# Minstrelsy in Edinburgh, 1843 to 66

The popularity of the early minstrel shows of Sweeny, Briggs, etc and Christy's Minstrels reached Scotland in the mid nineteenth century. The following are all cuttings from the *Caledonian Mercury*, Edinburgh's, and Scotland's, foremost newspaper at that time. As this was an online search for the word 'banjo', each incidence of the word is highlighted in green.

The first is an advertisement for a concert by Sweeny. Note that Sweeny is the only minstrel-style performer in this programme.

Caledonian Mercury (Edinburgh, Scotland), Thursday, July 13, 1843; Issue 19264.

EDINBURGH ADELPHI THEATRE.

This present Evening, THURSDAY, JULY 13,
Will be performed
THERESA'S VOW.
To which will be added,
CAPTAIN CHARLOTTE.

At the end of the Comedictta, Mr SWEENEY, the
celebrated Nigger Melodist and much-admired
Banjo.player, will sing several of his Popular
Melodies, accompanied by himself on his favourite instrument the Barjo.
After which,
ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA!
The whole to conclude with
THE HAPPY MAN.

A review of the concert appeared two days later. The reviewer felt it important to describe the banjo to his readers – clearly it was a new instrument to Edinburgh at the time – and compares it to the guitar. There were many guitar concerts in Edinburgh around this time, sometimes by famous guitarists such as Regondi, Horetski, Eulenberg and Szczepanowski – all except Regondi lived in Scotland for many years. To say the banjo is 'much more powerful, and at the same time more melodious' must have upset many guitar players in the capital. Frequently, reviewers decry the lack of volume of the guitar in concerts. I wonder what these guitarists would have thought of the banjo being more melodious?

Note that Sweeny not only played and sang, but danced too:

Caledonian Mercury (Edinburgh, Scotland), Saturday, July 15, 1843; Issue 19265.

season is characterised by the total absence of their usual scourge, the fly.

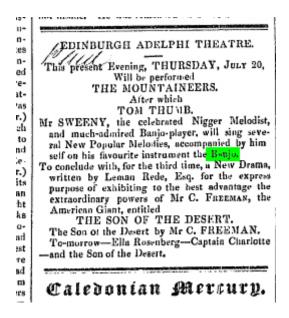
ADELPHI THEATRE .- Mr Sweeny, Hanja-player and Nigger Melodist, from the Theatre Royal, English Opera House, appeared here n Thursday evening, when he sung several negro melodies, accompanied by himself on the Bunja, an instrument shaped and stringed somewhat like the guitar, the tones being, however, much more powerful, and at the same time more melodious, than the latter. Mr Sweeny plays on the instrument most admirably, and with an ease and humour which tends to heighten the general effect attendant upon his combined efforts in singing and dancing. The applause which followed his first melody was immense; he was encored three several times, and that so rapturously, that, as he himself expressed it, they "hardly gib the Nigger time to draw him breath." There can be no doubtthat if a Yankee were to see Mr Sweeny on the stage they would pronounce him to b east real rightdown, down-right, genuine" Nigger. He is immeasurably superior to the original Jim Crow. 

Due to the success of the concert, another was quickly added:

Caledonian Mercury (Edinburgh, Scotland), Monday, July 17, 1843; Issue 19266.

EDINBURGH ADELPHI THEATRE. ζ This present Evening, MONDAY, July 17, Will be performed THE MILLER'S MAID. To which will be added. CAPTAIN CHARLOTTE. At the end of the Comedicta, Mr SWEENY, fix celebrated Nigger Melodist and much skind Banjo-player, will sing several of his l'a,c't: Melodies, accompanied by himself on his favorite instrument the Banjo. To conclude with, for the first time, a New Burn, written by Leman Rede, Esq. for the exposs purpose of exhibiting to the best advantage the extraordinary powers of Mr C. FREENIS, the American Giant, entitled THE SON OF THE DESERT. The Son of the Desert by Mr C. FREEMAN. To-morrow-A variety of entertainments in which the American Giant and Mr Sweety sil appear.

