

THE RHETORIC OF DEMOCRACY IN AMERICAN MUSICAL DISCOURSE, 1842–1861

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ABSTRACT

MOLLY LEEANNA BARNES: The Rhetoric of Democracy in American Musical Discourse,
1842–1861
(Under the direction of Mark Evan Bonds)

In the United States, art music has long operated in an uneasy cultural space, divided between associations with the elite and aspirations to mass appeal. This tension became especially acute in the antebellum years, when dramatic changes to the country's social and political landscape, including massive immigration from Europe, conflict over the institution of slavery, and increasing social and economic inequalities posed serious threats to the democratic American experiment. These circumstances prompted many commentators to voice idealistic hopes about the capacity of classical music in general and instrumental music in particular to unify, uplift, and democratize American society. This dissertation examines antebellum American public discourse about classical music and the powerful rhetoric that promoted this music as a means of realizing the ideal of democratic egalitarianism during a period of palpable discord.

Commentaries about music and its social role in newspapers, periodicals, and magazines generally addressed one or more of three interrelated currents. First, the spiritual aspect of art music—the tradition of *Kunstreligion* inherited from early-nineteenth-century central Europe—figured prominently for many writers. They posited that art music could serve as a means of personal and social improvement, a quasi-religion by which listeners might better themselves morally and spiritually, and in doing so, help to realize a more democratic and socially unified society. The New England Transcendentalists especially championed the alleged spiritual power

of music. Second, given the fact that so much art music was of German origin, the political and national implications of this music constituted a major concern for writers in the public sphere. Many observers harbored profound admiration both for German music and for what they perceived as inherently democratic and communal musical practices among the German immigrants who flooded the country after 1848. Third, commentators portrayed Beethoven's music as heralding the coming state of human freedom and the perfection of democratic life in the American nation. A study of these three themes makes clear that when numerous internal struggles seemed to jeopardize the democratic project, the idealistic rhetoric of antebellum American writers reflected the hope that high musical culture might salvage and sustain that project.

To my family, including those members of the canine persuasion

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INTRODUCTION

Writing to his wife Abigail in 1780, John Adams, the future second President of the United States, articulated a typically practical American approach to learning and cultural development:

I must study Politicks and War that my sons may have liberty to study Mathematicks and Philosophy. My sons ought to study Mathematicks and Philosophy, Geography, natural History, Naval Architecture, navigation, Commerce and Agriculture, in order to give their Children a right to study Painting, Poetry, Musick, Architecture, Statuary, Tapestry and Porcelaine.¹

While Adams envisioned a day when his descendants would be able to enjoy the luxury of engaging in artistic pursuits, he believed that day still lay far off. America's status as a freshly emerging nation and society, he argued, obligated her people to ensure her political, legal, and economic integrity before indulging in the cultivated arts. This attitude, commonly shared among Adams's more educated compatriots, reflected on one hand a simple recognition of current realities. But its prevalence also helps to explain why the fine arts, including art music, were slow to develop in the new republic.

Some seventy years later, in 1851, a similar sentiment appeared from the pen of a cultural commentator, one "Mrs. Winchester," who wrote that "America has, as yet, no national music" because "her people have had, so far, too much occupation in felling forests, building railroads, and making themselves comfortable" either to regard music as a genuine art or to cultivate their own musical tradition. Although some recently immigrated composers claimed to be Americans, they "are not really natives of our soil, or thoroughly imbued with our spirit." Yet Mrs. Winchester added some new notes as well, a sense of America's dawning appreciation of

¹ Letter from John Adams to Abigail Adams (1780) quoted in Marjorie Garber, *Patronizing the Arts* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 59.

European musical imports and a hope that the young country would soon discover her own musical language. Americans “are beginning at least to know that we have ears, and a voice will not long be denied us.” Fortunately, she noted, the United States economy could now support European musical visitors to whom Americans listened “with rapture.” Thus, finally, “Art is awakening in America[,] her hand is finding its skill, her voice its sweetness.”² Typically for her time, “Mrs. Winchester” ignored the rich culture of music making in vernacular and sacred realms that had developed in the United States since its inception, and that today would be considered part of artistic culture, including orally transmitted folk traditions, minstrelsy, and psalm singing, all of which were cultivated intensely throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. But this commentary accurately articulated the perception that while the country’s overwhelmingly practical preoccupations had so far stifled its higher musical life, a native concert culture was now beginning to form.

From the days of the nation’s founding, the cultivated arts had occupied an uncomfortable position in its economic and social landscape. As the country grew through the first half of the nineteenth century, its pragmatic and egalitarian orientation posed a persisting obstacle to the nurturing of the fine arts, as commentators repeatedly pointed out.³ An aristocratic tradition of the arts had existed in Europe for hundreds of years, and public musical life began to flourish in Europe at the end of the eighteenth century, but the United States enjoyed no such

² Mrs. Winchester, “Thoughts On National Music,” *Sartain’s Union Magazine of Literature and Art* 9, no. 6 (Dec. 1851), 442. Pseudonyms were common in public forums of the period, so “Mrs. Winchester” might have been a man. It seems more likely, however, that “Mrs. Winchester” was indeed a female. Female commentators, though far outnumbered by their male counterparts, were not at all uncommon in this period. The female composer Augusta Browne (1820–1882) went by her full name in her articles, which appeared in such publications as *The Message Bird* and *The Columbian Magazine*. The visibility of these women writers in the press helped to attract female readers as well as heightened the profile of women in arts and letters during the antebellum era.

³ Indeed, as Michael Broyles observes, “the aristocratic basis of European music had not escaped American observers in the early nineteenth century, for music nurtured in the courts and cathedrals of Europe seemed out of place in the democratic society America was producing,” in “*Music of the Highest Class*”: *Elitism and Populism in Antebellum Boston* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 215.

foundation and much of its cultural life stemmed from European antecedents.⁴ The egalitarian ideal of American political and social life, the enormous value placed upon the practical realms of industry, business and agriculture, the antipathy toward aristocratic posturing and class hierarchies, and the persistent American inferiority complex in the face of Europe's great cultural legacies—these conditions and attitudes formed both intellectual and practical stumbling blocks to the American development of what were traditionally conceived as sophisticated art forms.⁵ In no realm was this truer than in that of art music in the Western tradition.

As Mrs. Winchester noted, however, circumstances as well as attitudes were changing rapidly by mid-century. Indeed already in the early 1840s, a London observer could assert that “A great revolution in the musical character of the Americans is taking place at present,” and it appeared likely that “it will progress until it has obtained its object.”⁶ Celebrating a new Boston edition of a European instructional work for violin, a native writer found here “an index of the progress which the beautiful and tranquillizing art of music is making in our warlike nation.”⁷ Indeed by the mid-1840s such observations were becoming all but superfluous. “It cannot have escaped the attention of the observing, that the standard of musical taste has in this country been placed much higher within the last few years than it has ever been previously.” Such rapid

⁴ Both in Europe and the United States, music was not exalted as an art until the nineteenth century. But the young country's almost complete lack of a framework and tradition of “high culture”—let alone one that reflected a unique American identity—nonetheless made nurturing a public culture of the arts doubly difficult, especially since in Europe such a public culture did not even begin to blossom until the late eighteenth century. Americans in the early nineteenth century thus found themselves in the position of drawing upon European cultural and intellectual models. For elaboration on these points see for instance Henry Steele Commager and Richard Brandon Morros, eds., “Editors' Introduction” *Society and Culture in America, 1830–1860* by Russel B. Nye (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), esp. page x.

⁵ For the purposes of simplicity, in this study I use the adjective “American” and occasionally the noun “America” to refer to the United States specifically, and not to the entire North American continent.

⁶ “State of Music in America,” reprint from the *London Era*, in *Spirit of the Times* vol. 11, no. 45 (Jan. 8, 1842), 540.

⁷ “The Violin,” review of a new edition of *Campagnoli's Method for the Violin*, in *The American Review* Vol. 6, no. 6 (Dec. 1847), 619.

improvement, wrote a contributor to the *American Journal of Music*, “cannot fail to gratify the friends of the most pleasing and delightful of arts. . . . Music may be said to be as yet in its infancy. . . . Its progress, however, has not only been decidedly marked but wonderful.”⁸

As the public was increasingly exposed to an ever-widening range of genres, American commentators expressed growing appreciation for certain forms of music. While they continued to see much popular music as mere entertainment, they also began to discuss music’s potential as a force for social and moral edification.⁹ This change in perception was occurring more or less contemporaneously in Europe.¹⁰ To be sure, this discourse about music’s social and moral potential was not new in the United States, yet it became significantly more salient in the middle decades of the century. A typical expression appeared in a piece from *Gleason’s Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion* of 1853:

Yes! the practical American begins to respect music as an art, as a language of the soul, as part of the permanent revelations of God, and as one of the great divine agencies by which humanity, even now, is led on toward the fulfilment of its glorious destiny. Once it was only as an amusement (more or less refined, it is true, but still as an amusement), or as a mere church ceremony, that men thought of music. It is beginning to be esteemed as art.¹¹

Given the American obsession with constant improvement and moral progress, this idealized vision of music as an agent of “glorious destiny” proved attractive. Such hallowed status was granted not to any sort of music, of course, but only to those forms that critics and commentators

⁸ W.H. Cudworth, “Music in America,” *American Journal of Music and Musical Visitor* Vol. 4, no. 21 (May 4, 1846), 161.

⁹ See Broyles, “*Music of the Highest Class*,” 1–12.

