



Blind Tom, the Black Pianist-Composer (1849-1908): Continually Enslaved

Geneva Handy Southall

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Blind Tom was the stage name of Thomas Greene Wiggins, a blind black pianist born into slavery in 1849. Noted by many musical authorities to be a musician of amazing skill, expressive playing, and incredible memory, he was nonetheless considered by his "admirers" still nearer to "animals" than other human beings, and was exploited by a series of whites after the Civil War for their own financial comfort.

In this focused, consequential study, Geneva Southall reformulates the debate surrounding Blind Tom and expands its dimensions significantly. Southall asks questions about the talents of black performers and musicians, the relationship between black culture and economic prosperity, and the personal ability of talented black musicians to weather the dual stigmatization of racism and (in Blind Tom's case) physical disability to produce music not just worthy of remembrance, but of importance to the tradition of American arts from which they have been excluded. (Originally printed in cloth in 1999)

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