And another, this time introducing the American Giant... *Caledonian Mercury* (Edinburgh, Scotland), Thursday, July 20, 1843; Issue 19267.



Unfortunately for the Giant, stage pistol etiquette had not yet found their way onto the Scottish stage...

Caledonian Mercury (Edinburgh, Scotland), Monday, July 24, 1843; Issue 19269...

ADELPHI THEATRE-ACCIDENT TO THE GIANT. -Mr C. Freeman, the American giant, took his benefit on Saturday night, on which occasion the house was crowded to overflow. Mr Freeman, who personated the Monster, in " Presumption," met with an accident-the wadding of a pistol having struck him in the mouth, knocking out one of his teeth, and otherwise injuring him severely, though not dangerously. It is the custom when discharging fire arms on the stage to fire upwards, and on this occasion the rule was observed to a certain extent; but the person who fired the shot, not at all calculating on the unusual height of the "Monster," the pie:e was levelled so as to cause the wadding to hit Mr Freeman; of course, had it been any ordinary man the contents of the pistol would have gone over his head. Notwith-tanding the accident, however, Mr Freeman appeared in the last piece " The Son of the Desert." but was unable to take part in a sparring scene which intervened, for which an spology was made by the Manager. It will be seen that Mr S reeny, the Nigger melodist and banjo player, makes his appeal and last appearance to-night. Those who have not yet seen Mr Sweeny's unsurpascable execution ought to avail themselves of this last opportunity of doing so. It will be observed, that the benefit for the family of the late Mr Elton takes place on Saturday first, and not on Saturday the fifth August, as erroneously stated in the first advertisements.

THE LION TAMER.—Van Amburgh, who with his splendid collection of animals, is to make his grand entree into Edinburgh this forenoon, was at Fisherrow on Friday and Saturday, where his elephant afforded much amusement by carrying a number of children on its back, and stepping over the body of the keeper, while the latter was lying on the ground.

Mr E. R. Harper, the 'celebrated American Comedian, Melodist, and Banjo Performer' visited Edinburgh some four years after Sweeny:

*Caledonian Mercury* (Edinburgh, Scotland), Thursday, September 23, 1847; Issue 19713.

Paul VICTORIA TEMPLE.	
GREAT ATTRACTION — This present EVENING, MONDAY, and during the Week.—Last Night but One of the Engagement of Mr E. R. HARPER, the celebrated American Comedian, Melodist, and Banjo Performer. The Entertainments will commence with a Romantic Sketch, entitled THE FAIR MAID OF LITCHFIELD. CONCERT & DANCING. To be followed by a truly laughable Farcette Ballad,	10-
BLACK BLUNDERS,	
in which Mr E. R. HARPER will appear.  The whole to conclude with	
MISS IN DISGUISE,	1
	١.
Received last week with shouts of laughter and applause.	
On Tuesday Evening, Bambo Sambo, and other Entertain-	ļ e
ments. On Wednesday Evening The Dumb Boy of the Fac- tory.	n
•	t
Doors open at a Quarter-past Seven—Overture to com-	
mence at a Quarter to Eight—Performances terminating about	F
Eleven.	•
Prices—Boxes, 1s. 6d.; Balcony, 1s.; Pit, 6d. Second	M
Price to the Boxes and Balcony at a Quarter past Nine-	e
Boxes, 1s.; Balcony, 6d.	
Proprietor and Manager, Mr W. GOURLAY.	G
1 /- TETTU UNCUITAT	tı

*Caledonian Mercury* (Edinburgh, Scotland), Thursday, September 23, 1847; Issue 19713. – Note that 'Mr E. R. Harper will appear every Evening during the Week'...

