

Rediscovering the Minstrel Music of African-American Composer Jacob J. Sawyer (1856-1885)

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Poster Abstract

For James M. Trotter's famous book *Music and Some Highly Musical People* (Boston, 1880), only 13 pieces of music were selected for inclusion. One of these pieces was by African-American composer Jacob J. Sawyer. The inclusion marks Sawyer as an exemplary and well-known composer, despite his young age at the time. His early death from tuberculosis let him sink into oblivion. As reported at a previous conference, the author of this poster recently discovered Sawyer's birth and death records as well as several newspaper articles from the late 1870s and early 1880s that provide biographical information and information about Sawyer's work as a musician and composer. This poster will focus on Sawyer's collaborative work with famous musicians of his time and on his leadership in well-known ensembles of the time:

1879-80	Pianist for the Hyers Sisters
1881	Musical Director of the Haverly's Colored Minstrels
1883	Pianist of the Slayton Ideal Company
1884-85	Musical Director of the Nashville Students

The Hyers Sisters were well-known singers and pioneers of African-American musical theater, while Haverly's Colored Minstrels was a successful black minstrelsy group owned and managed by Jack H. Haverly (1837-1901). The Slayton Ideal Company was a jubilee troupe by African-American actor and singer Sam Lucas (died 1916¹). Finally, the financially successful and very popular Kansas-City-based "Nashville Students and Colored Concert Company" was managed by the African-American Preston T. Wright (1857-1898); it toured nationally, performing vocal and instrumental music, dance, and comedy.

This poster will provide information about Sawyer's work and will start discussing, for the first time, his Minstrel music.

¹ Sam Lucas's date of birth is unknown.