

The Musical World Of Abraham Lincoln

By Gail Smith

President Lincoln was born on February 12, 1809. To understand the musical world of Abraham Lincoln we must know what music he would have been able to hear. This involves knowing some musical history such as: Felix Mendelssohn was born nine days earlier than Abraham Lincoln; Beethoven was 39 years old; Mozart had died 19 years earlier and Bach had been dead for 59 years. Chopin and Robert Schumann would be born when Abraham Lincoln was just one year old.

There are accounts of musical concerts that were given at the White House during Lincoln's presidency. Many songs were composed for Lincoln while he was alive and over one hundred songs were composed after his assassination. Let's take a journey back into the musical world of Abraham Lincoln

The first music Abraham Lincoln would have heard was music sung to him by his mother. They were living in a wilderness frontier cabin. Folk songs that his mother sang to him were: "Barbara Allen," "Annie Laurie," "Blue Tail Fly," or "Jim Crack Corn." While Abraham Lincoln was not musically talented, he was deeply moved by ballads, patriotic songs and had a special passion for opera. He attended 19 grand opera performances while he was President. His favorite hymn was "Rock of Ages."

Music was performed often at the White House for receptions during Lincoln's presidency. The Marine Band, under the direction of Scala gave concerts every Saturday afternoon on the front lawn of the White House. On July 25, 1861, President Lincoln established the first act to recognize the Marine Band by law.

On October 17, 1862, Phineas T. Barnum brought a talented midget, Commodore Morrison Nutt to the White House to perform. Nutt sang the popular song "Columbia the Gem of the Ocean" for the President and members of his cabinet. During his term, there were two pianists that performed at the White House. The first to perform was a child prodigy named Teresa Carreno. She performed in the fall of 1863 and played a few classical pieces

which were: Gottschalk's "March de Nuit", and "The Last Hope." She then jumped off the piano bench and exclaimed that the piano was out of tune and she didn't want to play anymore. Abraham Lincoln patted her on the cheek and asked her if she would play a favorite song of his which was, "The Mocking Bird." Teresa played the song with several variations. The following year Louis Moreau Gottschalk who was America's first great performing pianist, was in Washington on a tour that included 85 recitals within a five month period. Lincoln heard him perform on March 24, 1864.

During the Civil War, mobs of soldiers sang in front of the White House responding to the Presidents call for soldiers and they cheered and sang "Battle Cry of Freedom" composed by George F. Root. On July 4, 1864, a moving crowd of thousands of black people sang spirituals as they celebrated the Emancipation Proclamation. On January 27, 1865, five hundred members of the Christian Commission called on the president and sang the "Battle Hymn of the Republic" and "Dixie". The President asked them to sing "Dixie" again, saying that "It's our tune now", implying that the North and the South would unify with this common song.

On that fateful night of April 14, 1865, the orchestra played "Hail to the Chief" as Abraham Lincoln entered the Ford's Theater. The evening's performance was a play with music called 'Our American Cousin'. The special featured music of the evening, the "Patriotic Song and Chorus, Honor to Our Soldiers" was never heard. Instead, the last sound heard was a bullet fired by John Wilkes Booth who assassinated President Lincoln. Abraham Lincoln died the next morning at 7:22 a.m., in a room across the street.

The funeral service held at the White House had no music; however, the Marine Band played as the solemn cortege left the mansion for the Capitol. As the President lay in state at the Springfield City Hall, one thousand singers chanted. During the impressive service at the Springfield Oakridge Cemetery, a song composed by George Root was sung as a tribute. The words are: Farewell Father, Friend and guardian, Thou hast joined the martyr's band; But thy glorious work remaineth, Our redeemed, beloved land.

Ode to Abe

(composed for his 200th birthday)

Abraham Lincoln



(The musical letters in his name)

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Musical notation for the first system, measures 1-4. It is in 3/4 time. The right hand starts with a melody in measure 1, marked *mf*. The left hand provides a bass line. Measure 4 contains a whole note chord.

Musical notation for the second system, measures 5-8. Measure 5 is marked with a box containing the number 5. The right hand continues the melody, and the left hand continues the bass line. Measure 8 contains a whole note chord.

Musical notation for the third system, measures 9-12. Measure 9 is marked with a box containing the number 9. The right hand continues the melody, and the left hand continues the bass line. Measure 12 contains a whole note chord.

Musical notation for the fourth system, measures 13-16. Measure 13 is marked with a box containing the number 13. The right hand continues the melody, and the left hand continues the bass line. Measure 16 contains a whole note chord and ends with a double bar line.