¹⁰ For more on the development of this new view of cultivated music in Europe, a development centered in German-speaking lands, see David Gramit, *Cultivating Music: The Aspirations, Interests, and Limits of German Musical Culture, 1770–1848* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); and William Weber, *The Great Transformation of Musical Taste: Concert Programming from Haydn to Brahms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

¹¹ Anon., “Growing Taste for Music,” *Gleason’s Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion* 5, no. 5 (30 July 1853): 80. Reprinted from *The Harbinger*.

deemed worthy of attention, which tended to include abstract instrumental music (symphonic, chamber, and solo works), art songs, some forms of sacred music, and certain operas. Light dance music, comic operas, or any sort of vernacular music, such as minstrel and folk songs or the works of Stephen Foster, could not serve such exalted purposes in the eyes of most mid-century American writers and intellectuals. In fact, most opera in this antebellum period would not have been considered “serious music” as it is today. Opera was heir to a long tradition of popular theatrical entertainment in Europe. As the result of a confluence of factors, it was not until the later nineteenth century that opera came to be perceived—along with symphonic and chamber music—as a high art.¹²

The idea that instrumental music was untainted by worldly matters had developed around the turn of the nineteenth century in Europe, and had made its way to the United States via the writings of European intellectuals. References to music as a “language of the soul” and a “permanent revelation of God” point to the influence of German Romanticism, which took hold first in New England’s intellectual circles but then gradually penetrated the broader culture. Attributing such lofty characteristics to music elevated it from a mere diversion to a veritable moral—even spiritual—enterprise. But while this new appreciation was partly influenced by European thinking that increasingly attributed to music an ethical dimension, it took much of its force from distinctly American ideals. Whether implicitly or explicitly, a remarkable number of native critics and commentators around the mid-nineteenth century sought to portray art music as a force for a free, democratic, and egalitarian social world. A writer for the widely-circulated

¹² A thorough explanation of the relative place of opera in the musical hierarchy on both sides of the Atlantic during the nineteenth century lies outside the purview of this study. It must suffice to say here that we should be very careful not to project our modern conceptions of opera onto the people of the past. Indeed, for antebellum Americans, opera had not accrued extremely elitist associations, and was for the most part not limited in accessibility or appeal only to the wealthy or the musically literate. Opera in English translation was performed in nineteenth-century America to an extent hard to imagine today. Traveling opera troupes brought the genre to many outside the larger cities, as Katherine Preston has shown in *Opera on the Road: Traveling Opera Troupes in the United States, 1825–1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993). See fn. 16 in this introduction.

Philadelphia-based *Graham's American Monthly Magazine* argued in 1851 that since the United States was a country of equal opportunity for all, there was no reason why Americans of all walks of life should not become involved in music as a fine art, for "In this country where every person, whether rich or poor, stands equal, on the same political ground...there have been, and are, constant examples of men who have attained the most distinguished positions, both political and professional, who possessed no early advantages either of wealth, association or education." Music "affords relaxation, while at the same time it elevates and refines the moral nature. May the time soon come, when not only musical clubs but little operatic *troupes* may be found scattered all over our wide extending country."¹³ Most crucial here was the emphasis on the universal opportunity for uplift in American life, the notion that regardless of background, any citizen might achieve success, whether financial, educational, political, artistic, or moral.

My use of the term "egalitarian" in this study refers not to a literal leveling of social classes defined in terms of wealth, property ownership, or educational attainment, but to the traditional definition of the term as usually used in the United States; that is, egalitarianism as equality of *opportunity* extended to all. Gordon Wood notes that for the revolutionaries, this equality of opportunity entailed "inciting genius to action and opening up careers to men of talent and virtue while at the same time destroying kinship and patronage as sources of leadership." These early idealists thought that any social hierarchies that developed in any given generation would not have the chance to solidify and be preserved, and that therefore each generation would experience approximately equal initial circumstances in which to seek their

¹³ Anon., "The Fine Arts," *Graham's American Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art, and Fashion* 38, no. 6 (June 1851): 462. Opera was by this already an integral part of the antebellum American soundscape, as opera troupes were touring far into the country's interior. Thus this writer likely was referring to permanent, established opera companies that would make this repertory available on a more frequent basis to Americans outside large urban areas. Regarding circulation, *Graham's* began publication in January 1841, and a year later it boasted a circulation of 50,000 subscribers. See J. Albert Robbins, "George R. Graham, Philadelphia Publisher," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 75 (1951), 283 and Edward E. Chielens, ed., *American Literary Magazines: the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 156–159.

fortunes. Wood argues that the idea of equality of condition held much greater significance in the new republic than similar conceptions in other nations, because average Americans “came to believe that no one in a basic down-to-earth and day-in-and-day-out manner was really better than anyone else.”¹⁴

But to remove themselves temporarily from the trials and vicissitudes of daily life, Americans of the requisite means desired communion with the transcendent through music. Without a high musical tradition of their own but craving some semblance of sophisticated musical culture, American intellectuals and other arbiters of culture seized on European musical models as templates for their own cultural development. Public musical life in Europe, including aspects of concert culture and informed criticism, had reached an advanced state only relatively recently, but it provided the young country with a framework for building their own such musical life. American writers in the public sphere reconciled the apparent conflict between their populist impulses and the non-populist associations of European art music by seeking to appropriate this music as a tool of democracy and even egalitarianism. Mid-century American critics used increasingly idealistic terms to argue that despite its often elitist connotations, European and especially German art music could help to realize the highest aspirations of a great national experiment, including endless opportunities for moral and social advancement. This effort was undeniably an expression of genuine idealism.

The present study will argue, however, that even as this discourse expressed an already established American democratic idealism, it also represented a response to new perceptions of troubling trends. During these middle decades of the nineteenth century, as the spiritual energy of the Second Great Awakening was winding down, political divisions and sectional conflict over the issue of slavery were growing more and more pronounced. At the same time, a new

¹⁴ Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 233–34.

sense of unease arose over increasingly evident signs of social as well as cultural stratification—signs that included the fact that even as art music spread, its appeal was too limited, as it often tended to draw people of greater wealth, education, and leisure. Observers were greatly pleased whenever they found socially “mixed” audiences, as in Boston, but their reactions also revealed underlying concerns about creeping social stratification. Even when only vaguely perceived, such unsettling developments aroused a common desire to defend the virtually sacred democratic project the nation’s founders had envisioned, which had seemed to thrive in prior generations.

My argument raises the obvious question of whether the democratic visions of these writers extended to women and to black people, both enslaved and free. Women were central in this context as readers of antebellum musical discourse—and in many cases as writers—and as attendees at concerts.¹⁵ While explicit references to race in commentaries on the goal of democracy or the social makeup of concert audiences were rare, there may be significance to the fact that these egalitarian impulses came at the same time that the anti-slavery movement was peaking, as well as the fact that some of this rhetoric about the democratic potential of artistic and musical life can be found in openly anti-slavery newspapers.¹⁶ As many of the commentators I will be quoting were liberal, progressive Northeasterners sympathetic to the anti-slavery cause, their references to the “freedom” and “equality” served a double purpose, signifying both the realization of American democratic ideals in the abstract and covertly alluding to the anti-slavery platform. In any event, we have no reason to doubt that either the concerns or the idealism of commentators in the public sphere were genuine. Indeed, we have good reasons to view the

¹⁵ For an overview of female attendance at concerts in New York City, see Adrienne Fried Block, “Matinee Mania, or the Regendering of Nineteenth-Century Audiences in New York City,” *19-Century Music* Vol. 31, no. 3 (Spring 2008): 193–216.

¹⁶ These papers included *The North Star*, the *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, the *New York Daily Tribune*, and *The National Era*. As we will see later in this study (see especially Chapter Four), it appears that there were some limited areas of overlap between these discourses.

soaring optimism of public paeans to art music as inseparable from efforts to respond to some of the disturbing realities of mid-nineteenth-century American life.

This project represents the first serious consideration of antebellum American thought on concert music in relation to democratic ideals and widespread concerns about social stratification. Through a wide-ranging investigation of periodicals, newspapers, and other publicly circulated literature of the period, the study looks both at the ways in which writers wielded democratic ideals to promote the practice and cultivation of concert music in the United States, and conversely at the exaltation of European art music as an instrument of universal human fulfillment in a young country confronting a host of social, political, and cultural challenges. This work explores the years from 1842, the year of the founding of the Philharmonic Society of New-York (as it was then known), to 1861, the start of the Civil War. I focus mainly though not exclusively on instrumental music, which would prove most adaptable as a subject of democratic rhetoric. Unencumbered by narrative, drama, and explicit extra-musical associations, the seemingly abstract, universal, and “ideal” qualities of instrumental music appeared to make it an especially potent tool of social and moral progress. While I have chosen to look largely at the discourse surrounding instrumental music, however, it would be artificial to separate this discourse entirely from music broadly conceived, and its role and influence in American culture. I will therefore give some attention throughout to opera, choral groups, vocal church music, and touring vocal soloists.

Setting the Stage

Americans who lived during the two decades preceding the Civil War witnessed an explosion of technological, economic, political, and social changes in their everyday lives. The Panic of 1837

had thrown the country into the deepest recession it had yet seen, but its worst effects had largely dissipated by the early 1840s.¹⁷ By the middle of that decade, the nation was well on its way to transforming itself into a bustling market economy thanks in part to the rise of industry, the growth of factories, and the laying of new rail and telegraph networks. After 1848, these developments accelerated dramatically. With the end of the Mexican-American War that year, the country acquired vast territories on which to continue building business, communication, and transportation infrastructures. An influx of immigrants—largely Germans and Irish—fleeing the 1848 European political revolutions flooded the East Coast and Midwest. Improvements in communications, such as the advent of the electric telegraph in the 1830s, disseminated news and information more rapidly to a far wider audience by the 1850s. The 1849 discovery of gold in California brought much-needed capital to a nation scrambling to accommodate its booming population and to settle its suddenly larger land mass. By the 1850s, advancements in transportation, such as the proliferation of the steam locomotive, steamship, and the canal system, allowed people to travel once-daunting distances faster and more frequently. Between 1850 and 1860, for example, some 22,000 miles of new railroads were built, allowing quicker travel far into the country's interior.¹⁸

These revolutionary changes manifested themselves visibly in American musical culture, which demonstrated a surge of vitality across both public and private realms. This was a crucial era for the growth of musical learning, public and private performance activity, the founding of new and larger musical institutions, concert production and attendance, and discourse about

¹⁷ See Peter L. Rousseau, "Jacksonian Monetary Policy, Specie Flows, and the Panic of 1837," Working paper 7528 (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2000), <http://www.nber.org/papers/w7528>; and Diane Lindstrom, "Economic Depressions," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of American Business, Labor, and Economic History* ed. Melvyn Dubofsky (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 173.

