A testimonial from the pen of Dickens—however it was constructed—provided the strongest endorsement possible in Britain at this time. His was a powerful voice that spoke across class lines; any association attracted just the broad-based attention the minstrel troupe was after. This populist appeal suited their primary London venue, Vauxhall Gardens, the nature of which stands in many respects in stark contrast to the St James. Vauxhall was south of the Thames, reached by foot, carriage, and the earliest of train travel. It was a large outdoor venue, with extensive tree-lined walks past arbors and cafes, and instrumental and vocal concerts. The London darkness arrives late in the summer, but artificial light was still provided, and at dusk there was a fireworks display. Such gardens had been a feature of London summer life for many years, though they had fallen on hard times more recently; Dickens himself (as ‘Boz’) had written about the prospective sadness of such a place, in the cold light of day, in one of his early sketches. This particular year, however, the manager (Wardell) had made a widely praised effort to return Vauxhall to something like commercial and critical success, and most especially to draw from the widest possible cross-section of society for his patronage. He did this through discounted tickets for the working classes, and specially organized events for the aristocracy; and he appears to have succeeded. To some extent he attracted different audiences on different nights and to different parts of the garden; but to some extent, as was the tradition of such gardens in the summer, Vauxhall in 1848 did seem to provide a space where cultures mixed.

Rain or shine—unfortunately for Mr. Wardell, it was a rainy summer—there was an indoor establishment called the Rotunda open to all patrons, either standing, or sitting in pre-booked boxes. The entertainment varied from year to year, but during the second half of the 1840s Wardell successfully turned it into a circus, presented in the round. The bill, which was advertised with times for each participant, included among others: Van Amburgh, a lion-tamer; Barry, a clown and acrobat; Mlle. Marie Macarte with a troupe of Equestrians, in a display of acrobatic horsemanship; and the Ethiopian Serenaders. On the face of it, the context of performance appears to return Pell and his troupe to their roots in a rougher performance culture, the circus, just one of a number of acts on a bill rather than a stand-alone entertainment form, surrounded by the smells and other distractions that come from sharing a stage with animals. But in fact, Vauxhall Gardens allowed the Serenaders to perform to a wide range of class cultures, from a working clientele with some leisure money, to the minor aristocracy, slumming though they might have been. It allowed for performance at special events for children, for dignitaries, and for women. On the one hand, the roots of the Serenaders in American popular and folk forms would be exposed by the animals and acrobats that surrounded its performance; on the other hand, it also reinforced the extent of the minstrel show’s previous widespread exposure. It was now a distinct form, as well known and popular as any other.
It was only six minutes from Waterloo Station, according to the advertisement in the *Morning Chronicle* 17 July 1848.


Information on Vauxhall Gardens in the 1840s comes from a survey of London newspapers. See particularly the *Globe and Traveler* 2 June 1846, and the *MorningAdvertiser* 13 and 20 June 1848, for descriptions. The *Morning Chronicle* 8 July 1848 describes a fundraiser for the Distressed Needlewomen’s Society, attended by the Lord Mayor and other dignitaries and aristocrats. The same paper 30 Aug. 1848 and 4 Sept. 1848 report discounted tickets and large attendance figures (6,000 and 20,000 respectively, though these cannot be trusted). Other information may be found in a dedicated file on the Vauxhall in the Harvard Theatre Collection. See also Warwick Wroth, *The London Pleasure Gardens of the Eighteenth Century* (NY: Macmillan, 1979 [London 1896]), and Jonathan Conlin, “Vauxhall Revisited: The Afterlife of a London Pleasure Garden, 1770-1859,” *Journal of British Studies* 45 (October 2006): 718-743.

See the *Observer* 31 July 1848 for an advertisement by the Vauxhall listing the range of Dukes, Lords, Marquises, and Viscounts who had visited that summer. The Garden was a mixed-gender venue, and although difficult to document, the popularity of minstrel sheet music in the middle-class British parlour suggests a sizable (and commercially significant) female audience for blackface minstrelsy. It is perhaps most telling that a print of Juba dancing in the *Illustrated London News* 5 August 1848 includes a sketch portrait of his audience, and all of them are women.