

Mp3 The Canebrake Minstrels - Finer Than Frog Hair

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Historic 19th century minstrel string band music from before and during the American Civil War, featuring authentic oldtime banjo, flute, fiddle, bones, tambourine, and vocals 13 MP3 Songs FOLK: Traditional Folk, COUNTRY: Country Folk Details: Minstrel music is the bedrock not only of popular American music, but of American culture as well. This art form, which represents the best attempts by 19th century entertainers to emulate and perform African-American folk music of the period, was wildly popular throughout the world during the greater part of the 1800s and into the early 1900s, and encompassed some of that era's most well known musicians, songwriters, and comedians. Minstrel music and the minstrel shows, in fact, form the genesis of American music we know of today as ragtime, jazz, blues, bluegrass, country, old-time, and even rock 'n' roll. As musical historians, we face a serious dilemma in performing and preserving this crucial chapter of the American past. You see, authentic minstrel music as it was performed and heard did not apply 21st century racial sensitivities. Many people today might find the original lyrics and banter offensive. History, after all, is a foreign country; they did things differently then. So we face these questions: should we preserve American minstrel music authentically in its pure form, sprinkled liberally with terms that are culturally unacceptable today, such as "darkey," "coon," and "nigger?" Or still, should we ignore this all-important chapter of history altogether because of its highly charged racial content? After much soul searching, we of the Canebrake Minstrels decided that presenting minstrel music in its original, pure form is the only answer. We cannot, and shall not, alter history; otherwise we couldn't look at ourselves in the mirror. By the same token, we can't ignore such an important contribution to American music and culture. So herein is a portrayal of authentic minstrel music with all of its racial content, complete with the original language that some might consider to be coarse and insensitive if taken out of its historical context. All the music and words on this recording come from original documented sources. This is minstrel music of the 19th century. The 19th century minstrel show has been described by Robert Winans as "theatrical music." The names of the pieces performed were often featured on handbills and concert postings. While none of these contained the dialogue or "comic business" that went on between the musical numbers, the instrumentation for these ensembles has been

clearly established. In this recording we have attempted to demonstrate the variety of combination and the effect on interpretation on instruments derived from period reconstruction, or in some cases, original instruments. BANJO -- considered the "heart of the ensemble. The fretless gut-string banjo heard on this recording was hand-made in 1997 by George Wunderlich of the Wunder Banjo Co., Myersville, Md. It is a faithful reproduction of a William Boucher model, found and researched in the Smithsonian. The Boucher model was produced in volume in the late 1840s. This fairly plain banjo would have been available to the "common" musician, but also would have found its way to the local minstrel stages. BONES -- made from animal rib bones, dried and smoothed, and played in sets in both hands. The bones heard on this recording are not "period" original, but were original to the cow that had them perhaps thirty years ago. VIOLIN -- or "fiddle" was a key melodic instrument to the ensemble. The fiddle on this recording dates from the turn of the century, with gut strings, as were most of the fiddles of the 19th century. It follows the common style of the violin throughout history, and is played with lots of rosin on the bow. FLUTE -- The wood flute heard here is an original Asa Hopkins, made in Litchfield, Conn., in 1826. TAMBOURINE -- "Mr. Tambo" plays a modern reproduction, a simple wooden hoop stretched with animal skin, with metal "jingles." ORGAN -- The organ used on "Babylon Is Fallen" is an original Esty pump organ, dating to perhaps the late 1840s. Listen for the "click-clack" of the two foot pedals as they pump air into the bellows, feeding the reeds for sound. An informal review of the group during the 19th century might be sumpin' like dis. Hey white folk and ebbrybody -- I seed de Canebrake Minstrels de udder night, an, Lawdy deyz de bess minstrel folk I ebber done see! Dey be finer dan frog hair! Dey clared de kitchum, de fine men an de purty gals be dancin' and jumpin' and carryin' on, so mos' all de night long! De fiddle player, JUSTIN CASE, be sawin dat ting so de rosin on de bow be makin' big puffy clouds up abub him. An all de long, he don' spill no liquor! He sure kin kick up de debbil! An, de banjer player, AMOS NANDY, be pickin' dat ol banjo so fast dat de ol' hide mos' jump right off de hoop an' back on de woodchuck! It be a fine purty New Yawk banjer too! I be tinkin' he must hab more an' elebben fingahs or sumpin'! De flute player, JUBA LEE, he also a real fine fust-rate singah. He hit lots a high note an' low note, an' some 'taint nebber hear afor 'tall! An den de fingers gets ta flyin' on dat purty wood flute pipe, and de mos' sweet music done be made! He gots lotsa fas' fingahs too, jes like Amos! De endman on de lef be WILLIUB WEABER, but deyz call s him Mistah Bones. He done click dem ol rib bones tuggedah wif both hans, and' make de mos' impressive ribbums t' dance to. He done clickety-click dem bones t' any ting you wants! An

