

# Stephen Foster's Songs as American Vernacular

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## Preface and Acknowledgement

In the United States, music written by Stephen Collins Foster (1826-1864) has long been recognized as a symbol of his cultural era. Historians cite him as the nation's first important songwriter; one wrote that he was,

without a doubt the best-known and most popular composer of the entire century.... No other American composer has been so romanticized, or has inspired...such an indelible image in the popular mind—an image based both on the wide and enduring currency of his songs, and also on the undoubtedly sad circumstances that attended the last years of his short life. <sup>1)</sup>

The largest library devoted to documenting his legacy is the Foster Hall Collection, housed in the Stephen Foster Memorial building at the University of Pittsburgh since 1937. <sup>2)</sup> It contains more than 50,000 books, magazines, music scores, manuscripts, photographs, art works, sound recordings, and artifacts that document Foster's life and music in American and world cultures from his lifetime to the present.

As only the second Curator of this collection since it was established, in writing this paper I have drawn on its contents, the research it has generated, and the interests and contributions of its many visitors and scholars over the years. Our staff, which includes Kathryn Miller Haines and Mariana Whitmer, interacts with countless tourists, school groups, and Internet users, as well as newspaper reporters, filmmakers, television producers, and even playwrights and musicians seeking information. Since the 1980s, about 20% of the collection's visitors have been from outside the United States, and half of all the visitors from abroad live in Canada or Japan. Our most prominent visitor in 2011 was Mrs. Miyuki Hatoyama, the wife of the Prime Minister of Japan, and we have enjoyed several visits from the Japanese ambassadors to the United States. Outside of his native country, the citizens of Japan have had the greatest interest in Foster's music, and the average citizen here may know more Foster songs than the average American.

As curator of the collection, I learn a great deal from our visitors, especially those who have stayed to work, study, or live. Our most extended contact in Pittsburgh has been with Mrs. Teruko Shiono, whose husband was on the faculty of the University of Pittsburgh, and who has participated

with me in many public ceremonies and greeting Japanese visitors to the city. I also want to mention Miss Kanako Tateishi, now Mrs. Kawamura, who spent a year studying there. And I am grateful to Professor Kazuko Miyashita, who has visited many times, and once spent many months there doing research as a Fulbright Scholar. I express my deepest appreciation to her and to Dr. Keiko Wells for organizing this symposium and making it possible for me to travel here to participate.

### Why Foster?

The folksong singer Jean Ritchie, who was born in 1922 and grew up in the Appalachian Mountains of the state of Kentucky, has sung old American songs in recordings and in concerts all over the world. She told me that once, when she was in Japan, she heard a group of men in her hotel lobby singing Foster's songs in Japanese. Because she knew the songs but did not speak Japanese, she joined in singing with English-language words. One of the men asked her, "How did you learn to sing Japanese folksongs?"

We might ask with equal curiosity, "Why Foster?" And how did several compositions by a young man—who was born in 1826 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and died at the young age of 37—become folksongs in any language or country? Most importantly for this symposium, how and why were they brought to Japan, and how did they become so widely known here?

In 1947, only the second book-length study of Foster appeared, and it was written in Japanese and published in Tokyo; in 1949, a 91-page book of his songs also appeared there.<sup>3)</sup> Nearly four decades later, in 1985, about twenty musicologists, newspaper writers, photographers, and theater producers from Japan visited the Stephen Foster Memorial in Pittsburgh. They were a delegation preparing the program booklets and publicity for *The Stephen Foster Story*, a musical play from Bardstown, Kentucky, that was about to tour Japan. One of them was a reporter from the *Asahi Shimbun*, who asked me, "Why are Stephen Foster's songs so well-known in Japan?" I replied that I looked forward to finding out some day. Perhaps this symposium will help answer his question.

Foster's songs are an enduring repertoire of mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century American vernacular culture. If we understand the term "vernacular" (as applied to song) to mean a style (of melodies, lyrical poetry, and imagery) which is understood by performers and listeners to connect us with everyday aspects of our personal lives, and which evokes ideas that are natural to human life rather than being monumental or elite in scope and philosophy, then Foster's works are one of the few groups of texts created by a single person that have also become demonstrably vernacular in multiple cultures and countries around the globe.