¹⁸ Henry Martyn Flint, *The Railroads of the United States: Their History and Statistics* (Philadelphia: John E. Potter and Company, 1868), 43.

music among both intellectuals and laypersons in such public forums as periodicals, newspapers, and lectures. The growth of rail travel was bringing fresh musical experiences to greater numbers of Americans, and the enormous wave of German immigration after 1848 was profoundly shaping the repertory and culture of concert music. European soloists began touring the United States with much greater frequency than ever during the 1840s, exposing thousands to music they might never have heard otherwise. Also during the 1840s, the Philharmonic Society of New-York was established, the activity of groups such as the Harvard Musical Association and the Boston Academy of Music intensified, several opera houses in New York such as Palmo's Opera House and the Astor Place House sprang up (but quickly failed), and smaller local musical institutions were founded across the country.¹⁹ The venerable tradition of singing schools begun by the likes of William Billings continued to flourish in the south and west, while in the northeast Lowell Mason spearheaded the campaign to make music part of American public-school education, though using the model of European art music rather than Billings's vernacular compositional style. Furthermore, improvements in manufacturing rendered pianos cheaper and more widely obtainable to middle-class consumers, allowing them both to recreate their public concert-going experiences and to enjoy an increasing wealth of music composed for domestic performance. By this point, John Adams's grandchildren and even his great-grandchildren—who he hoped would have the leisure to study the fine arts—had come of age. His descendants indeed lived in a country in which many citizens—especially though far from exclusively in the larger

¹⁹ As Katherine Preston has shown, as early as the 1820s and long before permanent opera houses began to be established in the United States in the 1850s, a thriving cross-country circuit brought traveling opera troupes to towns large and small up and down the Eastern seaboard and into the Midwest. Catering to the American thirst for musical theater in the antebellum period, these troupes performed English, Italian, and French opera to people of all socioeconomic classes throughout the country. See Preston's *Opera on the Road: Traveling Opera Troupes in the United States, 1825–1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

urban centers—could regularly and affordably attend musical events, receive musical education, and practice music at home.

It was a period of exciting if in many respects disorienting change. Americans were wealthier, more informed, and enjoyed more leisure time than ever before; many were thus able to attend the greater number of entertainments on offer. People began to see more and more of one another at the theater, concerts, civic meetings, and other public gatherings, and the common experiences of these groups of Americans from many backgrounds must have inspired a certain confidence in the democratic project (even if, as I propose, that confidence was increasingly challenged toward mid-century). This culture of crowds was a natural consequence not only of the nation's greater disposable income and more abundant public amusements, but also of the legacy of Jacksonian populism. Indeed, even though class hierarchies were in fact widening in these years, Americans displayed a remarkable penchant for believing in and striving toward the ideal of a classless society. Karen Haltunnen writes that “Despite widespread signs of growing stratification in Jacksonian society, despite the reality of severe limitations on upward social mobility, there were few expressions of class-consciousness in antebellum America; in stark contrast to Old World society, Americans believed, theirs was a uniquely open social system.”²⁰

The success of P.T. Barnum as a showman and marketing strategist beginning in the 1840s can be largely explained by his ability to tap into this populist ideal, in which enormous crowds, relatively unconcerned with issues of class or status, jostled and craned their necks to witness the latest spectacle—be it a musical performer, in the case of Jenny Lind, or a biological rarity, in the case of “Tom Thumb.”²¹ What the age of Barnum tells us is that mid-nineteenth-

²⁰ Karen M. Haltunnen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830–1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 195.

century America was a land of great crowds—rich and poor alike—gathering together, seemingly unified, to observe the latest sensation. Although in reality American society was deeply divided along lines of class, race, religion, gender, and other distinctions, the populist ideal remained strong in the public imagination. Moreover, while the populist ideal may not have directly affected or become translated into musical life, the rhetoric of democracy pervaded discourse about art music, mutually strengthening the significance of both in the public imagination.

Another manifestation of the populist spirit, this time coupled with the desire for continued individual advancement, came in the form of the lyceum movement. Perhaps the most obvious evidence of the aspiration for self-improvement through popular education during the middle decades of the nineteenth century, the lyceum was a “self-supporting, locally controlled, voluntary association” that offered educational lectures, classes, and materials, as well as established museums and libraries.²² Between the 1840s and the 1860s, lyceums thrived in every state in the union.²³ Speakers on a broad range of topics made circuits to various lyceums in both large cities and small towns, and often delivered a series of lectures on a single subject. One of the most active lyceum speakers was Ralph Waldo Emerson, who sought in this way to popularize basic aspects of his Transcendentalist beliefs. Though not part of a lyceum, the American composer and journalist William Henry Fry (1813–1864) tapped into a similar populist educational impulse in his initiative to deliver a series of eleven lectures on music in

²¹ Scholars of music have in recent years recognized the importance of Barnum to our understanding of mid-nineteenth-century American cultural life; Daniel Cavicchi used the name to great expressive effect in the title of his 2011 book *Listening and Longing: Music Lovers in the Age of Barnum* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press).

²² Russel B. Nye, *Society and Culture in America, 1830–1860*, 360.

²³ *Ibid.*, 360–61.

New York's Metropolitan Hall between 1852 and 1853.²⁴ In these lectures he attempted to offer his listeners an overview of as much musical knowledge as time would allow.²⁵ George William Curtis in *Putnam's Monthly* called them "generous and catholic" in scope.²⁶ The efforts of such lecturers to democratize learning and cultural awareness certainly manifested the persistence of positive hopes for progress in the still-young republic.²⁷

Again, however, new circumstances were threatening to undermine the sanguine hopes on which developments such as the lyceum movement appeared to build. Rumblings of unease could be detected beneath the inheritance of optimism. By the 1840s, the excitement of religious revivalism brought on by the Second Great Awakening was waning rapidly, and confidence that preaching the word of God would fuel a great egalitarian and democratic flowering was increasingly moribund. New anxieties about social stratification and inequality brought a waning of earlier hopes that Jacksonian democracy would remain viable into the distant future. Attendant to these concerns during the 1840s and 1850s was the gradually intensifying political and ethical debate surrounding the issue of slavery. The acquisition of American territories in the West raised the questions of slavery's moral status and the constitutionality of its spread to the new lands. The city of Boston, which at least in the eyes of its own citizens ranked as the nation's preeminent center for the high arts, now became at the same time a major hub of the abolitionist movement. Legal agreements such as the Compromise of 1850, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and

²⁴ In addition to his work as a composer, Fry worked as a writer and critic for the *New York Tribune*.

²⁵ Fry was perhaps too ambitious in this goal; his overwhelming number of lecture subjects, as well as his use of musical performers to illustrate his points, is discussed in Vera Brodsky Lawrence, "William Henry Fry's Messianic Yearnings: The Eleven Lectures, 1852–53," *American Music* 7, no. 4 (Winter, 1989): 382–411.

²⁶ Curtis, "Editorial Notes—Music," *Putnam's Monthly Magazine of Literature, Science, and Art* Vol. 1, no. 1 (January 1853), 119.

²⁷ For more on the lyceum movement, see John R. McKivigan, *Forgotten Firebrand: James Redpath and the Making of Nineteenth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); and Marjorie Harrell Eubank, "The Redpath Lyceum Bureau from 1868 to 1901" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1968).

the Dred Scott Decision temporarily postponed the eruption of violence over the problem of slavery and its geographical extension, but by the time of Lincoln's 1860 election to the Presidency, sectional hostilities had reached a breaking point. The summer of 1861 marked in earnest the beginnings of four agonizing years of civil war.

These sobering mid-century realities provoked doubts—often open, but sometimes unconscious or nearly so—about the ability of the country to sustain progress toward its presumed social and political ideals. The awareness of these concerns also brought to the fore the central tension between the widespread egalitarian antipathy to social hierarchy and the mounting aspirations of many common citizens to a more sophisticated and edifying cultural life. Public discourse about art music's role in negotiating this tension reflected a larger national dialogue about American manifestations of equality, not just in terms of the accessibility of or to high culture but also in terms of what American democracy and citizenship actually meant in practice.

Thus a complex of interrelated questions will shape my inquiry: Who were the prime movers behind the promotion of democratic and egalitarian ideals in public discourse about music? What positions did writers and critics take in regard to the relationship between musical aesthetics and social progress? How were various aesthetic and national attributes of music rhetorically related to the character of American social life? The central aim of my study is to analyze and contextualize these writers' arguments and attitudes. My work on democratic ideals and related notions about education, progress, equality, and universality sheds important light not only on American musical discourse in the nineteenth century, but also on deeper shifts in American culture and society.

Historiography

This study takes intellectual inspiration at least in part from the classic work of the American historian John Higham. In 1969, Higham proposed that in the first half of the nineteenth century, and especially after 1815, the United States was characterized by a “spirit of boundlessness”—a sense of fluid boundaries, expansion, and unrestricted opportunity. The U.S. emerged from the War of 1812 a stronger, more confident power, no longer in fear of the Old World encroaching upon its freedom. As Higham wrote, “After 1815 most of the limits Americans had assumed would forever enclose the scope of their endeavors seemed to melt away. The limits of ascribed status yielded to an egalitarian celebration of the self-made man.”²⁸ He quoted the illustrious preacher William Ellery Channing:

In looking at our age I am struck immediately with one commanding characteristic, and that is the tendency in all its movements to expansion, to diffusion, to universality... This tendency is directly opposed to the spirit of exclusiveness, restriction, narrowness, monopoly, which has prevailed in past ages. Human action is now freer, more unconfined...²⁹

Channing’s reference to “universality” was typical of the democratic, populist spirit of the age, a time before perceptions of social hierarchy and class status could take hold in the young country. But over the course of the late 1840s and 1850s, Higham asserted, this “boundlessness” contracted into greater rigidity and a diminishing sense of possibility, and a more established and ordered society emerged.³⁰ My study contends that—as American writers on music in these later decades perceived the nation becoming more socially stratified and class conscious—they seized

²⁸ John Higham, “From Boundlessness to Consolidation: The Transformation of American Culture, 1848–1860” [1969], in *Hanging Together: Unity and Diversity in American Culture*, ed. Carl J. Guarneri (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 153.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 152.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 159–161.

upon the cultivation of art music as a means by which the country might recapture that democratic spirit.

