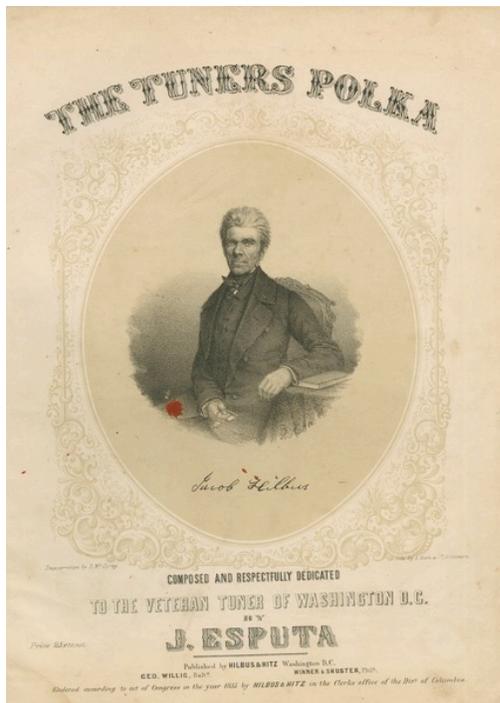


John Esputa and the Musical Community of Washington, D.C.'s Navy Yard

Patrick Warfield, Georgetown University
SAM, Pittsburgh, 2007

Francis Esputa (c. 1797-1866)

1830s, emigrated to US from Spain
1835-1838, service on *U.S.S. Constitution*
1841-1845, possible service on *U.S.S. Ohio*
1847-1849, employed by Georgetown University
c. 1853, possible service on *U.S.S. North Carolina*
1853-1857, service in the United States Marine Band



John Esputa (c. 1831-1882)

1830s, emigrated to US from Spain
1844-1849, apprentice in United States Marine Band
1853-1860, service in the United States Marine Band
1861-1863, service with the 15th Engineers Regiment, NY
c. 1860s, choir director at St. Peter's and St. Dominic's
c. 1868-1878, choir director at St. Martin's/St. Augustine's
1872-1873, Colored American Opera Company
Performances of *The Doctor of Alcantara*
St. Martin's Hall (DC), January 24, 1873
Lincoln Hall (DC), February 3-4, 1873
Horticultural Hall (Phil.), February 21-22, 1873
Wall's Opera House (DC), May 12-13, 1873
1874-1878, Washington Colored Schools
1877, music shopkeeper
1878, moved to Palatka, Florida
1882, returned to DC, dies, March 7

Works of John Esputa

1855, *Tuner's Polka*
1858, *Paradise Waltz*
1870, *Esputa's Musical Instructor*
1874, *Happy Hours* (arr.)
1875, *Mass in "C"*



“The choir sang very sweetly Mozart’s 7th Mass. This choir, which has been carefully trained by Professor John Esputa, is justly considered one of the best in the city.”

The Catholic Mirror, October 11, 1873

“under the leadership of Professor John Esputa, whose name and fame as a musician is of the first order, and stands No. 1 in Washington City; add to this a chorus of forty-two well-trained voices; imagine a grand organ of 34 stops under the master hand of Professor Zierback [Thierbach], who in his beautiful combinations of flute and violincello, blended with the bourdon, followed by the reed stop, sixteenth, and this with the swell organ coupled with the choir organ, all concluding with the metallic clash of the double gamba, overpowered by the immense choral wave, and you will have some idea of St. Augustine’s choir. The attraction to this church is increasing, Foreign ministers, members of Congress and the aristocracy generally, are frequently seen in this church; the elite and upper tens generally consider it their special privilege to be present.”

The Catholic Mirror, February 2, 1878

“We hope to be able to demonstrate that our race will in time be capable of taking rank musically with our white brothers and sisters, and intend, should we meet with success here, to make a professional tour of the Northern cities. We appeal to you, who have always expressed so much friendship for our race in our struggles for political and mental elevation, to aid us in our endeavors now. Stimulate us by your presence. Witness our performance of the opera, and see if we are not worthy of encouragement.”

The Daily National Republican, February 3, 1873

“Neither Miss Miller nor Mrs. Smallwood, nor any of the company, have had the advantage of musical training in European or American conservatories. They have to depend alone upon their natural gifts and personal acquirements. This fact is one which makes vastly in their favor and protects them from the rules and standards by which Adaline Patti or Louise Kellogg would be judged as artists. Under all the circumstances they sing and perform extraordinarily well, and as for the chorus, it is superior to that of any Italian or German opera heard in this city for years.”

The Daily National Republican, February 5, 1873

“Many of the white ladies and gentlemen present were no doubt attracted by the novelty of colored ladies and gentlemen appearing in opera, and if they reflected at all upon the recent condition of the colored race in this country and the certain and rapid progress it has made as evinced by the ability presented to them on Monday night, they could not but realize the check to civilization that the forced ignorance of four million people has wrought. The capabilities of the colored race to do and be all that any other civilized and enlightened race can do or be has been fully demonstrated, and such performances as that of Monday make the evidence stronger and stronger.”

The New National Era, February 6, 1873

“Before the curtain rolled up on the serenade scene one could not help recalling the dark and bloody pictures of ‘chains and slavery,’ of ignorance and degradation that once surrounded these colored people, and how those pictures were irradiated with the colors of hope, ambition and gratitude by Mr. Lincoln’s god-like action in his proclamations of freedom and emancipation. Emancipation not only gave liberty to the African race, but it gave the world colored poets and painters, orators and senators, judicial magistrates, and men of solence, sculptors and musicians, and as one of the first fruits of liberty a regularly organized opera company at the national capital. This is a long, long step in advance of the condition of the race a few short years ago, and it reveals possibilities for them that are indeed gratifying to all their well wishers.”

The Daily National Republican, February 5, 1873