In order to start understanding why and how this happened, this talk begins by summarizing the social and cultural contexts in which Foster wrote his songs and in which they first became popular. Next we will look at evidence for how the songs moved beyond the United States, and what possible meanings they have had for cultures in other countries. And finally we will observe

the songs' continued use in electronic and digital media marked by the paradoxical challenges of clinging to traditional regional values within global online communications.

### **The origins of Foster's songs**

If we wish to know why Foster's songs still appeal to us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we can first look at the culture from which they arose, and how his contemporaries understood the songs at the time they were written. Stephen Foster was the youngest child in his family, born in what is now Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on the day that Americans celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> birthday of their country, July 4, 1826. His parents, of Scots-Irish heritage, were in the "middle class" social level of the city's mayors, judges, and business owners. As a young man, his father William had been a flatboat man, floating products nearly 2,000 miles through wilderness territory down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers to New Orleans; once he started a family, he bought and sold land and invested in companies that made iron or built canals, but he gradually lost his properties and by the time Stephen was born the family was supported by the oldest son, a professional surveyor who helped decide the routes of canals and railroads and who later rose to become vice president of the Pennsylvania Railroad.

Stephen grew up hearing music in three different environments: in the streets and factories of the town and from workers around his home; by women performing music in the homes of his family and friends; and as part of the public activities of theaters and churches. His job as a youth was to clean the floor of a cotton mill, where an older brother was a buying agent who traveled throughout the American southern states purchasing bales of cotton to send to Pittsburgh (and bringing back stories and songs from what must have seemed to Stephen to be an exotic land). When Stephen was old enough to leave home he became bookkeeper for another brother's company in Cincinnati that owned and operated steamboats on the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. In all these situations he heard the language, stories, and music of men of labor. In Pittsburgh most of the workers were probably from the British Islands and western Europe. Since he was living and working along the Ohio River that separated the southern slave-holding states from the northern free states, he also often came in contact with enslaved African Americans. Indeed, his parents employed African Americans as workers around their home, and one of them is said to have taken young Stephen with her to church.

And so we can see that Stephen Foster grew up in an environment where the men knew the workers' culture of the rivers and the factories, in a city that was the gateway to the nation's westward exploration and commerce, and that would later come to epitomize the factories of Industrial Revolution. Pittsburgh and Cincinnati were multi-cultural urban centers, with many different styles of singing and dancing.

The women of his family, however, came from a very different surrounding. His mother was born to relatively wealthy plantation owners in Maryland; she and her daughters brought white

middle-class, genteel literature and songs into their Pittsburgh home. They used “refined” songs to reinforce social ethics, and instrumental music for soirees with dancing. A music teacher named Henry Kleber taught the daughters of the family to play piano and to sing; less formally, he also mentored Stephen in songwriting. Kleber had trained in classical music in Germany; in Pittsburgh he taught young women, ran a store that sold pianos and printed music, conducted concerts, and composed songs and piano pieces for publication in New York. What Stephen Foster learned of performance and compositional technique he either taught himself or picked up from Mr. Kleber. Stephen also attended schools whose subjects included writing poetry but not studying music, which was part of the school curriculum only for young women.

In the social ethos of this era, women’s domestic consumption complemented men’s production of industry and commodities. The choices of music they made for the home indicated the family’s class or social standing and moral values.<sup>4)</sup> The men of the family, meanwhile, enjoyed various forms of theater, which contained a great deal of music that was not considered “refined.” These included drama such as adaptations of plays by Shakespeare; physical humor such as circus acts; and beginning in the 1840s, the new craze called the minstrel show.

