traced.

Heller’s “Dixie” arrangement returned to published advertisements in 1864 for his long-running Salle Diabolique in New York City, which had infrequent changes of program. The piece was resurrected for a show on 8 September, just six days after the Confederate surrender in Atlanta—surely no coincidence. By 1864, “Dixie” was understood to be “an uncontestable southern anthem,” as James Davis points out, and Northern soldiers often marched to the tune as they breached geographical or military barriers in the South.93 A Northern hospital steward, held as a Confederate prisoner of war, once described how the song accompanied a scene of martial liberation: “You can hardly imagine my feelings as our troops entered the town to the tune of Dixie, bearing aloft the remnants of flags torn and shattered.”94 For the New York crowd, Heller’s “Dixie” could have functioned as a musical expression of military conquest—a re-packaging that allowed Northern audiences to enjoy the piece anew, only days after the Confederacy had conceded Atlanta. Had Heller’s programming decision backfired, “Dixie” would have been removed from subsequent shows, but instead it was a featured selection, along with Thalberg’s fantasia on Semiramide, throughout the month of September.95

Over the years, Heller’s descriptions of “Dixie” evolved, perhaps in response to spectators who held a wide range of views on the piece. For his 1864 performances, he labeled “Dixie” a bagatelle, which defused the piece’s explosive qualities by linking it to the musical trifle. The following year, several months after the war had ended, he designated it a “burlesque caprice” for a series of shows in Washington, D.C. According to one program, “Dixie” featured “imitations” and “banjo accompaniment,” probably played in a piano style reminiscent of the banjo, à la Gottschalk.96 [No other musical personnel, such as banjo players, were listed on the program.] Whether Heller had revised an earlier “Dixie” arrangement or simply advertised it differently, his banjo reference explicitly embraced the piece’s origins in minstrelsy. For his Philadelphia shows in 1866, Heller described “Dixie” as a “musical burlesque,”97 evoking the sort of comic portrayals of Southern plantation life that were popular in the North before and after the war. Though there would inevitably be some Northern spectators for whom “Dixie” could not be reclaimed, Heller’s rhetorical and musical variations imbued the piece with a plastic quality that accommodated a range of political and

92Several sources describe this incident, or a very similar one, as occurring in 1864. Frederick Starr dates it to 1862 and corroborates this date with two newspaper accounts: Paul Letondal, “Gottschalk à Théâtre Royal,” L’Ordre, 9 July 1862 and an item in the Boston Musical Times, 6 September 1862. See S. Frederick Starr, Bamboula! The Life and Times of Louis Moreau Gottschalk [New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995], 325, 511.
93James A. Davis, “‘Our War Songs’ [1864]: Popular Song and Music Criticism during the American Civil War,” Popular Music and Society 40, no. 5 (August 2017): 12, McWhirter, Battle Hymns, 73.
social beliefs. Some may have heard in it a nostalgic return to breezy prewar entertainments, others a parody of Confederate politics, Southern cultural proclivities, or ideological notions of “Southernness” itself. The light-hearted and family-oriented nature of Heller’s show suggests that a comical interpretation of the piece likely prevailed, making it a sort of cousin to *Boarding School Miss*, which was also described in advertisements as “burlesque.” For Philadelphia spectators who hailed from the South, Heller's “Dixie” might have functioned as an uplifting anthem—and a musical nose-thumbing at those in the crowd who appreciated the song as farce.

Before departing for a world tour in 1867, Heller stopped in California, a place less obviously marred by war scars but nevertheless tethered to the geographical and cultural binary of Union and Confederacy. A truly novel characterization of “Dixie” appeared in one of his ads for a San Francisco performance: “Caprice fantastique—Dixie Reconstructed” (plate 6).98 That he featured this peculiar title only in California—neither the North, where...
“Dixie” was born, nor the South, where it was an auditory icon—suggests some awareness of postwar cultural politics in the American West. The link between “Dixie” and the Confederacy, forged by Southern politicians, military bands, and flag-waving partisans, had only strengthened by the late 1860s. Heller’s California spectators certainly would have recognized the link—indeed, some might have moved to the state recently from a home east of the Mississippi River. Though California had adopted a Unionist stance in the Civil War, it also housed Confederate sympathizers, like the Northern states in which Heller had previously performed; in fact, while many states had refused to enforce the federal government’s Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, California passed its own law two years later, committing state resources to capturing enslaved people and returning them.

