Greenfield, Elizabeth Taylor,

original name ELIZABETH TAYLOR (b. 1817?, Natchez, Miss., U.S.--d. March 31, 1876, Philadelphia, Pa.), African-American singer whose exceptional voice made her a popular performer in Great Britain.

Born a slave, Taylor accompanied her mistress to Philadelphia, Pa., in her childhood. When her mistress joined the Society of Friends and freed her slaves, Elizabeth chose to remain with her and to take her surname, Greenfield. Encouraged by Mrs. Greenfield, young Elizabeth began to develop her manifest musical talent. She continued to study music after Mrs. Greenfield's death in 1845, eventually concentrating on singing.

In 1851 Greenfield gave her first public performances, in Buffalo, N.Y. During 1851-52 she made a concert tour of several cities, including Boston and Chicago. A testimonial concert in March 1853 arranged by friends in Buffalo raised funds to finance a trip to Europe for additional training. A London manager who was to have handled a British concert tour for her defaulted, leaving her stranded. She sought help from Lord Shaftesbury and was further aided by the recently arrived Harriet Beecher Stowe and by the Duchess of Sutherland, who became her especial patroness. She gave her first London performance in May 1853 and over the next months sang in several cities in England and Ireland.

Greenfield's voice--full, resonant, with remarkable range--was all the more striking for her plain appearance and the charm of her imperfect training. Affectionately dubbed "the Black Swan" by enthusiastic followers, she sang for Queen Victoria at Buckingham Palace in 1854. Despite her popularity, she was financially unable to continue her vocal studies, and in July 1854 she returned to America. Settling in Philadelphia, she became a vocal teacher and for some years gave occasional concerts.