As a teenager, Stephen attended a boarding school where the local everyday entertainments included horse races across the countryside. He later celebrated such sporting events with his song “Camptown Races,” constructed in the African-American song form known as call and response, and infused with elements of circus humor in its comic descriptions of a blind horse, a “muley cow,” and other obstacles, along with slang of the day such as the response “do dah” (black dialect for “do that”). His first published song, “Open Thy Lattice Love,” was in the refined British style. As a young adult, Stephen Foster wrote songs that combined the elements that these different forms of music had in common, merging elements of the rough-and-tumble culture of the street with the refined arts of the parlor at home. The immigrant character of the United States meant that for the first time people of many different ethnic and national backgrounds, skin colors, dialects, and diverse group identities were living in close proximity and intermingling, and Foster’s songs reflect that mix.

The authors of the article on “Popular Music” in *Grove Music Online* summarize the character of popular song in the 1840s and 50s as a “...musical fusion of Anglo-Celtic, Italian and (to some degree and in diluted forms) black American elements. The fusion is heard at its most influential in the songs, for both minstrel show and domestic parlour, of Stephen Foster.”<sup>5)</sup> And the musicologist Charles Hamm has pointed out that Foster studied the different ethnic styles of song, and wrote his own songs that combined the most common musical and lyrical elements that those styles shared. His songs were the first to be thought of as distinctively American, because “Never before, and rarely since, did any music come so close to being a shared experience for so many Americans.”<sup>6)</sup>

## The spread of Foster's songs

How did his contemporary audiences hear and understand Foster's music? Who performed it, where and in what circumstances was it heard? The answers to these basic questions change as we move outward from the composer's own community, to his region of the country, to travelers abroad, to communities in other lands.

His parlor songs like "Gentle Annie" and "Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair" were polite and refined, about chaste love, and filled with soft images of nature that suggested gentle qualities of human compassion: dew, moonlight, flowers, gentle breezes, meadows, and streamlets. But they sold only modest numbers of copies; they became widely known only after the public developed a taste for his minstrel songs, made familiar and even beloved by theater performers in the most popular entertainment genre of his time. The combination of popular theatrical performances and sheet-music sales, along with the appeal of Foster's melodies and lyrics, caused a few of his songs—though not all of them—to be taken up into oral practice, as America's first nation-wide popular songs.

Over the course of his career, Foster wrote 286 songs and instrumental compositions; only about 25 of these entered oral tradition in the United States. His first "hit" song was "Oh! Susanna" (1848), spread by professional minstrel singers throughout the northeastern United States. Music publishers sought to capitalize on the most successful offerings of the theater by printing them and selling copies in the lobby or in shops, for people to play or sing at home. Printing was a rapidly expanding industry, "as penny papers, mammoth weeklies, giftbooks, fashion magazines, and other ephemeral printed materials brought exuberance and theatricality to public culture."<sup>7)</sup>

Through this combination of professional performances and publications—and because his first songs were not protected by copyright—during Foster's lifetime practically everybody in the country had heard "Oh! Susanna" and "Old Uncle Ned," and was now singing "Camptown Races" and "My Old Kentucky Home," followed by "The Old Folks at Home" ("Way down upon the Swanee River," 1851) which was second only to "Oh! Susanna" in its popularity.<sup>8)</sup>

"OLD FOLKS AT HOME," the *last* negro melody, is on every body's tongue, and consequently in everybody's mouth. Pianos and guitars groan with it, night and day; sentimental young ladies sing it; sentimental young gentlemen warble it in midnight serenades; volatile young "bucks"<sup>9)</sup> hum it in the midst of their business and pleasures; boatmen roar it out stentorially at all times; all the bands play it; amateur flute blowers agonize over it at every spare moment; the street organs grind it out at every hour; the "singing stars" carol it on the theatrical boards, and at concerts; the chamber maid sweeps and dusts to the measured cadence of *Old Folks at Home*; the butcher's boy treats you to a strain or two of it as he hands in the steaks for dinner; the milk-man mixes it up strangely with the harsh ding-dong accompaniment of his tireless bell..."