The descriptive words in Heller’s “Dixie” title blended long-simmering cultural sentiments in a complex brew specifically calibrated for Western audiences. This brew is best sampled by examining the piece’s allusion to Reconstruction, a term used in successive presidential proclamations issued by Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson between 1863 and 1865. Lincoln’s Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction (8 December 1863) likely marked the first time “reconstruction” had been applied to the nation’s eventual need for postwar rebuilding—not only of damaged infrastructure, but of maimed bodies, cruel practices, and wounded political institutions. Johnson’s amnesty proclamation, delivered after the war had ended, on 9 May 1865, was the more recent political touchstone. Both ignited political and cultural debates with which Heller would have been familiar, particularly concerning the conditions of amnesty for Confederate states, which some Congressional legislators found too generous.

Yet for many, the allure of the American West remained undimmed. Hours before his assassination, Lincoln had expressed a wish to convalesce in California, made newly accessible to those living east of the Mississippi River by the transcontinental railroad, for which groundbreaking ceremonies had been held not long after the Emancipation Proclamation, in 1863. (Heller himself traveled the rails from Virginia City, Nevada, to Salt Lake City during the same tour that brought him to California.) After the war, the railroad conveyed prospective settlers from the south and east to an apparently open frontier, ripe with possibilities. California, in particular, became a destination for those seeking recuperation, a “healing of both the body and the body politic,” as William Deverell describes it.

During Reconstruction—framed by many historians as peripheral to the incendiary debates over slavery and federal sovereignty in the North and South—were fueled by similar movements toward (and against) national consolidation. And though the West was viewed by many as a free space “where autonomous, mobile individuals were at perfect liberty to pursue their economic interests and raise their social status,” it also bred contention over water and land usage, national borders, and the rights of the indigenous, migrant workers, and formerly enslaved people. Californians, aware of the fraught race relations and the crisis of federal authority created by Southern secession, also faced local conflicts over the status of Mexican, Chinese, and multi-racial residents. Discord over political suffrage and racist labor codes defined the Reconstruction era for much of the country, including California.

There was also ongoing debate about the extent to which Lincoln had exceeded his presidential powers, resulting in the Wade-Davis bill [which Lincoln vetoed] and, later, a manifesto published by supporters of that bill in major U.S. newspapers. See John Hope Franklin, Reconstruction after the Civil War, 2nd edn. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 17–20.


102Smith, Freedom’s Frontiers, 3.


the Central Pacific and Union Pacific rails in 1869, commemorated by hammering golden spikes at Promontory Summit, became a kind of synecdoche for political and cultural reconciliation—and, for some religious preachers, the realization of messianic prophecy, cited as further evidence of the “supposedly redemptive power of the postwar American West.” If a key imperative of nineteenth-century politics was the “integration of a divided America into a whole,” as Elliott West has argued, it unfolded not only because of Southern secession, but also because westward territorial expansion challenged the nation’s cultural and geographical cohesion. California offered an endpoint, a frontier refuge for settlers, where the allure of freedom, wealth, and sanctuary managed to eclipse the state’s political and social turmoil.

If Heller’s “Caprice fantastique—Dixie Reconstructed” offers a musical parallel to postwar re-building and consolidation, it filters the experience through a whimsical lens. In this sense, it exhibits the same pliable quality as the other “Dixie” titles, like the burlesque variant, which invited spectators to enjoy the piece regardless of their political proclivities. “Dixie Reconstructed” seems to take the gambit further, freighted with potential meanings that evoke the tensions and complexities of knitting together a war-torn nation.