Building on Higham's work, writers over the last several decades have devoted greater attention to nineteenth-century American cultural history. One of the most influential of these was Lawrence Levine, whose 1988 book *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*, remains a landmark in the field. The response to Levine's book was immediate and intense; *Highbrow/Lowbrow* inspired countless subsequent scholars to explore the vagaries and complexities of literature, the arts, and entertainment in the United States in this era. A year after its publication, historian Roland Marchand began his assessment of Levine's book simply and presciently: "This is a book that will make a difference."³¹ Michael Fellman described it as one that "invites us out to play."³² Various camps have formed in agreement with or in opposition to Levine's central arguments, yet no matter their orientation with reference to Levine's work, these camps have clearly found valuable substance in his scholarship.

Levine's theses require no extended rehearsal here, but we may briefly summarize his central points. In essence, Levine attempted to demonstrate a fundamental shift over the course of the nineteenth century, particularly after the Civil War, from a "shared public culture" in which, for example, all social classes loved and knew Shakespeare, to a stratified, hierarchical one in which certain forms of culture underwent "sacralization," becoming the province of the educated and wealthy elite. Levine's illustration of the fluidity between high and low forms of culture, of their juxtaposition and consumption by varied social classes in early nineteenth-

³¹ Roland Marchand, review of *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* by Lawrence Levine, *The Journal of American History* 76, no. 2 (September 1989): 565–66.

³² Michael Fellman, review of *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* by Lawrence Levine, *The American Historical Review* 95, no. 2 (April, 1990): 570. Here, "us" presumably refers to historians and other scholars of the period generally.

century America, represents a perspective that strongly complements a great deal of earlier as well as later work, including Higham's well-regarded study. As we shall see, problems arise when we try to determine when the shift to hierarchy and "sacralization" took place—was it far earlier in the century, as some have argued?—and whether it was as pronounced as Levine depicted.

While much of the early reception of Levine's book was positive, some reviewers found significant faults with it. David D. Hall was one of the first scholars to criticize his *Highbrow/Lowbrow* in a review of 1990, labeling it "a gesture of cultural politics" and "seriously inadequate" as history. Although Hall made some gross oversimplifications about musical hierarchies and the separation of "serious" and "popular" music throughout the West in the nineteenth century, he did call attention to Levine's lack of engagement with how evangelical Protestantism, race, gender, class, and capitalism influenced the development of cultural hierarchy in nineteenth-century America.³³ Others, such as Alan Gribben, criticized Levine's inattention to European influences: "it is as if the United States existed by itself, and conjured up all these foolish ideas about the 'purity' and 'spirituality' of art utterly out of its own fears of contamination by the lower social classes."³⁴ In this early period immediately after the appearance of Levine's book, it had clearly sparked a firestorm of reactions from various scholarly camps.

One of the main critiques of Levine's work holds that he caricatured his historical subjects beyond recognition, and in so doing passed retroactive normative judgment on them. A now well-known 1993 article by Ralph Locke took Levine to task for unfairly depicting late-

³³ David D. Hall, "A World Turned Upside Down?" review of *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* by Lawrence Levine, *Reviews in American History* 18, no. 1 (March, 1990): 12.

³⁴ Alan Gribben, review of *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* by Lawrence Levine, *Libraries and Culture* 27, no. 2 (Spring, 1992): 226.

nineteenth-century American elites simplistically as power-hungry, exclusionary snobs. Locke entreated his readers to see these patrons—the creators of an institutional American high culture toward the end of the century—as motivated not merely to “sacralize” high art, but also by a desire to “democratize” art; that is, to make it available to the broadest possible audience.³⁵ I would adapt this argument and apply it to the context of the mid-nineteenth century to argue that there was an earlier, democratic form of “sacralization” occurring in antebellum public discourse about art music. In fact, I will show that the term makes more sense in regard to mid-century rhetoric than in regard to late-century elitists.

In his 1998 book *Maestros of the Pen: A History of Classical Music Criticism in America*, Mark Grant considers whether music critics themselves could in any demonstrable way influence the practice of and public attitude toward music in the way that composers, performers, and conductors did. Concluding that critics did in fact wield significant power in swaying public opinion about music, Grant argues at the same time for a perspective fully opposite from Levine’s. He contends, contrary to Levine’s understanding, that a cultural hierarchy had been present in the United States since colonial times, and that music journalists aided the process of democratizing classical music as the nineteenth century wore on.³⁶ Grant’s view has not taken hold broadly among scholars of this period in American music history, but he offers an important counterpoint to the prevailing understanding of the cultural landscape of this era. He suggests that music journalism of the mid- to late-nineteenth century represented not a myopic rehearsal of the virtues of art music for an elite, sympathetic audience, as Levine had portrayed it, but in fact a genuine effort to spread the “gospel” of “good music” to a diverse American populace.

³⁵ See Ralph Locke, “Music Lovers, Patrons, and the ‘Sacralization’ of Culture in America,” *19th-Century Music* 17, no. 2 (Autumn 1993): 149–73.

³⁶ Mark Grant, *Maestros of the Pen: A History of Classical Music Criticism in America* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), xx.

This conclusion stands in agreement with Ralph Locke's view that the arbiters of culture in the late nineteenth century did not possess the exclusionary intentions Levine had described. In fairness to Levine, he was attempting a historical synthesis cutting across the realms of literature, theater, and music, and was relying at that time on a dearth of scholarship on nineteenth-century American musical life. Grant, writing ten years later, had the advantage of a decade's worth of further work on American music criticism during the nineteenth century.

Joseph Horowitz has offered perhaps the most cogent commentary on the virtues and especially the flaws of Levine's work. In his 2005 book *Classical Music in America: A History of Its Rise and Fall*, Horowitz brings a new level of nuance to the assessment of Gilded Age culture. He shows that the emergence of a musical high culture and the phenomenon of "sacralization" in Levine's sense did indeed constitute central developments in American life. His caveat, however, is that these developments were not elitist in the sense that many scholars have led us to believe; the desire to institutionalize and sacralize high culture, he suggests, sprang not primarily from a need for "social control" on the part of the wealthy but from the conductors, performers, and composers themselves.³⁷ Horowitz further protested that Levine was guilty of falsely equating today's American perceptions of "high" culture with those of the late nineteenth century.³⁸ He makes an important point: it is tempting to excoriate the people of the past for what appear to be, from our perspective, moral failures. "Levine's heartfelt populism," explains Horowitz, "misleads him into overly equating the 'highbrow' mentality of his own

³⁷ Joseph Horowitz, *Classical Music in America: A History of its Rise and Fall* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 251.

³⁸ Horowitz, *Classical Music in America*, 252.

times, and its antidemocratic disparagement of the popular arts, with the practices and pronouncements of [Theodore] Thomas and [Henry] Higginson in another era.”³⁹

Other scholars came down staunchly on the side of Levine. Writing in 1991, Paul DiMaggio took up Levine’s idea of “sacralization” with gusto, and furthered it by adopting the term “cultural capitalist.” DiMaggio explained that the “cultural capitalists” of the late nineteenth century were those men and women who were responsible for the increasingly exclusionary, isolationist, and institutionalized high culture that developed in New England during the period, led by the Boston Brahmins.⁴⁰ DiMaggio argued that the Brahmins desired to dominate and control, as much as possible, the masses from whom they were attempting to differentiate themselves.⁴¹ The idea of “cultural capital” was borrowed from the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who had introduced it in the late 1970s as a way to illuminate the formation of hegemonic ideas and representations.⁴² Applying the concept to late-nineteenth-century American cultural life, DiMaggio broadly reinforced the perspective of Levine. The works of both of these scholars remain of primary importance in any effort to frame the issues that concern students in this field, even if many take issue partly or wholly with their arguments.

Michael Broyles was one of the first musicologists to build upon Levine’s work in a major scholarly publication. His important 1992 book *“Music of the Highest Class”: Elitism and Populism in Antebellum Boston* made the case that a variety of forces helped to engender a

³⁹ Horowitz, *Classical Music in America*, 252. Horowitz’s assertion does not mean that he would not still label Thomas an elitist or a snob in the context of Thomas’s own era; rather, Horowitz contends that true elitism about classical music in the U.S. arose not in the Gilded Age, but in the years between the two World Wars (*Classical Music in America*, 252–53).

⁴⁰ Paul DiMaggio, “Cultural Entrepreneurship in 19th-Century Boston,” in *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies*, ed. Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 374–76.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 392.

⁴² See Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Sage Publications, 1977).

musical “idealism” in New England as early as the 1830s and 1840s, giving rise to a hierarchy of musical value and an attitude toward art music peculiar to the United States.⁴³ This idealism of which Broyles spoke was decidedly not an egalitarian or democratic strain, but an idealism about the moral value of music itself. Broyles largely accepted Levine’s thesis, challenging it only to the extent that he saw the development of a cultural hierarchy beginning earlier than the 1850s. As recently as 2010 Broyles reiterated Levine’s central argument, explaining that during the second half of the nineteenth century “the bourgeoisie discovered that a musical hierarchy derived from the notion of sacralization could become a means to distance themselves from other segments of society.”⁴⁴

Jessica Gienow-Hecht’s 2009 study of musical diplomacy in German-American transatlantic relations between 1850 and 1920 reflects the extent to which this discussion has been too limited to the Gilded Age. Gienow-Hecht addresses the debate over Gilded Age high culture in the U.S., providing a sketch of the scholarly discussion over the last several decades and ultimately avoiding a statement of her own perspective on the issue. Like Horowitz, Gienow-Hecht draws attention to the widespread scholarly condemnation and dismissal of Gilded Age elites, and the resultant disregard of nineteenth-century imported European high culture generally and of classical music in particular. In her attempt to account for this disregard, she reveals a contemporary reality: “To write about classical music is not the politically correct thing to do in an age skeptical of the influence of elites, notably the influence of white European males.”⁴⁵

Gienow-Hecht’s most important contribution in the context of the present study concerns the

⁴³ Broyles, “*Music of the Highest Class*,” 2–12.