den de mos' amazing ting habben! He pull out de ol' jawbone! Yassuh, I means a REAL big ol' jawbone wid de tef and al still in! I sp'eck dat ol jackass (de bone, not ol' Williub) almos' gwine talk to me or leas-wize chew de cud! He shake de teeth and clickety-clack on dat big bone too, to be keepin' ob de beat. He really sumpin' fancy, an' de bess Mistah Bones I ebber done seed in any trabelin' minstrel music show ... Lass be Mr. Tambo, down on de udder end od de band. He a dancer, too, an' shake de jingles an' beat on de skin head ob de ol tambo as he twist an' turn an' jump jis so. His name be MOSES LINKUM I tink. But he be real funny when he tease Mr. Bones when de music stop betwix de tunes. So iffum yous don' b'leeve ol' Maykah, goes an' see fuh yusseff. If dey be in de cookhuse kitchum, roun' de fire, or up to de big house pahluh, De Canebrake Minstrels be de finess in de lan'. Maybe yous see 'em in de big city some day. Finer dan frog hair, yassum! Dats dem! Tells um Maykuh Case done sen' yous. Tank you berry much. OLD DAN Tucker Composed by Daniel D. Emmett -- published by Atwills, N.Y., 1843 H. Ogden Wintermute's biography of Dan Emmett recounts: "When Daniel was almost fifteen years of age, a traveling show came to the village. Because they had lost their violinist, the manager asked the innkeeper where he might find someone to take his place. He was urged at once to see the boy at the blacksmith shop." For his audition, young Dan played a composition of his own; first he played it, then he sang it. "The showman was pleased. 'You'll do all right,' the show manager remarked. Play for us tonight and do that song between acts." The show was on the village green and the whole settlement turned out to see what it was all about. Although they were not too surprised to see the blacksmith's son playing the fiddle, they were amazed when he appeared as a black-faced character and sang OLD DAN TUCKER. Wintermute further states that Emmett was fourteen years old when he composed this tune and used his own first name and that of his dog, which he called Tucker. Robert B. Winans "Early Minstrel Show Music, 1843-1852" has Old Dan Tucker listed second in popularity for 1843-1847, the most popular and performed song being Miss Lucy Long. Rev. Daniel Tucker owned a large plantation on the Savannah River and is buried near his old hometown, Point Lookout. Born in Virginia, February 14, 1774, Daniel Tucker "came to town" to take up a land grant. A revolutionary soldier, planter, and minister, he owned and operated Tucker's Ferry near his home. He died April 7, 1818 -- but not "of a toothache in his heel." Esteemed by his fellow planters, he was loved by Negroes who composed many additional verses of the famous ditty, which became a favorite song at corn shuckings and social gatherings. (source: Georgia Department of Trade Tourism, Gainesville, Ga.) LUCY LONG From "Minstrel Songs Old and New" --

dates to 1844 Minstrel tunes of the period often reflect the English stage tradition of introducing dialogue into the performance of the tune, this taken from Dan Emmett and Frank Brower, published in Hans Nathan's "Rise of Early Negro Minstrelsy." While coined a "nonsense," or "comic" song, it reflects the complexity of interpretation given the dialogue and its intent. Was Lucy Long a prostitute, or Ater eel a reflection of the black male anatomy? Ultimately the dialogue between verses defined what the performers intended. Today this might be interpreted as "gutter prose." In the much larger picture, it defines the transition of early minstrel tunes from taverns to the great concert halls.

DE FLOATING SCOW QUICKSTEP or "Oh Carry Me Back To Old Virginny" Published in Philadelphia by E. Ferrett, 1847 In that same year, Lee and Walker of New York published the lyrics "as sung by the celebrated black Apollo" Charles T. White. This version appeared in many published works of the 19th century. Not to be confused with "Carry Me Back To Old Virginny" by African-American minstrel James Bland, which was published in 1878 by the Oliver Ditson Company.