Second Appearance of Mr E. R. HARPER, the renowned American Comedian and Banjo Player.  THIS PRESENT EVENING, THURSDAY, the Amusements will commence with a Sketch, entitled ALL IN THE DOWNS.  To be followed by a Variety of SINGING and DANCING.	Open Every Evening.	
American Comedian and Panjo Player.  THIS PRESENT EVENING, THURSDAY, the Amusements will commence with a Sketch, entitled ALL IN THE DOWNS.  To be followed by a Variety of SINGING and DANCING. After which a truly laughable Burletta, called THE VIRGINIAN MUMMY.  Ginger Blue (his original character). Mr E. R. HARPER, in which he will introduce a number of his most popular Negro Melodics.  The whole to conclude with a favourite Ballet d'Action, supported by Mr Mungall and the Corps de Ballet.  Mr E. R. Harper will appear every Evening during the Week.  Doors open at a Quarter-past Seven—Overture to commence at a Quarter to Eight—Performances terminating about Eleven.  Prices—Boxes, Is. 6d.; Balcony, Is.; Pit, 6d. Second Price to the Boxes and Balcony at a Quarter past Nine—Boxes, Is.; Balcony, 6d.	Open Every Evening.	1
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SETTI PARAT OF OTAGO IN NEW ZEALAND		1

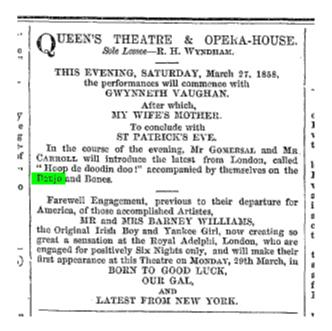
Apparently the great banjoist, Briggs also paid a visit to Scotland, alongside bones player, Pell and the singer-dancer, 'Boz's Juba' – a trio of whom 'none can compare'.

Caledonian Mercury (Edinburgh, Scotland), Thursday, August 30, 1849; Issue 19915.

BRID CYCRING.

ADELPHI THEATRE .- Of the many talented Ethiopian serenaders who have visited this city for the last few years, certainly none can compare to Juba, Pell, and Briggs, who commenced a short engagement at this theatre on Monday evening. Mr Briggs plays the banjo with extraordinary facility and power, producing either the sweet sounds of the gainer, or the more boisterous accompaniments to negro melodies. Mr Pell performs on the "bones" with surprising dexterity, and produces many a variation on what are esteemed very monotonous instruments. Having exhibited his skill on the four bones, he reduces the number to two, and eventually to one. How he performs a solo on the remaining bone, we leave to be seen, but its accomplishment excites not a little mirth. As for Juba. or, as he is more commonly called "Boz's Juba," he is a coloured seronader, which is rather a rarity. His singing is excellent and humorous, his tambourine playing remarkable for rapidity and adroitness, while his dancing exhibits a nimbleness, sprightliness, and celerity perfectly wonderful. His joints vibrate with incomprehensible intensity, and his heel and toe beat the ground so fast, that a demi-semi-quaver must be divid. est and sub-divided a great many times to cope with them, and he keeps up the steam amazingly. His leaping, bounding, and gyrations exhibit great agility, and every movement is combined with such grotesque capering, and given with such hilarity and gice, that an exuberant and almost perpetual roar of laughter is maintained. The singing in concert of the screnadors is admirable, and among others the new tune to the well known words, "Wiso's dat knocking at de door," has an amusing and buriesque effect. All who wish to enjoy a hearty laugh, should see Juba and his companions.

Due to the popularity of Minstrel performance, British groups started appearing, including, from London, the wonderfully named, *Hoop de doodin doo*! *Caledonian Mercury* (Edinburgh, Scotland), Saturday, March 27, 1858; Issue 21373.



Scottish groups also got in on the act. Here is an interesting review of the local Artillery Volunteers, of whom, apparently, Christy's Minstrels need not fear...This review is followed by an interesting and relevant article...