⁴⁴ Michael Broyles, “Bourgeois Appropriation of Music: Challenging Ethnicity, Class, and Gender,” *The American Bourgeoisie: Distinction and Identity in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Sven Beckert and Julia Rosenbaum (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 236.

⁴⁵ Jessica Gienow-Hecht, *Sound Diplomacy: Music and Emotions in Transatlantic Relations, 1850–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 12.

issue of scholarly attention to German influence in the musical experience of Americans during the mid- to late-nineteenth century, a fact that tended to be downplayed—consciously or unconsciously—in much of the scholarly literature.

Gienow-Hecht's work provides a dramatic counterpoint to the way in which the story of music in the United States has traditionally been told. The classic twentieth-century works of scholars such as Gilbert Chase, Charles Hamm, and H. Wiley Hitchcock in many ways laid the foundation for our understanding of the history of American musical creation.⁴⁶ Because of the historically composer-centered orientation of traditional musicology, these and other scholars of music in America have tended to champion native-born American composers while downplaying those individuals and institutions that advocated the overwhelmingly German canon of European art music. For this reason, earlier scholars such as Chase, Hamm, and Wilfrid Mellers briefly acknowledged the inescapable influence of figures such as John Sullivan Dwight, the editor of the Boston periodical *Dwight's Journal of Music* (1852–1881) and advocate of European music, but treated Dwight's arguments or their ramifications for broader cultural life somewhat less seriously.⁴⁷ Thus despite the undeniably powerful German influences on American culture during this period—an exchange that produced crucial and lasting consequences for American musical life—the “German element” has become something of an albatross to those scholars who regard it with implicit resentment as having prevented the development of a rich and independent American musical tradition. These scholars have thus understandably become

⁴⁶ See, for example, Gilbert Chase's *America's Music, from the Pilgrims to the Present* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), first published 1955 with revised editions in 1966 and 1987; Charles Hamm's *Music in the New World* (New York: Norton, 1983); H. Wiley Hitchcock's *Music in the United States: A Historical Introduction* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2000), first published 1969 with revised editions in 1974, 1988, and 2000; and Wilfrid Mellers's *Music in a New Found Land: Themes and Developments in the History of American Music* (New York: Hillstone, first published 1964 with a reprint in 1975 and a third reprint by New Brunswick's Transaction Publishers in 2011).

⁴⁷ These authors charged Dwight, among other things, with being “pontifical” and a “snob.” For more on these issues in American music historiography, see Chapter Three.

engrossed in efforts to examine the impulse of musical “nationalism” and the creation of an American identity among musicians and composers.⁴⁸ The issue is not one of whether American music scholars give credit to the Germans, but rather of the extent to which American musical commentators, orchestra directors, and as far as we can tell even audiences, embraced German composers as exponents of universal democratic values that could be realized above all in the United States.

Although many different European musical currents appeared on the American scene, including French, Italian, and Spanish, the German element constituted the most visible and dominant foreign strain, especially in instrumental music. In this realm of symphonic and chamber music, the work of German composers represented the central repertory, and a staggering number of performers and teachers of music in nineteenth-century America came from the German-speaking lands. And while scholarship on American musical life before 1900 has in general blossomed in recent decades, distinct lacunae remain, especially regarding the broad field of “music in America” as opposed to “American music” written by native composers—to borrow Irving Lowens’s classic formulation. “Music in America,” as Lowens defines it, is “everything musical that takes place here, regardless of its race, creed, or national origin,” whereas American music “includes only that aspect of the art which was created by Americans.”⁴⁹ Scholars have often striven to bypass the broader landscape of “music in America” and instead to emphasize the development of a distinctly American music—yet these

⁴⁸ See Denise Von Glahn, *The Sounds of Place: Music and the American Cultural Landscape* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004); and Douglas Shadle, *Orchestrating the Nation: The Nineteenth-Century American Symphonic Enterprise* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). There are notable exceptions to this trend; see, for example, John Graziano, ed., *European Music and Musicians in New York City, 1840–1900* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2006) and Douglas E. Bomberger, “The German Musical Training of American Students, 1850–1900” (PhD diss., University of Maryland at College Park, 1991).

⁴⁹ Irving Lowens, *Music in America and American Music: Two Views of the Scene, with a Bibliography of the Published Writings of Irving Lowens* (Brooklyn: Brooklyn College of the City University of New York, 1978), 8–9.

attempts have tended to portray music in America as much more “American” than the evidence would indicate.

The more recent secondary literature on art music in nineteenth-century America has taken on a new framing as “cultural history,” which takes into account the larger scope of the American musical scene. Thus American music scholars have moved away from composer-driven musicology and toward the goal of a more contextualized picture of actual musical life as experienced by nineteenth-century Americans of all backgrounds. Recent work by Katherine Preston, Douglas Shadle, and Kristen M. Turner has also contributed to this scholarly discussion and debate. Preston’s forthcoming monograph examines opera in English translation in the United States in the late nineteenth century, with particular attention to the role of women as managers of opera companies. Douglas Shadle’s book on American symphonic composers during the nineteenth century reveals a long-neglected aspect of American music history, and engages heavily with transatlantic musical exchange between the United States and Europe. A recent dissertation on English-language opera in the United States during the Gilded Age by Kristen M. Turner has helped to fill the gap in our understanding of opera culture between 1878 and 1910, a culture that was extraordinarily varied and engaged with contemporary narratives about race, gender, class, and nationalism. Aside from work by the above-named scholars, there has been very little investigation into American musical life during the Gilded Age and in the nineteenth century more generally.⁵⁰ Thus one benefit of my work will be to demonstrate unique

⁵⁰ Notable scholarship on music in the U.S. during the Gilded Age includes Joseph Horowitz, *Moral Fire: Musical Portraits from America’s Fin-de-Siècle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); *Classical Music in America: A History of Its Rise and Fall* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005); *Wagner Nights: An American History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Katherine Preston, *Opera for the People: English-Language Opera and Women Managers in Late-Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming); *Music for Hire: A Study of Professional Musicians in Washington, 1877–1900* (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1992); and Kristen Meyers Turner, “Opera in English: Class and Culture in America, 1878–1910” (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2015).

features of the mid-century scene, thus providing context for further work in antebellum American musical life and shedding light at least indirectly on later developments.

Even in the most recent scholarship, one still senses the old concern: how should we regard the “German problem” encountered when we endeavor to trace a history of music in nineteenth-century America? Often the issue has been posed in one of two ways: either we should turn our attention away from the palpable German musical influences in the United States, in favor of a focus on *American* music and composers, or we should openly acknowledge the German element and its influence on U.S. musical practice—but in so doing, risk perpetuating the long-standing musicological bias toward the European, largely German, musical canon. Attempting to mediate between these two approaches, my work bridges the gap by acknowledging the immense and powerful German influence in American musical life at midcentury, while also emphasizing the American effort to adapt European, particularly German, musical culture to a universal, democratic, expansive American vision.

Sources and Approach

Because my work investigates mid-nineteenth-century American public discourse regarding the social function of art music, I rely largely on printed periodical publications, which constituted by far the most widely distributed primary source materials for the period and often reached a sizable readership. These sources may be trusted to reflect a broad range of public opinion.

Although we can ultimately come to no definite conclusions about the reception of these materials, we can see how frequently and consistently certain ideas and attitudes appeared in a wide range of publications. As we will see, democratic ideals were prominent and widespread in public discourse on music.

By mid-century, the countless publications available to Americans included a great deal of attention to and commentary on the arts. While many ultimately proved short-lived, their sheer number suggests a voracious public appetite for literary and artistic engagement, as well as a widespread impulse to disseminate knowledge and opinions. Articles from European magazines, and especially those from England, were frequently reprinted in American magazines (translated into English when necessary). Aside from the significant number of music journals, general-interest magazines enjoyed circulations extending not only to cities, but to smaller towns, villages, and even isolated farms and homesteads. Furthermore, a large number of newspapers for diverse constituencies appeared in the late 1840s, helped along by the tide of European immigration to the U.S. Commentaries and reviews on music in newspapers may have indeed reached more people than those in monthly or quarterly journals.

A variety of general interest magazines appeared during this era. These included New York's *Home Journal*, edited from 1846 to 1867 by Nathaniel Parker Willis (Willis brother to the American critic and composer Richard Storrs Willis), which is still in publication as *Town and Country*; the literary magazine *Littell's Living Age* (Boston, 1844–1941); *Putnam's Monthly Magazine of American Literature, Science and Art* (New York), which had its first iteration between 1853 and 1857 and contained only American writings; *The American Review* (New York, 1844–1852), which was also known as *The American Whig Review* and commented frequently on music as a force for the general moral and social good; *Graham's Monthly Magazine* (Philadelphia, 1841–1858); *Godey's Lady's Book* (Philadelphia, 1830–1878); and the *Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature* (New York, 1844–1898), which reprinted articles from English publications. These publications encompassed material on a broad spectrum of subjects,

including local and national news, political life, science, literature, the fine arts, religious culture, poetry, humor, and other content of general interest.

My study draws on a broad cross-section of these and other primary-sources from the nineteen years immediately preceding the Civil War, from books such as Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, to music journals such as the *New York Musical World*, *Musical Gazette*, and *Dwight's Journal* (hereafter *DJM*) to editorials, reviews, colloquies, and lectures printed in newspapers such as the *New York Tribune* and the *Boston Daily Atlas*, to Christian publications such as *The Methodist Quarterly Review*, to ladies' reading material such as the *Ladies' Wreath* and *Godey's Lady's Book*, to Transcendentalist journals such as *The Harbinger* and *The Dial*, to literary and general interest magazines of varying sophistication such as *The Albion*, *Graham's American Monthly*, *Home Journal*, *Littell's Living Age*, *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*, and *Holden's Dollar Magazine*.⁵¹ These titles, among many others, propagated a broad discourse on the arts that reached a large proportion of literate Americans. This wide-ranging material offers a reasonably accurate overall index of attitudes among literate Americans in this period.