While “Caprice” suggests a sprightly rendering, “fantastique” appends to it a supernatural or illusory quality, perhaps bringing to mind the restorative fantasy of the open frontier. But the titular allusion to reconstruction evokes stark political realities, from compromises proffered and ultimately rejected to governmental and cultural institutions rife with the same instabilities that led to war. In combining reconstruction with “caprice fantastique,” Heller proposes a chimerical version of “Dixie” that achieves what politicians had sought but failed to accomplish. An uncluttered, politically expedient path to national healing was, indeed, a fantasy—even in the American West, where dreams seemed to incubate beneath its sun-soaked skies. “Dixie Reconstructed” could illuminate that healing path in a jesting sort of way, harnessing spectators’ latent disdain of political rhetoric, especially of the sort focused on restoration or renewal. The piece could also signify refuge or respite to spectators, regardless of their political views, its protean quality creating the illusion of national unity that no law or speech could forge.

Heller toured internationally for nearly ten years, departing for Panama in February 1867 and returning in the fall of 1876. He performed in England and Australia before setting sail for a world tour, where he visited cities in China, Egypt, and India, among other countries, typically lingering in areas controlled by the British empire. When he returned to the United States, he opened Heller’s Wonders, performing in months-long theatrical residencies and periodically touring. In November 1878, Heller arrived in Philadelphia, leasing the concert hall for an engagement that was expected to last several months. During his first performance in the city, he retreated behind a curtain and re-emerged, looking pale and asking for the spectators’ indulgence. A doctor visited him later that evening and diagnosed slight lung congestion. He reluctantly canceled his next two performances and died in the early morning hours of November 28 from acute pneumonia. A private funeral service was held the next day, in his hotel room; Heller was buried in the suit he wore during his final performance. His wife and three children, living in Paris, were cabled about his death but were unable to attend the hastily arranged funeral. Their long estrangement since 1862—whether a cause or an effect of the magician’s touring—suggests that the family may not have appeared even if the funeral had been postponed. The magician’s middle daughter, Adelaide, recalled her father mostly from stories her mother had told her, describing how, when he returned from his tours, she felt what “one might experience at the materialization of a thrilling character of romantic fiction or fable.”

---

Heller’s death circulated quickly in national and international newspapers. Speculation swirled over the disposition of his will, especially concerning provisions for his conjuring apparatus, which were to be destroyed under the direction of Haidee Heller.109 (She claimed that Heller had revoked this order and had requested instead that any machines and devices be offered for sale.) Ultimately, the apparatus were held at the Concert Hall as security against the claims of newspapers, stage hands, and the lessor. Heller had accumulated far less in the bank than his legatees and attorneys had surmised, and Haidee struggled to reach a financial arrangement with the executor of the will to release the apparatus from their imprisonment.110 Eventually she acquired a satisfactory sum for the lessor and sailed for Liverpool in September 1879. By October, she was promoting “Heller’s Wonders” with her assistant Warren Wright, declaring that the “magnificent and costly apparatus, artistic accessories, and thorough completeness of the performance render this entertainment unique and unapproachable of its kind.”111 She appeared in Edinburgh and Aberdeen while continuing to advertise in London newspapers for additional engagements. None materialized. Years later, according to the theatrical manager Michael B. Leavitt, she was manning the cash register at the Cavour Restaurant in Leicester Square, a few doors down from the Alhambra Theater; she was reportedly an investor in the establishment, which catered largely to entertainers and spectators.112 Her death, reported under the name “Susannah Jane Ravenhill [otherwise Haidee Heller, otherwise Mrs. Hill]” occurred in 1893.113

Though very few performers took the stage alone in the nineteenth century, pianists and magicians often did. Heller centered himself in his shows, according to the prevailing practice in both disciplines, but his marketing and performance decisions were typically governed less by artistic convention than political and cultural factors. His celebrity emerged from publicity strategies that foregrounded the tastes, identities, and politics of spectators. Heller leveraged these mediating factors to blend the fields of music and magic in unprecedented ways. He crafted a persona shaped by spectators’ perceptions and expectations, responding to the gendered demographics of recital attendance, the popularity of musical genres like minstrelsy, and the incipient political turmoil inflamed by the Civil War. His “Dixie Reconstructed” fantasy demonstrated the extent to which his musical marketing strategies, filtered through his dual role as pianist and magician, might address contemporary political and cultural movements.