From this newspaper article we learn that, in one year's time, the song had rapidly become familiar through a diverse population, wealthy and poor, amateur and professional, black and white, male and female, and adapted to all kinds of music-making from the most casual to the most formal. The tune had become what we might today call a "meme" of vernacular culture, a set of cultural ideas and symbols rapidly transmitted from one person to another.<sup>10)</sup>

Foster had become a "voice of the marketplace."<sup>11)</sup> The users of his songs freely altered his words and melodies to suit their own purposes, to sing about the virtues of temperance, advocate for candidates and political positions during presidential campaigns, promote the moral cause of abolishing slavery, share complaints about the hardships of travel across the continent, and many other activities within contemporary life. Even though several Foster tunes can be said to have become folktunes, freely adapted to vernacular life, most religious leaders objected to them because of their relationship with the theater, which made their melodies unsuitable as accompaniment for religious texts. The songs were also avoided by educators who valued the moral influence of more refined culture—the heritage of folksongs and classical melodies from Scotland or Germany, for example, rather than anything associated with minstrelsy, which was viewed by them as being raucous, physical, and unnatural.

The actors who adapted Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) for the stage had no such qualms, inserting Foster's songs into their play scripts (even though the novel contains no references at all to Foster's songs).<sup>12)</sup> The "Uncle Tom" troupes—with their Foster songs—remained a dominant part of American theater throughout the rest of the century, so that most Americans came to associate the novel with such Foster songs as "My Old Kentucky Home" and "Old Folks at Home."<sup>13)</sup>

The vernacular ubiquity of a handful of Foster's songs in America is reflected by their inclusion not only in the Uncle Tom shows, but also in the classic series of books written by Laura Ingalls Wilder, the *Little House* series, about life in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, both in the eastern states and with the settlers in the Midwest.<sup>14)</sup>

Foster's songs having spanned the settled, eastern half of the American continent, a handful of his most popular songs were carried by sailors and passengers across the oceans. A travel writer from New York City recounted his journey to the gold-miners' camps of California, sailing first to Cuba and then across the Caribbean to the Isthmus of Panama in 1849, where he heard an oarsman who "struck up 'Oh Susanna!' which he sang to a most ludicrous imitation of the words," undoubtedly learned from previous American travelers.<sup>15)</sup> Four years later he heard the same song sung and played on mandolin by a musician in India, who learned it from British military officers.<sup>16)</sup>

Another traveler reported having heard Foster's "Uncle Ned" and "Oh! Susanna" in 1852 in Patras, Greece. "Later he heard these and others played by British military bands in Malta, and during the voyage from Malta to New York he heard the sailors sing a number of them, 'The Old Folks at Home' being their favorite."<sup>17)</sup>

In 1859, a New York newspaper reported a letter from an American hiking along the border between England and Scotland:

"[I] spent several weeks amid the poetic hills of Ettrick, along the braes of Yarrow, so famed in Scottish border minstrelsy, and here I found some of Foster's earlier melodies were almost displacing, in the estimation of the shepherd boys and cottage girls, the songs of Burns and Ramsay. Often, in the Scottish cottages, after the bagpipes have droned out their accompaniment to 'Scots Wha Hae' and 'Lord Athol's Courtship,' a voice will take up one of these American melodies, and all gathered around the ingle-side will join in the simple refrain; and thus the plaintive, touching strains that are first sung in the dark, sooty town of Pittsburg, on the Monongahela, rise away above the smoke and steam of city life, float across the Atlantic, and are heard upon the heathery hills of Ettrick, and among the birks that grow on the 'braes of Yarrow.'" Favorable mention has also been made of them from California, China, Australia, and even the deserts of Africa, through the foreign and home correspondence of our newspapers.<sup>18)</sup>

Evidence suggests that during the 20<sup>th</sup> century some of Foster's songs acquired new meanings in certain cultures. During the 1980s I interviewed the black South African poet Dennis Brutus, who help lead opposition to the Apartheid laws that reserved all the political and economic power to the country's whites. He told me that his mother and other school teachers in the black townships taught Foster's songs such as "Old Uncle Ned" and "Old Black Joe" to their students in the 1930s and 1940s, because they were reminders that black Americans had once been slaves but had won their freedom.

In the 1990s a Russian couple visited the Foster Hall Collection and told me that while they were students at the University of Moscow, to protest the Soviet Union's restrictions on human rights, they sang Foster's songs because they represented American's civil liberties and political rights.