The Caledonian Mercury (Edinburgh, Scotland), Friday, January 4, 1861; Issue 22238:

OF CONCERT OF THE MID LOTHIAN COAST

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claid aside his bow and arrows; henceforward he is to besiege the sensitive heart of humanity with parks of artillery. We are led to this conviction by the High Art programme of the concert, which we listened to with delight nesterday evening. "The head and front of its" bill of musical face is embellished with the semblance of five Cupids in an anti-Haddo state of innocence, making preparations for the discharge of an Armstrong gun — of how many thousand 2's it is impossible to say, as the calibre is most pro-bably calculated by these paradisically clothed gunners according to the squares of the dis-tances of the "tocher." With a shudder of pity for the small protection from the present inclement season furnished by the uniform of the Edinburgh Cupid Artillery Corps, whose sole dething appears to consist of a shake and a sword-belt, we pass on to record the doings of the amateur guardians of our Mid-Lothian shores; these amiable men having consented "for this evening only" to transmute their cannons into trombones and less fiddles, their revolvers into piccolos and flutes, and their cartouche-boxes into concertinas and banios. The performances opened with a selection of Scottish airs, arranged by the conductor, Herr F. Weirter, which were executed in a most admirable and con amore manner; next, "The Volunteers' Song," excellently sung by Mr Chamberlain, who is author of the words and music. A duet for flute and piano followed, performed by Messra Black and Riddell, and was received most enthusiastically. The great feature of the evening, to judge from the ap-plause, long and loud, was "The Mid-Lothian Serenaders," to the number of eleven, who appeared with countenances of the intensest shade of black, and locks of the darkest hue and curliest twirl. Although the Christy's Minstrels need not at present tremble for their laurels, yet, considering the capital style in which the "Bones," "Tambourine," Bunjo, ke, went through their performances, and the spirit and feeling infused into the singing, we doubt not that a short rehearsal would make our " Mid-Lothian Serenaders " formidable rivals to the renowned professionals. In the second part Mr Forrest played a bril-liant fantasia on the concertina; and Messrs Fairbairn, Meikle, and Turner, obtained much applause for their vocal solos, a like tribute being accorded to the cornet and piano solos of Messrs M'Gregor and Riddell. The conductor produced for the first time his "Augusta Polka," a graceful variation of a most melodious theme.

The hall on this occasion was crowded by one of the most brilliant audiences ever assembled within its walls. Among the audience were Sir John Douglas, Lieut, Cols, Baird and Anderson; Captains Ballantyne and Brydone; Lieutenants Miller, Virtue, Douglas, &c. ; J. G. T. Sinclair of Ulbster; Lady Baird, Miss Catherine Sinclair, the Misses Sinclair, &c.

The sum arising from the sale of tickets goes to the Band Fund of the Mid-Lothian A COLOR OF THE STATE OF Artillery Company.

### THE SECESSION OF THE SLAVE STATES.

From a letter addressed to a gentlemen in this city by a distinguished Professor of Theo-logy in the United States, we extract the following passage :-

Enter the World-Renowned Mr Mackney...

*The Caledonian Mercury* (Edinburgh, Scotland), Monday, February 20, 1865; Issue 23601.

Zublic Imusements.	V.
L. MUSIC HALL	Ī.,
CATURDAY EVENING CONCER'	rs.
Under the Patronage of the Right Hon, the	16
MACHNEY! MACKNEY! MACKNEY!!!	
The World Renowned Delineator of Negro Character will appeared the many	tox,
M U S I O H A L L SATURDAY EVENING FIRST	'Lin
(for One Night only), and Sing	OIT
"SALLY COME UP," "LADIES WONT IN	Ι, .
WHAT CAN'T BE CURED MUST BE ENDOWN	rm
Farm Tard Imitations), THE KAPPIE SOI (with Extraordinary Effects on the Violing)	NG"
MR MACKNEY WILL also PERFORM upon PIANOFORTE, VIOLIN, BANJO, MREOPHO	the
and BONES, concluding with his	,
UNBIVALLED AMERICAN JIG.	.111
Mr. MACKNEY will be supported by Miss JULIA BLEADON,	
MR HENRY NIGHOLSON, MASTER ALFRED GIBSON, and	
MR F. W. BRIDGMAN	937
Reserved Seats (Numbered), 28; Sides, Body	of
Hall, and Front Gallery, 1s; Back Gallery, Under Gallery, and Orchestra, 6d.	1.4
Tickets to be had at Wood & Co.'s, George St (where a plan of the Hall may be seen), and at the	e St
Andrew Hotel.  Doors Open at 7; Band Performances at 7.30.	-1:
Carriages may be ordered at 10.15.	1.0°

### And the review:

*The Caledonian Mercury* (Edinburgh, Scotland), Monday, December 4, 1865; Issue 23848.