Among historians of magic, Heller is known for his wit and musical virtuosity: perhaps not an accomplished inventor himself, but a performer who could hold the stage with few props and little technical assistance. In histories of music, he is virtually unknown. So, too, are the many conjuring musicians who acquired national and international renown in the nineteenth century—figures who composed music, created instruments, and performed musical numbers as part of their acts. They incorporated music for a variety of reasons: to increase attendance, showcase unusual talents, misdirect spectators and, most assuredly, to elevate their aesthetic and social standing. But Heller’s virtuosity set him apart from his musical peers, his shows at once novel and familiar to spectators schooled in the pianistic exploits of Meyer, Herz, and Thalberg during their North American tours. The public appetite for musical spectacle, packaged as middlebrow entertainment, fueled Heller’s singular brand of performance, which thrived on his savvy attention to musical trends and regional politics. In this sense, he was, indeed, one of a kind.

Abstract

Robert Heller, a virtually unknown figure in music-historical accounts, trained in the 1840s at the Royal Academy of Music in London and gave
the American premieres of Beethoven’s Fourth and Fifth Piano Concertos with the Germania Musical Society. But he also pursued a parallel career in theatrical magic, using his musical virtuosity to elevate his social and artistic stature as a conjurer. Between 1852 and 1878, his magic act was seen by millions in Europe, East Asia, and the United States, including states and territories in the American West never visited by contemporary piano virtuosos like Thalberg and De Meyer.

While magicians routinely incorporated music in their acts, Heller’s virtuosity set him apart from his conjuring peers, including those who were themselves musicians. Using his musical expertise, he blended the magic show with other popular forms of spectacle, including minstrelsy, burlesque, and the piano recital, framing the latter as an extraordinary attraction. Advertisements and accounts of his performances reveal the marketing strategies Heller employed to negotiate the crowded landscape of consumer culture and American popular entertainment, especially during the tumultuous years of the Civil War. These strategies included co-branding, altering the titles and descriptions of musical compositions (particularly “Dixie”), and joining forces with “Blind Tom” (Thomas Greene) Wiggins, the Black, enslaved musical prodigy whom Heller had briefly tutored; they performed together in Louisville during one of the magician’s last appearances in the South. Throughout the 1860s, Heller was influenced by gendered musical practices and regional attitudes toward race and politics, leading him to market his act specifically toward middle-class women, music lovers, Unionists, and those seeking postwar reconciliation. Keywords: magic, spectacle, piano, virtuosity, Civil War

Appendix A: Repertoire and Compositions

N.B. The surname “Heller” always refers to Robert Heller.

Repertoire with the Germania Musical Society (1854)

Beethoven, Piano Concerto No. 4 in G Major
Beethoven, Piano Concerto No. 5 in Eb Major
Heller, Andante Capriccioso
Heller, Fantasia
Heller, Mazurka No. 3
Heller, Nocturne No. 2
Heller, Valse brillante
Mendelssohn, Andante Capriccioso
Mendelssohn, Rondo Brillante
Mendelssohn, Rondo Capriccioso
Thalberg, Andante
Thalberg, Fantasia on Don Giovanni

*Mixed apparently programmed the Andante and Rondo portions of Mendelssohn’s Andante and Rondo Capriccioso separately.