The richest information and opinion pieces come, unsurprisingly, from publications out of the major northeastern metropolitan centers: Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. Much of the nation's rapidly developing concert culture was concentrated along this northeastern corridor. Middle- and upper-class inhabitants of these cities in this period enjoyed a quickly expanding, vibrant and varied art-music landscape, with operatic, symphonic and chamber music performances, vocal and instrumental concerts by touring European and American soloists, and performances by both native and foreign family singing groups. Between 1842 and 1861,

⁵¹ To make any sharp distinctions between "religious" and other publications in this era, however, would represent a serious error. The public discourse was so pervaded by religious language such that there was very little difference between articles in "religious" publications (such as the *Christian Examiner* and *Religious Miscellany*) and those in ostensibly secular ones (such as *Littell's Living Age*).

residents of these northeastern cities interested in art music might have patronized the Philharmonic Society of New-York, the Boston Academy of Music, the Germania Musical Society, the Mendelssohn Quintette Club, the New York Academy of Music, a variety of traveling opera troupes, the Hutchinson Family Singers, and a host of instrumental and vocal soloists. Exposure to art music was by no means limited to residents of these large cities, however; by mid-century, Americans living outside of major metropolitan centers could attend concerts by touring ensembles and soloists, as well as local choruses and pick-up orchestras.⁵² In addition, private in-home performances involving piano, violin, and voice were growing more common nearly everywhere.

Writers of all backgrounds and persuasions, from highly cultivated critics to hack journalists, reported on the activities and performances of such institutions as the Handel and Haydn Society, founded in 1815, the Philharmonic Society of New-York, founded in 1842, Castle Garden, which opened in 1824 and hosted many popular concerts in the 1850s, and Niblo's Garden, which opened in 1834, was twice burned and rebuilt, and became a leading site of theatre and opera performance beginning in 1849. Commentators gave a great deal of attention to vocalists such as the highly famed Swedish soprano Jenny Lind, the Italian contralto Marietta Alboni, and the German soprano Henriette Sontag, all of whom toured the U.S. in the early 1850s.⁵³ Virtuoso instrumentalists offered other delights and further opportunities for press coverage. The Viennese-born French pianist Henri Herz toured the U.S. in the late 1840s, while the German pianist Otto Dresel settled in Boston in 1852, offering concerts in the northeast for

⁵² Ad-hoc orchestral ensembles were relatively common in both Europe and the United States before the advent of established professional orchestras with subscription series.

⁵³ For information on the activities of opera singers in nineteenth-century American culture, see Preston, *Opera on the Road*.

many years thereafter.⁵⁴ The American pianist and composer Louis Moreau Gottschalk toured the country to great acclaim during the 1850s and 1860s. Norwegian violinist Ole Bull visited the U.S. several times between the 1840s and 1860s, enjoying enormously successful concert tours.⁵⁵ Finally, writers paid ample attention to the activities of the French conductor and composer Louis-Antoine Jullien, who toured the U.S. with his orchestra in 1853–54, as well as to those of Theodore Eisfeld, one of the series of German conductors of the Philharmonic Society of New-York, best known for his “Quartette Soirees” of the 1850s.

Aside from specific commentaries regarding performances by ensembles, opera companies, and vocal and instrumental soloists, writers on music during this period—especially those writing for more general audiences in publications that covered a variety of subjects of popular interest—often penned articles praising music in general terms, or connecting music with some other idea or subject, such as the domestic sphere, artistic taste, or the education of the young. Common themes and topics included the veneration of Handel and his *Messiah*, Beethoven’s symphonies, the growth of the opera and opera patronage in the U.S., and the reception of traveling soloists, such as the singers Jenny Lind, Adelina Patti, the violinist Ole Bull, and the pianist-composer Gottschalk.

Authors sometimes attempted grand, overarching, and often ill-informed histories of Western music in the form of lengthy magazine articles; some of these were reprinted from

⁵⁴ For more on touring European piano virtuosos in the United States, see R. Allen Lott, *From Paris to Peoria: How European Piano Virtuosos Brought Classical Music to the American Heartland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁵⁵ For further information on the tours of Bull and Gottschalk, see Einar Haugen and Camilla Cai, *Ole Bull: Norway’s Romantic Musician and Cosmopolitan Patriot* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993) and Frederick S. Starr, *Bamboula! The Life and Times of Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

English magazines.⁵⁶ Such pieces would typically begin with a brief discussion of music in the ancient world, inevitably acknowledging the lack of information at hand, and then proceed to the development of chant in the early Christian church, through the medieval era, the Renaissance, and finally into the Baroque, with a more thorough treatment of Bach and Handel. Next would come the early classic era with Scarlatti, followed by a celebration of the achievements of Haydn, Mozart, and Gluck. Writers would almost invariably end with a paean to Beethoven, whose work was often described as a pinnacle to which more recent composers such as Schumann, Mendelssohn, and Spohr could only aspire. Some writers also offered superficial explorations of the music of non-Western peoples, including the Chinese, “Hindoos” (as Indians on the Asian subcontinent were known), and American Indians. Only rarely did they mention the music of African peoples, whose musical practices they generally dismissed as primitive and crude. Despite such prejudgments, however, a general desire to educate the public was persistent in the journals, magazines, and other periodicals of the time. This encyclopedic impulse, this urge to document and enlighten, was a trend not only true of music but of many fields. In the case of music, as we will see, writers did this at least in part in order to demonstrate to their readers how Western—mainly German—music had developed into what they saw as a near-perfect art form.

The tone of writing in newspapers, magazines, and periodicals varied, of course, depending on the intended audience. While a quasi-professional journal such as Dwight’s could assume a sophisticated readership, most journals assumed their reader was a person who had received a basic education, who read relatively frequently, and who kept up with the news and

⁵⁶ See, for example, the anonymous articles “Some Words about Music and the Modern Opera,” *Littell’s Living Age* Vol. 19, no. 240 (December 23, 1848), 529, reprinted from *Fraser’s Magazine*; “Music,” *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature* Vol. 14, no. 1 (Jan. 1849), 35, reprinted from the *Quarterly Review*; and “Some Musical Notes, by C Minor,” *The Southern Literary Messenger* Vol. 16, no. 10 (Oct. 1850), 619.

issues of the day. A fast-growing portion of the reading population was made up of women, and while authors who wrote for journals such as *Godey's Lady's Book* obviously tailored much of their production accordingly, in general writers the periodical publicists had to assume a broad mixed-gender readership. Also important to note is that in the mid-nineteenth century, reading aloud was still a common practice in both public and private settings, so we have reason to believe that popular publications sometimes reached an audience not limited to the literate.⁵⁷ Some writers adopted a slightly pedantic tone, though outright condescension was rare. Writers not uncommonly adopted a sagacious tone suggesting an effort at gentle edification, and reflecting the assumption that the reader would accept and agree with the author's points. We see this kind of attitude especially in articles that extolled the power of music to uplift society and set straight the moral compass of the young. Indeed, this kind of idealism about art music grew increasingly pervasive in our period. American commentators were, however, not slavish admirers of European art music, composers, conductors, or performers, however. Many writers had no qualms about expressing strongly negative opinions. Given the general timidity and hesitancy to judge or offend that prevails in our twenty-first century, it proves refreshing to read mid-nineteenth-century writers' often devastating critiques of musical works, composers, and performers. Popular misconceptions about "proper" Victorians should not cloud the reality that these same people were capable of venomous public attacks.

In discussions of music, writers often made a distinction between what they called "scientific music," whose synonyms included "serious music," "good music," "music of the highest class," "the best music," and somewhat less commonly, "classical music," on the one

⁵⁷ See Thomas C. Leonard, "News at the Hearth: A Drama of Reading in Nineteenth-Century America," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society 1880–2008* Vol. 102, part 2 (October 1992): 379–401, www.americanantiquarian.org/proceedings/44517806.pdf.

hand, and so-called “popular music,” sometimes also condemned as “vulgar” and “low,” on the other. It is important to remember here that perceptions of high and low culture today differ significantly from perceptions of the mid-nineteenth century.⁵⁸ Much of what we would today consider “classical music” or “art music”—by virtue of its performing forces and intended audience—was deemed “popular” or “light” music in that period. For example, whereas Americans in the early- to mid-nineteenth century understood waltzes, polkas, and other “light” orchestral music to be “popular,” today such works would probably be categorized as “classical.”⁵⁹ Writers did not shy away from violent denunciations of what they saw as “popular music.” Minstrelsy—theatrical entertainment by whites in blackface—elicited the most extreme examples of such denunciations. In 1854 a writer for the *New York Musical World* referred to minstrelsy as “low filthy negro-music, which whites destitute of shame, consent to listen to, as though the poor African were a subject for Art to caricature.”⁶⁰ Such condemnations were partly evoked by outright racial prejudice, but they also had to do with the perceived moral value of minstrel music. Thus where commentators increasingly saw European art music in this period as edifying, uplifting, and providing a channel to the divine, they frequently depicted popular and light music—sometimes including light opera—as a crude diversion for the masses.

Music critics for many publications often went unnamed, as was common in public commentary of the period. If they were identified at all, it was with cryptic initials, a humorous nickname (e.g. “C Minor”), or some type of single name (e.g. “Aquila,” “Raimond,” “Fausir,” or

⁵⁸ This is somewhat misleading, as it proves nearly impossible to discuss cultural production in such terms today because we have no agreement at all about what constitutes “high” and “low” art. In our postmodern world, a relativist spirit prevails, especially in academic circles. I use the terms “classical” and “art music” in the conventional ways they have been understood until quite recently.

⁵⁹ Certainly today the commercial music industry and radio broadcasters categorize light orchestral works as “classical music.”