WALK JAWBONE There is a reference to "Published in 1840 with no author listed," however this version stems from the 1844 Silas Sexton Steele tune written expressly for Cool White. The Jawbone is a dance, an instrument, a stock character in minstrel shows, and a fiddle tune and song. The use of a jawbone with teeth, scraped with a hollow stick, was noted in Florida in 1837. Along with the bones, it was a percussion instrument of decidedly African origin.

ALABAMA JOE Thomas Briggs' Banjo Instructor, 1855 Commonly known in the British Isles as "Shall Trelawney Die," its text referring to Jonathan Trelawney (1650-1721), Bishop of Exeter, who was committed to the Tower of London during the reign of James II It was also used in 1841 to the nautical tune "A Wet Sheet and a Flowing Sea" by Allan Cunningham. In 1861 Col. H.C. Hart published his "Instructor for the Drum" and included the same as the fife tune "Le Petit Tambor." The lyrics to Alabama Joe, published in New York printer J. Andrews, represents a "black life" story about Joe and his widow Miss Phillis.

ROB RIDLEY Composed by "John Smith" on the sheet music in Phil Rice's Method for the Banjo from 1858, it was actually composed by Charles White in 1855 and published by Firth Pond Co. in 1855.

LAND OF CANNAN/SANDY BOY Canaan is listed as "played by J. Simmons" in Buckley's New Banjo Method, 1860. Sandy Boy is from Phil Rice Method for the Banjo, 1858. Interestingly, the name "Sandy, - boy," a dark-colored slave, shows up in a bill of sale from Benjamin David to Elisha David of Bibb County, Ga., in 1852.

SOMEONE IN DE HOUSE WIF DINAH Phil Rice Method for the Banjo, 1858 A "comic" song that characterizes the stage performance. The lyrics and dialogue represent a reality

known to all mankind. This piece is particular to a small audience in a predominantly male setting. Much like Miss Lucy Long, the Dinah persona creates many underlying interpretations. Dinah, along with Lucy Neal, Jim Crow, and Dandy Jim, are the subject of many compositions. OH LEMUEL Written by Stephen Foster, and published by F.D. Benteen, Baltimore, 1850 This tune was written for and made popular by the Christy Minstrels. EFFECTS OF THE BROGUE Also known by the melody "Tatter Jack," which was published by Dan Emmett in his "Drummers and Fifers Guide" in 1861, and lyrics published in Wintermute's book. Having such renowned success as the Virginia Minstrels in America, members of Emmett's act decided they would add to their prestige to perform in London for a season. They toured the British Isles where the group eventually disbanded in Glasgow, Scotland. Emmett stayed for a time, getting work where he could, to earn passage fare home. Minstrel shows commonly included the use of dialects other than Negro. Emmett was said to be a master of the Irish as well as the German dialect, and often included them in his performances. Here, Emmett characterizes the "effect" Paddy had upon his return voyage. Yet another segment to the sound of a minstrel act, this setting represents the performance venue of a concert hall. DARKEY MONEY MUSK Common 19th century dance In Emmett's Drummers and Fifers Guide of 1861, this tune was known as "Money Must." "Holyrood or Moneymusk" was published by Scottish composer Daniel Dow in 1780 under the title "Sir Archibald Grant of Monymusk's Reel." Moneymusk is a town in Scotland. This tune also appears in Thomas Briggs' Banjo Instructor, 1855. YEAR OF JUBLIO Composed by Henry Clay Work, 1862 Despite the fact that it appears to chronicle the final phase of the War Between The States, "Kingdom Coming" was written in 1862, and released on April 23 of that same year, following a weeklong promotional blitz by its Chicago publisher, Root Cady. Given its premier performance by Christy's Minstrels, the song was an overnight sensation. It was as well received by black as it was with white audiences, and was said to have been sung by black troops as they marched into Richmond during the final of the conflict. The "Year of Jublio" is a Biblical reference to the longed-for day on which all people will be set free. BABYLON IS FALLEN Composed by Henry Clay Work, 1863, as the sequel to "Kingdom Coming." Son of anti-slavery advocate Alanson Work, Henry was a printer by trade who became a composer at the encouragement of Publisher George F. Root. Given its Biblical references and grand chorus, we have incorporated the use of a mid-19th century Esty pump organ. All of the recording were accomplished in a digital multi-track surrounding, intended to capture the spirit of a full live performance the way it might have been heard in small venues and parlors,

as well as in larger concert-hall settings.

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