SATURDAY EVENING CONCERTS.—The directors of these entertainments succeeded in securing for last Saturday evening's concert the artistes who appeared at the concert on the previous Saturday -Mr Nicholson (flautist), Master Gibson (vio-linist), Mr Mackney, and Miss C. Grosvenor. The selections of operatic (duet) music performed by Mr Nicholson and Master Gibson were finely rendered, as were also the violin solos played by the latter artists himself. As on former evenings Miss Grosvenor's singing displayed that excellence of precision and taste which forms so distinguishing a feature in accomplished vocalists, and her various operatic airs and ballads met with a warm reception. The ballad of "Crossing the moor" was loudly encored, on which she gave with much taste and spirit "Within a mile o' Edinburgh town." Her rendering of "Wandering Willie" was another happy effort. Of Mr Mackney's accomplishments—hissinging, dancing, piano fingering, violin solos, banjo thrumming, and "bones" accompaniment—little need be said. His "Kaffir Song" is really a wonderful combination of all that is ludicrous, and evinces immensely Mr Mackney's wonderful talent for imitation. "Don't you hear this darky singing " was encored, as was also the song given in answer to the recall, so that he had thus to appear three different times running. His last song, "The garret near the sky," was rapturously applauded, on which he gave, with remarkable variations, a plantation "breakdown." At the conclusion of this feat the feelings of the audience were fairly carried away, and a vociferous round of cheering told how great was its success. In the duets concertante with Mr Nicholson and Master Gibson Mr Bridgman's piano playing was clever and appreciable, and as accompanyist he was as successful as on former occasions.

From London, Go West!

*The Caledonian Mercury* (Edinburgh, Scotland), Thursday, March 16, 1865; Issue 23622.

### MUSIC HALL.

# SATURDAY EVENING CONCERTS.

Under the Patronage of THE RIGHT HON. THE LORD PROVOST.

GREAT ATTRACTION ON SATURDAY EVENING FIRST, Being the Last Concert but One of the Season.

Last Appearance of
Miss FANNY EDWARDS, the eminent Controlto,
who will Sing "The Fisherman's Daughter," Glover;
"Bright Flames are Flashing" (Trovatore), Verdi;
"The Muranur of the Shell" (by request), Hon. Mrs.
Norton, with Organ Accompaniment; and "Why
throbs this Heart with rapture new" (Desert Flower),
Wallace.

First Appearance of
MR FRANK RLMORE, the celebrated Tenor, who
will Sing "Thou art so near," Richardt; "Sweet
Mary of the Valo," Ransford; "Mother, he's going
tway," Lover; and "Sally, why not name the day,"
Lover.

Miss EDWARDS and Mr ELMORE will Sing, "Yes, I'll Remember Thee" (Trovatore), Verdi; and "Home to our Mountains" (Trovatore), Verdi.

WEST! WEST!! WEST!!!
First Appearance of

WEST, the Original Stump Orator, brought from London specially for this Concert, who will give "Johnson's Ball," "Blue-Tail Fly," "Hold your Horses," "Shakspeare Rhymes," "The Came of Speculation," "Seraphma, Oh!" Banjo Solo—" Vermicello," "American Jig," and the celebrated "STUMP SPRECH."

A local man, Mr Healy, entertained at the Poor House:

*The Caledonian Mercury* (Edinburgh, Scotland), Saturday, March 25, 1865; Issue 23630.