⁶⁰ Anon., “Grand Musical Congress,” *New York Musical World* (at this time referred to as *The Musical World and New York Musical Times*) 9 (15 June 1854): 63.

“Gamma”).⁶¹ It seems likely that some of these anonymous authors were women who kept their identities hidden so that their work would be taken more seriously than it might be otherwise.

The practice of anonymity did not hold with public colloquies; in these cases, the identities of the debaters were generally made known.⁶² A final category of writers, special commentators or the authors of letters to the editor, were named quite often. Overall, however, the anonymity of many if not most writers on music in these years renders the search for personal connections, political alliances and affiliations, or ulterior motives frustrating. Often we must fall back on educated guesses or speculation when attempting to uncover a writer’s background or identity. To be sure, we do know the identities of most of the major journal editors and commentators, whose prominent circles included John Sullivan Dwight of *DJM*, the composer William Henry Fry, the editor of the *Home Journal* Nathaniel Parker Willis and his brother, the critic, composer, and editor of the *New York Musical World* Richard Storrs Willis, Herrman Saroni of *Saroni’s Musical Times*, the eminent writer and abolitionist George William Curtis, the musician William Batchelder Bradbury, and Augusta Browne, the pioneering female composer.

Several of the publications I have consulted for this study warrant special mention for their disproportionate influence, long duration, or especially forceful rhetoric about the

⁶¹ This was somewhat less true of *DJM*, in which it was clear that Dwight himself penned many of the major editorials and other articles. Dwight also often included copies of public addresses, translations of German criticism, poems, and other miscellaneous material, and he frequently identified the authors of these selections. “Raimond” was a music critic for *The Albion*, as was *Gamma* (who may have been the French composer, teacher, and critic Émile Girac, d. 1869), but we can be sure of little else about their identities.

⁶² The most obvious example of such a public colloquy—to be examined in greater detail later in this study—occurred in 1854 and principally involved American composers George Frederick Bristow and William Henry Fry along with critics Richard Storrs Willis and John Sullivan Dwight. The debate concerned the aesthetics of instrumental music (what would in Europe become known as the debate over program and absolute music) and turned into a brawl over the Philharmonic Society of New-York’s agreement to perform music by American composers. The debate took place principally in the pages of the *New York Musical World* and *DJM*, but commentary by the main participants and other authors appeared in *The Albion*, *Putnam’s Monthly Magazine*, the *New-York Daily Tribune*, the *Knickerbocker*, and other publications. Another rather remarkable public colloquy over musical aesthetics, this time concerning the music of Mendelssohn and containing a hint of anti-Semitism, took place in the fall of 1857 and the spring of 1858 and involved a Dr. Hermann Zopff, from Berlin, John Sullivan Dwight of *DJM*, and a writer for London’s *Musical World*.

salubrious social effects of European art music. *The Albion* (1822–1876) was a successful and widely read general-interest magazine published weekly in New York City covering “news, politics, and literature.” It was founded and edited by a British naval surgeon, John Sherren Bartlett (1790–1863). Although decidedly less formal and intellectual in tone than certain music magazines such as the *New York Musical World* or *DJM*, the *Albion* was one of the primary East Coast forums for information and discussion about art music of all kinds. During the period between 1842 and 1861 this journal’s writers devoted attention to the rapidly emerging and multifaceted concert life in New York, but much of the focus lay with opera. As noted earlier, in this era opera was very much in a transitional period, and was just becoming established as a viable enterprise in major American cities. The *Albion*’s music critics dedicated many pages to various stagings of operas new and old, and unsurprisingly to the soloists, whose skills they observed closely and remarked upon at length. Aside from discussions of opera, The *Albion* also gave space to reviews and notices about concerts of the Philharmonic Society of New-York, as well as chamber recitals in the city.

Although many proved quite short-lived, a remarkably large number of journals devoted specifically to music appeared in the U.S. during the mid-nineteenth century. *DJM* stands out as the first long-running American music journal and one that took a self-consciously high-toned approach to its subject. Established in 1852 and finally discontinued in 1881, the journal served mainly as a mouthpiece for John Sullivan Dwight, who acted in various roles during his lifetime as a Unitarian minister, a Transcendentalist writer and co-founder of the utopian Brook Farm community, and music critic. Together with his friends George William Curtis, Christopher Pearse Cranch, and other like-minded contemporaries, Dwight and his journal probably did more than any other single editor or publication to disseminate among Americans not only knowledge

of European concert music, but also a case for its moral value and its aesthetic superiority over vernacular and light music.

Subscription information for *DJM* remains elusive, and so it remains virtually impossible to determine the degree to which Dwight's writing had an effect on broader American musical thought. Scholars usually estimate its circulation between 1,000 and 2,000 subscribers at its highest, with Katherine Preston citing the journal's widest circulation at 1,500. Circulation numbers alone, of course, do not prove the relative influence of a publication. We do know that compared to other music journals that began before the Civil War, Dwight's enjoyed the longest lifespan.⁶³ Furthermore, articles, reviews, and commentaries from *DJM* were reprinted many times over in other publications, and editors commented on Dwight and his journal in their own publications, and so its reach proved broader than it might seem upon initial inspection.⁶⁴ But because of the scant information regarding circulation numbers, opinions about the extent of the journal's influence vary. The conventional wisdom among American music scholars has traditionally held that his influence was considerable; Mark Grant's perspective is typical in this regard. He writes that

Dwight's words and those of his many far-flung correspondents and the European writers that he reprinted did reach a select but influential audience of community leaders, university and literary people, and others in position to implement, sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly, many of his ideas. Dwight was the conscience of music criticism in nineteenth-century America, wreaking good works both morally and practically,

⁶³ For scholarly conjectures on and estimates of the circulation of *Dwight's Journal*, see Michael Broyles, *Beethoven in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 58; Katherine Preston, "Art Music from 1800 to 1860," *The Cambridge History of American Music*, ed. David Nicholls (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 207; Mark Grant, *Maestros of the Pen*, 44; and Broyles, "Music of the Highest Class," 306.

⁶⁴ Articles from and references to the contents of *DJM* during its tenure appeared in such magazines and newspapers as the *Message Bird*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Spirit of the Times*, *Littell's Living Age*, *Sartain's Magazine*, *Graham's American Monthly Magazine*, the *Boston Daily Atlas*, *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*, *German Reformed Messenger*, *Home Magazine*, the *Independent*, *New York Observer and Chronicle*, *The Albion*, *National Repository*, *The National Era*, *The Crayon*, *Church's Musical Visitor*, *Christian Examiner*, *Christian Inquirer*, *The Musical Visitor*, *The Farmer's Cabinet*, and countless others. The Library of Congress's online database "Chronicling America," an archive of thousands of historic American newspapers, yields over 11.3 million results for mentions of "Dwight's Journal" between 1852 and 1861.

promoting the higher musical consciousness of people who could form orchestras like the Boston Symphony and establish conservatories like the New England Conservatory of Music, opened during his editorship. *Dwight's Journal of Music*, the first such publication in the United States to last, established the tradition in America for an enlightened, cultivated audience to seek consecration of its love of classical music between the covers of specialized magazines.⁶⁵

Katherine Preston notes that Dwight was by no means the only voice of professional music criticism in this period; indeed, Nathaniel Parker Willis (editor of *Home Journal*), his brother, Richard Storrs Willis (editor of *New-York Musical World* and sometime commentator in *The Albion* and the *New York Tribune*) and Henry Cood Watson (music critic for the *Albion* and later editor of his own *Watson's Art Journal* during the 1860s and 1870s), among others, all played a role in the larger musical discourse.⁶⁶

Just as Dwight was crucial for *DJM*, so too the editors of the various other journals determined their character and shaped their judgments. Another major music journal began life as *The Message Bird* in 1849 and, after a number of name changes, finally became *The Musical World* and ceased publication in 1860.⁶⁷ Published in New York, it was edited by Richard Storrs Willis and by Oliver Dyer, who along with Frederick Crouch served at different times as the main music critic for the journal.⁶⁸ *The Musical World* chronicled many important musical

⁶⁵ Grant, *Maestros of the Pen: A History of Classical Music Criticism in America* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 53. Dwight was especially influential in disseminating information about Beethoven, as noted by both Broyles and Anne Hui-Hua Chan. See Broyles, *Beethoven in America*, 57 and Anne Hui-Hua Chan, "Beethoven in America to 1865," PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (1976). Chan writes that "there is no question that his Journal, in its earlier years (up to the end of the Civil War), contains the chief fund of literature on Beethoven in this country... To be sure, other American publications of the 1850s and early 1860s also contain some significant writings about Beethoven and his music, but their quantity and breadth were no match for those in *Dwight's Journal of Music*" (49).

⁶⁶ See Preston, "Art Music from 1800 to 1860," 207.

⁶⁷ This journal should not be confused with the much more famous journal *The Musical World: A Weekly Record of Musical Science, Literature, and Intelligence*, published in London from 1836 to 1891.

⁶⁸ Katherine K. Preston, "American Orchestral Music at the Middle of the Nineteenth Century: Louis Antoine Jullien and George Bristow's *Jullien Symphony*," in *Symphony No. 2 in D Minor, Op. 24 ("Jullien")* by George Frederick Bristow, ed. Katherine K. Preston (Middleton, WI: A-R Editions, 2011), liv.

events in New York and in the wider country during the 1850s, and, more important for the purposes of the present study, offered many thoughtful editorial pieces from various authors about music's aesthetic value, as well as commentaries on music as an aspect of the moral, social, and civic lives of Americans.

Organization

This study is divided into four main chapters. In order to set the stage more broadly for what will follow, Chapter One sets out to illustrate a key shift in the social and political landscape of the United States in the period c. 1815–1860. During the earlier decades of this era, a profound idealism overtook the national consciousness. I discuss various dimensions of this extremely optimistic outlook, including the perception of widespread social equality, the blossoming of the democratically oriented Second Great Awakening, and the flourishing of utopian communities. With the Panic of 1837 and the onset of the 1840s, however, new currents of unease began to set in among the American people. Many threats to social and national cohesion seemed to loom, including increasingly nasty sectional conflicts over slavery—itsself an institution whose aims were at odds with the precepts of American liberty. More general concerns included rising economic inequality, a loss of confidence in the goals of the Second Great Awakening, and a flood of European immigrants arriving during the late 1840s and 1850s.