Meanwhile, during the American Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s-60s, many schools in the United States banned Foster's songs because of his association with minstrelsy, which was increasingly understood as a theatrical genre that had degraded blacks.

This symposium will include two papers about Foster's songs in relation to other music of this era and in the schools in Japan. I look forward to learning what Dr. Sandra Howe and Kazuko Miyashita can reveal for us about how Foster's songs came to be sung by Japanese from their childhood, and how they flourished during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Global media and the digital age**

While printed music and the stage were the sole means for mass distribution of music until the

end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, around the year 1900 sound recording began to capture the voices of singers of every style, from minstrels to classical vocalists. If the nearly one thousand sound recordings of Foster songs collected by Mr. Lilly in the 1930s are representative, musicians of many musical genres and from many nations recorded some of Foster's songs on cylinders and 78-rpm discs.

The recordings helped spread the songs internationally, as record companies marketed them to wider audiences. Some discs were recorded for local buyers, as for example a recording in Danish of "Camptown Races." The Foster Hall Collection also has 78-rpm discs in Norwegian, Swedish, German, Russian, and French, as well as dozens of English-language discs recorded in Great Britain, Ireland, Canada or Australia. The non-English-speaking country with the most Foster 78-rpm discs in the Collection is Japan with at least 15 discs. Radio stations, which were another important medium for spreading Foster's songs beginning in 1920, undoubtedly played many of the 78-rpm recordings, but we lack widespread information about when and where these broadcasts occurred.

After the first scholarly documentary biography of Foster appeared in 1934,<sup>19)</sup> other commemorations of the composer and his music occurred. In 1937, the University of Pittsburgh opened its new Stephen Foster Memorial—an auditorium with a wing of the building devoted to housing and displaying the Foster Hall Collection. Kentucky established a state park in 1936 on the site of a pre-Civil War plantation in Bardstown, and Florida did likewise in 1950 on the banks of the Suwannee River. The U.S. Post Office issued a stamp (1940) bearing Foster's image—the first it had ever created honoring a musician. At least six different states named schools for him.<sup>20)</sup>

Theatrical representations of Foster's life and music have continued to the present. In 1959, near My Old Kentucky Home State Park, a summer outdoor drama called *The Stephen Foster Story* began presenting a mythic story of local history, loosely based on the lives of Stephen and his wife Jane. It appeals to audiences because of the familiarity of Foster's melodies including the state's official song "My Old Kentucky Home," benefits from Americans' fascination with Civil War and antebellum costume and social manners, and helps attract tourists to boost the local economy.

A very different perspective on the songs is at the core of a musical theater production called *Hard Times*, which opened off-Broadway in New York in fall 2012. Playwright Larry Kirwan uses Foster's songs as lenses through which to understand the tensions of social class, ethnicity and race in New York City during the American Civil War and echoing in present-day American society.

That writers and producers of *live* theater still turn to Foster for their inspiration and as a wellspring of issues that are central in American social history testifies to his music's continuing effect as well as its potency for significant emotional and intellectual themes. But the even more frequent examples of *recorded or broadcast* theater that use his songs suggests that the most effective media in keeping Foster familiar with each new generation have been film and television. Kathryn Haines has written that,

...hundreds of instances of movies, television shows, commercials, and cartoons that have integrated Foster music into their scores and into the musical activity of their characters. How did Foster's music come to be so heavily represented in cinema and TV? What is it about the songs that make them such worthy utility players in motion-picture soundtracks?

The most obvious motive for a composer to utilize Foster's music is simple economics: Foster's music entered the public domain in the nineteenth century, meaning that Foster's original arrangements could be used royalty-free. Because of that, his songs became a natural well to draw from when a director was looking for a song for a character to whistle, hum, sing, or play on the harmonica.<sup>21)</sup>

These forms of entertainment make the songs familiar even to children. When groups of school children age 5 to 15 tour the Stephen Foster Memorial and I ask them "How many of you have ever heard of Stephen Foster," no one responds. But when I ask, "How many of you know this song," and sing the first few notes of "Oh! Susanna," "Camptown Races," "Way down upon the Swanee River," or "Beautiful Dreamer," everyone's hand goes up.