CONCERT AT THE CITY POORHOUSE. - Last night a concert was given to the inmates of the City Poorhouse, Forrest Road. Several Scotch and Irish melodies, &c., were sung by Mr Banks and the Misses Balcarras, who were accompanied on the pianoforte by Mr M Intosh. Some excellent comic songs were sung by Mesers Balcarras, Smith, and Healy, the latter of whom appeared as a negro, and accompanied his songs on the banic. Mr Banks performed two solos on the concerting in excellent taste, and altogether the concert was a decided success. The inmates of the Poorhouse seemed to be highly delighted with the entertainment. A cordial vote of thanks was awarded to the vocalists and instrumentalists, and the meeting separated after giving three hearty cheers for Mr Kemp, jun., one of the governors, through whose exertions this concert was brought to such a successful issue.

The famous Christy's Minstrels had great success in Edinburgh – 'each performer a star' - having scenery of 'Darkie life' to the cost of £1,000 doubtless helped.

The Caledonian Mercury (Edinburgh, Scotland), Monday, March 19, 1866; Issue 23936.

Note. -- There will be no Admission to the Orchestra this Evening, it being occupied by the Magnificent Scenery accompanying the Christy's Minstrels Enter-tainment. The accommodation being thus limited, Tickets should be secured at one. The Numbered Seats (2s) are retained the entire Evening.

### MUSIC HALL.

SATURDAY EVENING CONCERTS. Under the Patronage of THE RIGHT HON. THE LORD PROVOST.

#### THIS EVENING.

The Public's old favourites, the world-renowned CHRISTY'S MINSTRELS, Prom St James' Hall, London, and St James' Hall, Liverpool.

Proprietors—Messas MOORE, CROCKER, RITTER, AND HAMILTON.

TEN PERFORMERS-EACH PERFORMER A STAR!!

IN THEIR
NEW AND ORIGINAL ENTERTAINMENT. Each Act Illustrated with New and Beautiful Scenery, got up at the Expense of One Thousand Pounds.
Embracing, with wonderful Dioramic Effects, the
Principal Views in connection with "DARKIE" LIPE.

The following NEW SONGS !

### NEW DANCES!!

NEW BURLESQUES !!!

will be given.

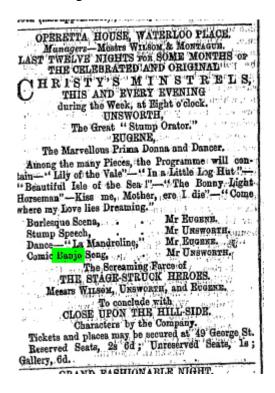
Overture, "Guy Mannering," MINSTRELS.
Opening Chorus, "When the Corn is Dry," COMPANY.
"Laughing Annabelle" (New),
"When Johnny Comes Marching Home" Moone.
" Jesse Lune" (New),Norman.
"Dance de Jubarce" (New),
"I'm Lonely To-Night" (New),LUMBARD.
** Tapioca" (1690th Time),
"Our Angel Nellie" (New),ST CLAIR.
Grand Medley Chorus (New),COMPANY.
Comic Solo (Danje),
Ballad (Selected),Sr CLAIR.
Song and Dance (Eccentric),
Selo (Harp),BLAMPHIN.
American Jig,RITTER.
Ballad, "Happy be Thy Dreams," RAINFORD.
Hair-Brushing by Moore, CROCKER, and RITTER.
The Great Rope-Trick, CROCKER and MOORE.
Plantation Festival Dance,Company.
Mis: F. W. BRIDGMAN will perform several Popu-
lar Airs on the Grand Organ.
Admission, 2s. 1s. and 6d.

Admission, 2s, 1s, and 6d.
Tickets to be had at Wood & Co.'s, George Street
(where a Plan of the Hall may be seen); the St Andrew
Hotel; and at the Committee Rooms, 52 Nicolson Street.

Doors open at 7; Organ Performance at 7.30; Concert at 8.

Carriages may be ordered at a Quarter-past Ten. DUNCAN M'LAREN, Hon. Secretary.

## Line Arts.



There is no doubt much more to be found regarding the banjo in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Scotland. Maybe one day...

Rob MacKillop Edinburgh 2008