Frequently programmed (1855–1878)

Auber, Caprice on Il Trovatore
Heller, Caprice on Il Trovatore
Heller, The Last Rose of Summer
Heller, Muddy Reminiscences of Faust
Heller, Pianoforte Practice of a Boarding School Miss
Heller, Tempest & Sunshine

Prudent, Fantasia on Lucia di Lammermoor
Thalberg, Airs from La Sonnambula
Thalberg, Fantasia on Home, Sweet Home

Less commonly programmed (1855–1878)

Beethoven, “Pathétique” Sonata
Caprice on airs of Bellini
Dohler, Nocturne
Etudes by Chopin, Cramer, R. Heller, Kalkbrenner
Goria, Caprice
Heller, Impromptu
Liszt, Paraphrase on Midsummer Night’s Dream, Wedding March
Mendelssohn, Songs without Words
Thalberg, Air and Variations on L’Elisir d’amore
Thalberg, Fantasia on Don Giovanni
Wallace, Airs from Maritana

Repertoire for organ

Handel, Messiah, Hallelujah chorus
Haydn, Mass in D, Gloria in Excelsis
Heller, Descriptive Impromptu of the Destruction of the Egyptians in the Red Sea {improvisation}
Heller, Selections from Faust {improvisation}
Heller, Variations on Home, Sweet Home {improvisation}
Rossini, Stabat Mater, selections
Original published compositions

Twilight Musings, Heller [Dodworth]

No. 1: Josephine Mazurka [first issued in 1852]

No. 2: Ariel Waltz [potentially unpublished]

Ripple Waltz Brilliante, Heller [Diston, 1854]


Presidents Mounted Guard Quick Step, Heller [J.E. Gould/Miller & Beacham, 1855]

The Soldier’s Adieu, Palmer [George Hilbus, 1855]

Souvenir d’hiver, op. 15, Palmer/Heller [Lee & Walker, 1857]

Caprice sentimentale, op. 11, Palmer/Heller [Dodworth, 1858]

Etude de bravura [sic], morceau de salon, op. 10, Palmer/Heller [Dodworth, 1858]

“Lou Lou” Mazurka, Heller [Pond & Co, 1863]

I Have Sworn to Love Thee Ever, Heller [Firth, 1863]

Laughing Water, morceau de concert, Heller [Dodworth, ca. 1863]

Trois Mazurkas, op. 14 [Dodworth, 1863]

No. 1: Fuchsia

No. 2: Ipomaea

No. 3: Coronella

Appendix B: Chronology of Heller’s conjuring performances, concerts, and tours

Conjuring

December 1852–May 1853	New York City

July–November 1853	Philadelphia

Music

January–April 1854	Boston [Germania Musical Society]

Conjuring (with music in the act)

April 1854	New York City

May	Boston

November	Baltimore

December	Richmond

January–March 1855	Washington, D.C.

Music

April–July 1855	Washington, D.C. [lessons, composition]

November–December 1855	Richmond [concerts]

1856–1860	Washington, D.C. [lessons, performing, composition]

Conjuring and Music, Domestic Tours

April–June 1860	Washington, D.C., Baltimore, Keokuk [Iowa]

July	Cincinnati

August	Lexington

September	Louisville

October	Lexington & Louisville

November	Jackson and Memphis

December	Natchez and New Orleans

February–March 1861	Houston and Galveston

March–April	Galveston and New Orleans (departs mid-April)

August–September	Louisville, New Albany, Frankfort, Lexington

October–November	Cincinnati

December	Buffalo and Cincinnati

January 1862	Philadelphia, Chicago, St. Louis, Cincinnati

February	Indianapolis and Cincinnati

March	Columbus and Pittsburgh

April	Pittsburgh, Wheeling (WV), Cleveland

May	Bloomington, IL

June	Davenport, IA

August	New Lisbon [Wisconsin]