Haines notes that about a dozen of Foster's songs carry certain connotations that can help filmmakers evoke or depict the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century era in USA when they were the current popular music, including the travel westward across the continent, the "Gold Rush," and the American Civil War. The struggle to avoid financial poverty so effectively captured in the poetry of "'Hard Times' ...sounds the most modern to contemporary ears, [and it] has the most 'country-like' musical style."<sup>22)</sup> She points out that Foster songs are also used for wind-up toys, and are "standard songs included on music boxes."

By 2012, Foster's music had been used in at least 625 films and television shows, the vast majority of which were produced in the United States.<sup>23)</sup> I cannot estimate how many were made or distributed in Japan, but one notable example is *The Girl in the Wind: Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair*, an anime series that ran for 52 episodes in 1992-93.<sup>24)</sup>

The familiarity of Foster's songs, coupled with their copyright-free status, has not only led many producers to include them in films and television shows, but also doubtless encouraged many performers to record them. Foster songs have long been a favorite source of "public domain" material for creators of entertainment media, as national and international copyright laws came to be enforced starting in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the 1930s, when composers in ASCAP<sup>25)</sup> sued American radio broadcasters to force them to pay performance rights for the music they aired, many stations resorted to playing Foster's songs. We know from first-hand reports by the founding Curator of the Foster Hall Collection that this was when "Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair" and "Beautiful Dreamer" first became hits, 75 years after Foster's death.

Stephen Foster won his first "Grammy" award, the highest honor given by the (American) National Academy of Recorded Arts and Sciences, in 2004 for a CD titled *Beautiful Dreamer*

containing performances by prominent artists in Nashville. A prominent critic who reviewed the album wrote,<sup>26)</sup>

Though Foster's songs course through the culture from Derby Day to doorbells, they're rarely performed by contemporary artists. Previous collections by legit singers Joan Morris and Jan DeGaetani inflated Foster into a capital-C composer; *Beautiful Dreamer* attempts to haul him back to earth. The two instrumental pieces here sound irrevocably dated (despite Henry Kaiser's scorched-earth solo on "Autumn Waltz"), but the vocal works adapt well to a range of rootsy but not wholly retro styles: country (Raul Malo, Grey De Lisle), folk-rock (Roger McGuinn's gauzy "Jeannie"), and, too often, public-radio Americana ("Slumber, My Darling," with Mark O'Connor, Allison Krauss, and Yo-Yo Ma).

For Americans, he points out accurately if bluntly,

Foster's lasting significance lies in songs whose African American protagonists are people, not stock grotesques. Mourning a "dark Virginny bride" as a lady distinguishes "Nelly Was a Lady" from nearly everything in the blackface [minstrel] repertoire, as does its dignified melody. In "My Old Kentucky Home, Goodnight" and "Old Folks at Home," plain homesickness lies behind now indigestible nostalgia for the plantation system. Foster's slaves and former slaves are lachrymose, morbid, and invariably passive; that is, they're exactly like his white protagonists. (For every "Nelly Was a Lady," he wrote five laments for pale little dead girls.) Foster wasn't motivated by humanism, but by the wish to strike a balance between minstrelsy and the parlor ballads favored by pianola-playing ladies,<sup>27)</sup> American pop's first mainstream. His own politics were "Copperhead"—pro-Union, anti-abolition—but his songs worked against his own interests; even Frederick Douglass allowed that they could "awaken the sympathies for the slave."

Many of the individual songs from the Grammy-winning CD can also now be heard on YouTube. A Google search for "YouTube 'Stephen Foster'" yields 265,000 videos ranging from a couple of minutes to more than half an hour.<sup>28)</sup> YouTube has established an "artist page" for performances of Foster's music, which include vocal and instrumental recitals, excerpts from commercial recordings, and clips from mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century films in styles as diverse as country guitar, unaccompanied choral arrangements, showy classical-style vocal harmony, violin recitalists, small jazz orchestra, and opera. The list of results also turns up many other things named for Foster: horse races, schools, highways, parks, statues, paintings, awards and competitions.

