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**The Musical Language of Black Minstrel Music by Jacob J. Sawyer (1856-1885)**

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**Abstract**

The inclusion of one of Sawyer's compositions in James M. Trotter's famous book *Music and Some Highly Musical People* (Boston, 1880) marked Sawyer, still in his early 20s at that time, as an exemplary and well-known composer. His early death from tuberculosis let him sink into oblivion. As reported at previous conferences, the author of this poster recently discovered Sawyer's numerous records that provide biographical information and information about Sawyer's work as a musician and composer, who collaborated with some of the most famous African-American musicians of the time, specifically with minstrelsy groups: the Hyers Sisters (1878-1880), the Haverly's Colored Minstrels (1881), the Slayton Ideal Company (1883), and the "Original Nashville Students" (1884-1885).

The vast majority of Sawyer's compositions were written for these ensembles, which performed primarily minstrel shows (vocal and instrumental music, dance, and comedy). Thus, Sawyer is a pioneer of *black minstrel* music: music composed by an African-American for African-American minstrel groups (which were not common before the Civil War). This poster will, for the first time, present harmonic and melodic analyses of Sawyer's minstrel music, specifically providing an analytical score of his composition *I'm de Captain of the Black Cadets* for voice and piano (1881), in which the lyrics are supported by the rhythmic and melodic design. As many other of Sawyer's compositions, his otherwise 'simple' entertainment music is built on an intriguingly creative harmonic language that is characterized by the use of common-tone diminished 7<sup>th</sup> chords, augmented sixth chords, added-note chords, and a walking bass!