October	Columbus and Cincinnati

November	Dayton, Cincinnati, Detroit

December	Detroit and Buffalo
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>City/Location</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>City/Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 1863</td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>January 1869</td>
<td>Ipswich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td></td>
<td>April–May</td>
<td>San Francisco (departs for Australia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February–</td>
<td>Washington, D.C.</td>
<td>September–</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td></td>
<td>November</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 1864</td>
<td>Washington, D.C.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>November–</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1864–</td>
<td>New York City [Heller's Salle Diabolique]</td>
<td>March 1870</td>
<td>Ballarat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>April–May</td>
<td>Adelaide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May–June 1865</td>
<td></td>
<td>June</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>Salem, Portland [Maine]</td>
<td>November</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td></td>
<td>December</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>February 1871</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td></td>
<td>March</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>Detroit</td>
<td>April</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 1866</td>
<td>Philadelphia and New York City</td>
<td>June–August</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>September</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>Washington, D.C.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>Boston</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>Hartford, Troy [NY], New York City</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>New York City and Pittsburgh</td>
<td>October 1871–</td>
<td>Bombay, Jubblepore, Allahabad, Calcutta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June–July</td>
<td>Pittsburgh and Philadelphia</td>
<td>January 1872</td>
<td>Singapore, Hong Kong, Macau, Shanghai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>Fremont [OH]</td>
<td>May–August</td>
<td>Batavia [Dutch East Indies], Samarang [Java]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September–</td>
<td>Philadelphia and Syracuse</td>
<td>September–May</td>
<td>Bombay, Cairo, Alexandria, Malta, Gibraltar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td></td>
<td>1873</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>Buffalo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 1866–</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 1867</td>
<td>En route from New York to San Francisco (steamer)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>October–December</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>San Francisco, Stockton, Sacramento</td>
<td>December 1873–</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>Nevada and Salt Lake City</td>
<td>January 1874</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>San Francisco [departed for Panama June 29]</td>
<td>February–May</td>
<td>Manchester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>June</td>
<td>Southport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>July</td>
<td>Wakefield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>August–October</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>November</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conquering and Music, International Tours</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 1867–</td>
<td>London</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1868</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August–October</td>
<td>Liverpool</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 1868</td>
<td>London</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

JESSIE FILLERUP
Heller’s Magical Mystery Tours
## 19th Century Music

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>City</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>December 1874–March 1875</td>
<td>Liverpool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April–September 1875</td>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September–October 1875</td>
<td>Aberdeen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1875–March 1876</td>
<td>Glasgow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>Dundee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conjuring and Music, Domestic Tours**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>City</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 1876–May 1877</td>
<td>New York City [Heller’s Wonder Theatre]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June–July 1877</td>
<td>San Francisco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>Salt Lake City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Appendix C: Sources

### Primary Sources

**Archival Sources**

- Bibliothèque nationale de France, Tolbiac.
- Harry Ransom Center for the Humanities, University of Texas at Austin.
  - *Magic Collection*
  - Maro, Box 17
  - Robert Heller, flat files
  - Robert Heller, Box 11
  - *Harry Houdini Papers*
  - Magicians Scrapbook
  - Heller folder 27.48

**Digitized Music Program and Sheet Music Collections**

- Library of Congress, American Sheet Music Collection, ca. 1820 to 1860.
- Johns Hopkins University, The Lester S. Levy Sheet Music Collection.

### Newspapers and Periodicals

- *Alexandria Gazette*
- *Baltimore Daily Clipper*
- *The Baltimore Sun*
- *The Boston Daily Atlas*
- *Boston Evening Transcript*
- *Buffalo Courier*
- *Chicago Tribune*
- *Cincinnati Daily Press*
- *The Cincinnati Enquirer*
- *The Courier-Journal* [Louisville]
- *The Daily Clarion* [Jackson, MS]
- *The Daily Cleveland Herald*
- *The Daily Constitution* [Atlanta]
- *The Daily Dispatch/Richmond Dispatch*
- *Daily Evening Bulletin* [San Francisco]
- *The Daily Journal* [Wilmington]
- *Daily Louisville Democrat*
- *Daily Mississippian/Semi-Weekly Mississippian*
- *Daily National Intelligencer* [Washington, D.C.]
- *Dwight’s Journal of Music*
- *The Era* [London]
- *Evening Star* [Washington, D.C.]
- *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*
Books and Articles


Secondary Sources


Evans, Henry Ridgely. “Adventures in Magic and the Occult Arts: Baron von Kempelen and His Chess