The short, repetitive structure that makes some of Foster's songs ideal for memorization also makes them suitable for use in 21<sup>st</sup>-century electronic devices. Because the songs are public-domain, most corporations that use them don't bother to mention the composer. One exception is

Nintendo, which used a Foster tune in *Brain Age<sup>2</sup>: More Training in Minutes a Day!* (2005).

Foster has a huge presence on iTunes. A search for his name in its database turned up more than one thousand recordings of songs attributed to him and 195 different albums (commercially released compact discs). But an even larger number of performances of his songs do not credit him as the composer. For instance, iTunes lists 723 performances of "Camptown Races" alone, and it's on 518 albums; a search for "Oh! Susanna" yielded 812 separate recordings and 644 albums; and "Beautiful Dreamer" shows up 1,074 times, with 194 albums, plus 4 iPhone and iPad apps.<sup>29)</sup> Thousands of different performances of Foster's songs are available through iTunes. Since some of them were never before known to the Foster Hall Collection, iTunes has become the largest single "library" of Foster sound recordings, and it is available electronically from anywhere on the planet.

## Conclusion

In the 1850s Foster's songs were the first significant body of identifiably American song; in the early twenty-first century, a handful of Foster's songs remain among the best-known music in the world. Their use by musicians, entertainment producers on stage, screen, and electronic devices has not waned but continues and has even increased in the Internet age.

What will the future bring for Foster's music? How will the songs survive in the digital age, and what will they mean to future generations? To find the answers, we'll have to reconvene our symposium in twenty-five or fifty years. But I predict that many of the reasons his songs are sung today—their poetic imagery, their roles in vernacular culture, their gentle understanding of the human spirit and of our environment—will still be valued then, and that inventors will have created even more ways to share this music. And Japan, as the nation that has sung his songs more than any other outside Foster's homeland, will have a large role to play in that future.

## Notes

- 1) Daniel Kingman, *American Music: A Panorama*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Schirmer Books, 1990), 318. Kingman is referring to Foster's poverty and ill health the last three to four years of his life.
- 2) For a history of the founding and significance of the collection, see Calvin Elliker, "The Collector and Reception History: The Case of Josiah Kirby Lilly," *Music Publishing and Collecting: Essays in Honor of Donald W. Krummel*, ed. David Hunter (Urbana, IL: 1994), 189-203.
- 3) Shiuchi Tsugawa, *Fosuta no shogai: Amerika min'yo no chichi*, Tokyo: Toppan, 1947; Tsugawa, *Fosuta kakyoku zenshu*, Tokyo: Ongaku no Tomosha, 1949.
- 4) See Lori Merish, *Sentimental Materialism: Gender, Commodity Culture, and Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).
- 5) Richard Middleton and Peter Manuel, "Popular music," *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed October 3, 2013, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/43179pg1>.
- 6) Charles Hamm, *Music in the New World* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1983), 231.

