



“Camptown ladies sing this song, dooh-dah! Dooh-dah! Camptown racetrack’s five miles long, oh dooh-dah day!”

So goes the first line of Stephen Foster’s popular minstrel nonsense song "Camptown Races," composed in 1850. A minstrel song, intended to be performed in blackface by white performers, in a raucous style intended to mimic African-American folk traditions, “Camptown Races” is about nothing but *affect*. It’s a jaunty, jumpy sing-along. The lyrics resist meaning and so I took this opacity as a starting point for an artwork: Who are the Camptown ladies? What is doo- dah? Why do they sing it? Is it a work song for runaway slaves? A sexual allusion? Magic language? And where is Camptown? Is it someplace or anyplace? Can I take the liberty of making a nonsense piece that recasts the caricatures of the minstrel stage? Change the tune away from the fantasy of racial harmonizing?