- 7) Isabelle Lehuu, *Carnival on the Page: Popular Print Media in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), publisher's advertisement.
- 8) *Albany State Register*, as reprinted in *Dwight's Journal of Music* 1 no. 26 (October 2, 1852): 202. The song had been deposited for copyright exactly one year and a day earlier, on October 1, 1851.
- 9) "A gay, dashing fellow; a dandy, fop, 'fast' man." *Oxford English Dictionary* OED Online. September 2013. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com.pitt.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/24123?rskey=tCIHrN&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed September 29, 2013).
- 10) "A meme is 'an idea, behavior, or style that spreads from person to person within a culture.' A meme acts as a unit for carrying cultural ideas, symbols, or practices that can be transmitted from one mind to another through writing, speech, gestures, rituals, or other imitable phenomena. Supporters of the concept regard memes as cultural analogues to genes in that they self-replicate, mutate, and respond to selective pressures" (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meme>, accessed 9/29/13). "A cultural element or behavioural trait whose transmission and consequent persistence in a population, although occurring by non-genetic means (esp. imitation), is considered as analogous to the inheritance of a gene." "meme, n." OED Online. September 2013. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com.pitt.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/239909?redirectedFrom=meme> (accessed September 29, 2013).
- 11) A term used by Anne C. Rose, *Voices of the Marketplace: American Thought and Culture, 1830-1860* (New York: Twayne, 1995).
- 12) See the detailed account in Deane L. Root, "The Music of Uncle Tom's Cabin" (<http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/interpret/exhibits/root/root.html>; accessed 1 October 2013).
- 13) For a fuller description of the places and styles in which Foster's songs were performed in public entertainments, private spaces, and accompanying other activities in both the United States and abroad, see Deane L. Root, "Performing Foster," Chapter 12 in *Music, American Made: Essays in Honor of John Graziano*, ed. John Koegel (Sterling Heights, MI: Harmonie Park Press, 2011).
- 14) Published 1932-43, the seven books are based on her experiences growing up from the 1860s to the 1880s in Wisconsin, Kansas Territory, and the upper Midwest. The first five books in the series include nine Foster songs.
- 15) Bayard Taylor, *Eldorado, or, Adventures in the Path of Empire: Comprising a Voyage to California, via Panama: Life in San Francisco and Monterey: Pictures of the Gold Region, and Experiences of Mexican Travel* (New York: George P. Putnam; London: Richard Bentley, 1850), 1:13.
- 16) Bayard Taylor, *A Visit to India, China and Japan in the Year 1853* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1855), 155ff. He did not report hearing American songs in Japan.
- 17) John Mahon, interview in the *New York Clipper*, 1877, as cited by Alvin F. Harlow, *Old Bowery Days: The Chronicles of a Famous Street* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1931), 350.
- 18) "Who Writes Our Songs?," *The New York Evening Post*, reprinted in *Littell's Living Age* no.781, third series no. 59 (May 14, 1859): 446-47.
- 19) John Tasker Howard, *Stephen Foster: America's Troubadour* (New York: T.Y. Crowell, 1934; second edition, 1953). His research was funded by J.K. Lilly.
- 20) An extensive list of commemorations of Foster can be found in Appendix IV, "Memorials and Tributes to Stephen Collins Foster" by Fletcher Hodges, Jr., Curator of the Foster Hall Collection, in Evelyn Foster Morneweck, *Chronicles of Stephen Foster's Family* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1944). It is supplemented by Calvin Elliker, *Stephen Foster: A Guide to Research* (New York: Garland, 1988).
- 21) Kathryn Miller Haines, "Stephen Foster's Music in Motion Pictures and Television," *American Music* vol. 30 no. 3 (Fall 2012), 373-388; the quotes are from pp. 373-4, 382, 386.

- 22) The best article on the adaptation of Foster's songs for these styles of performance, and how the songs might have spread from one performer to another, is Joe Weed, "Foster's Songs in Old-Time String Band and Bluegrass Music," *American Music* vol. 30 no. 3 (Fall 2012), 389-396.
- 23) As reported by Haines, who searched "Stephen Foster" on the Internet Movie Database <http://www.imdb.com/>, on September 13, 2012.
- 24) *The Girl in the Wind: Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair* [風の中の少女 金髪のジェニー Kaze no Naka no Shōjo Kinpatsu no Jeni], produced by Nippon Animation, 1992–1993. It is based on Foster's 1854 song "Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair." The story, based on Foster's life, begins in a small town in Pennsylvania in 1838. Jeanie MacDowell is a cheerful and beautiful girl with light brown hair, who enjoys playing the piano. She performs with her friends Steven (who plays harmonica) and Bill (banjo) as a band. Jeanie's happy life changes when her mother suddenly passes away, and she devotes herself to helping people who are ill.
- 25) The American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) was founded in 1914 to collect copyright royalties and performing-right fees from companies (such as movie theaters, record labels, concert halls, and theaters) that used music.
- 26) Frank Bruno, "Sympathy for the Slave," *Village Voice* 24 August 2004, <http://www.villagevoice.com/2004-08-24/music/sympathy-for-the-slave/>, accessed 3 October 2013.
- 27) Bruno was incorrect in this statement; the player piano he refers to was not developed until more than a decade after Foster's death.
- 28) Accessed 8 September 2013.
- 29) iTunes, accessed October 1, 2013.