During the 1840s and 1850s, we begin to see these concerns about the relative unity and equality of American society carried over into public musical discourse. Writers voiced a number of worries: about the accessibility of music to all classes of society, about what appeared to be mounting German domination of concert life, and about the proliferation of various forms of popular music that might—so it was feared—undermine the advancement of American musical

taste and moral respectability. To be sure, such mounting worries did not mean that powerful progressive hopes had evaporated. Rather, these new concerns and inherited progressive visions coexisted during this period, and can be found together in the discourse concerning art music.

The three subsequent chapters consider different dimensions of the response to these difficult social realities. All of these dimensions were related to the argument that European art music could facilitate the lofty social ideals of democracy and egalitarianism. Chapter Two treats the phenomenon of writers depicting instrumental art music as closely tied to, sometimes even synonymous with, the divine. One of the primary impulses behind the positioning of concert music in democratic terms was the development of an American version of *Kunstreligion* (“art religion”). To understand music in spiritual terms—whether as emanating directly from God, or providing a channel to the divine, or elevating listeners’ religious conscience—was to see it as a potentially equalizing force among the millions. The concept of *Kunstreligion* was a significant component of U.S. musical life, experience, and thought during the 1840s and 1850s. The movement of Transcendentalism, in particular, stimulated a broad shift in American spiritual thinking. John Sullivan Dwight (1813–1893) was the central figure in the articulation of *Kunstreligion* with regard to music in the public discourse of this period. His intimate involvement with the Transcendentalist movement led him to see concert music—above all the music of Beethoven—as a uniquely powerful window to the divine, and thus as an instrument of spiritual unification which would help to promote democracy.

Chapter Three considers the “German element” as an ideal for many writers on instrumental art music. A host of primary sources at mid-century provide evidence of the extent to which American writers praised German musical talent, output, and attitudes, as well as the German influence on American music. Paradoxically, these same writers tended to see German

music as expressing “universal” feelings and moods, and therefore as able to speak to and for every listener. These attitudes were present in German discourse about music as well, but in the United States the emphasis on “universality” was uniquely tied to democratic ideals. This idealism tended strongly to override fears about how the aristocratic patronage tradition of European, particularly German, concert music might be translated into an American democratic context. The influx of German immigrants in the late 1840s helped to introduce this ideal of the supposed “universality” of German music, and especially of Beethoven’s works.

Chapter Four examines the reception of Beethoven in the U.S. between 1842 and 1861 as a case study to demonstrate how writers of virtually every stripe couched their paeans to concert music in moral and social terms. More than the music of any other composer, Beethoven’s work was hailed as a uniquely powerful expression of democracy, freedom, and brotherhood. What observers perceived as great in Beethoven’s work was not only its capacity to inspire, uplift, and improve the minds of listeners, but also what they saw as its appeal to members of all social classes. Beethoven’s music could thus be both cerebrally rigorous *and* emotionally stimulating, thus bringing together a diverse populace in a shared musical experience. That experience, writers argued, was one that could promote American ideals because Beethoven’s music had finally been freed from its original context of European political oppression and aristocratic posturing, and now stood as a symbol of, and continued inspiration for, the pursuit of democracy and egalitarian virtue. Paradoxically, the fact that Beethoven was of German origin strengthened the case for the universal power of his music.

The conclusion considers briefly the change in public rhetoric after the Civil War. In the later decades of the nineteenth century, more established and somewhat less ambiguous patterns of cultural life began to emerge. Scholars have written and argued extensively about the so-

called “Gilded Age,” that period from approximately the 1870s until the turn of the century commonly understood as an era of superficiality, ostentation, and the conspicuous consumption of both tangible and intangible goods, along with a stark, widening divide between the wealthy, learned elite and the poorer, less educated masses. During these decades, writers became less and less idealistic about art music’s capacity to promote a democratic society. Many continued to see art music as a force for broad “cultural uplift,” but such expressions were increasingly qualified by the acknowledgement of more rigid social and cultural hierarchies. Casting a glance into the Gilded Age, I will argue that later writers had largely abandoned the fundamentally democratic and egalitarian ideal that was still very much alive in the antebellum years.

My study demonstrates that those earlier mid-nineteenth century cultural commentators who lauded the “purity” of art music and its potential to unify society were preaching not primarily from an elitist outlook, but from a genuine desire to uplift and democratize a society whose infinite promise seemed increasingly imperiled. This discourse cannot be reduced simply to a “top-down” or elitist vision. Rather, it was widely shared, and many if not most of those who engaged in it were inspired by inherited anti-elitist attitudes, even if they themselves could be counted among the social and intellectual elite. These writers saw European—especially German—instrumental music as a way of addressing grave social problems that they worried would destroy the free democratic republic for which their forebears had sacrificed so much. The middle decades of the nineteenth century represent the first moment—and also the last—when art music enjoyed widespread and enthusiastic praise as a means of promoting American democratic ideals.

CHAPTER ONE

AMERICAN DEMOCRATIC IDEALISM, c. 1815–1860: FLOWERINGS AND FLOUNDERINGS

In the year 1840, the French writer Alexis de Tocqueville issued the second and final volume of his *Democracy in America*.¹ The work would become virtually an instant classic for its insights into the promises and perils of the great national experiment that its author had crossed the Atlantic to study almost a decade earlier, in 1831. Tocqueville placed enormous emphasis on the American ideal of equality and sought to explore its foundations in religion, political ideals, and social circumstances. He was struck by the fact that in the United States, labor for profit was no longer merely for the commoner, but was honorable for all. By dignifying work for everyone, the Americans had upended the age-old European association of leisure with aristocracy.² Tocqueville was astonished at the lack of any clear boundaries among classes and impressed by what seemed to him an extremely open range of social mobility.³ He could even write that “the whole society seems to have melted into a middle class,” a new world without obvious extremes

¹ The first volume of the original French edition, *De la démocratie en Amérique*, appeared in Paris in 1835; the second in 1840. Both were published by Charles Gosselin. Each volume was quickly issued in an English translation by Henry Reeve (London, Saunders and Otley, 1835, 1840). A complete American edition appeared in 1841. For a modern English edition, see Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. Eduardo Nolla, trans. James T. Schleifer (1840, repr. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2012).

² Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 285–86.

³ Arthur Kaledin, *Tocqueville and his America: A Darker Horizon* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 3.

of wealth or poverty. In this regard, what he found was indeed a world of seemingly unlimited promise.⁴

At the same time, however, this keen foreign observer was far from entirely optimistic about the American experiment. As much as he admired what he saw as a profoundly democratic spirit, he also leveled some sober criticisms and made prescient warnings. He feared that the gnawing issue of slavery would lead to social conflict, that a newly wealthy and powerful class would develop with the growth of industry, and that the democratic principle would eventually lead to individual alienation.⁵ And even as he admired the “equality of conditions” instituted by American democracy, he worried openly that it would fail to provide a framework for “refining mores, elevating manners, and causing the arts to blossom.” As Jedediah Purdy aptly puts it, Tocqueville could not avoid the sense that “Democratic culture was self-concerned and philistine, flat because all its appetites, ambitions, and loyalties were directed at this world, in the present time, with no sense of history or the transcendent.”⁶ Thus while the democratic model in America laudably made room for equal opportunity, it threatened to fail in cultivating the inner life of the mind and spirit, or an appreciation for higher aesthetic experience.

While such doubts may have been partly a function of inborn French prejudices, they were by no means limited to the writer and his educated compatriots. Teetering between

⁴ Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 348. It is worth noting that in 1840, Tocqueville was writing for a French audience during the July Monarchy, at a time when ideals of equality were increasingly being destroyed.

⁵ See Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. Eduardo Nolla, trans. James T. Schleifer (1840; repr. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2012) and Schleifer, *The Chicago Companion to Tocqueville's Democracy in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

⁶ Tocqueville is quoted in Jedediah Purdy, ed., *Democratic Vistas: Reflection on the Life of American Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 5. Purdy further quotes Tocqueville on the alienation he saw as an inevitable consequence of American democracy: “I see an innumerable multitude of men, alike and equal, constantly circling around in pursuit of the petty and banal pleasures with which they glut themselves. Each one of them, withdrawn into himself, is almost unaware of the fate of the rest. Mankind, for him, consists in his children and his personal friends. As for the rest of his fellow citizens, they are near enough, but he does not notice them. He touches them but feels nothing” (5).

admiring hopes and wary fears, Tocqueville issued his observations precisely at a moment when Americans themselves were beginning to show much the same sort of ambivalence. By the 1840s, the happy confidence of prior generations was ebbing. Idealistic hopes had begun to crumble in light of harsh realities—slavery, sectionalism, increasing immigration, class tensions—that triggered rising concerns about social disunity and cultural stratification. To be sure, the two decades preceding the outbreak of the Civil War saw continuing rapid expansion in nearly every respect. But economic, demographic, and territorial growth brought many problems to light that earlier generations either had not yet felt, or had been largely able to ignore. In order to establish the necessary background for this study, the present chapter outlines this shift from the overwhelming idealism of the 1820s and 1830s to the creeping doubts of the 1840s and 1850s, with an eye toward how this change in perceptions stimulated public rhetoric about the potential of high art—particularly music—to promote a democratic society. I will begin by examining the idealism that prevailed during the first decades of the nineteenth century and then discussing the broad change in outlook that was becoming increasingly evident by the 1840s. Then I will move on to the ways in which the waxing social concerns of this latter period carried over into new anxieties about cultural divisions and stratification, especially in regard to the place of music in American life.

From Idealism to Disillusionment

While scholars have disagreed vehemently over the origins and development of early American democratic idealism, it would be difficult to deny that the prevailing public discourse through the first several decades of the nineteenth century—dominated as it was by males of British ancestry—was consistently characterized by a nearly unlimited sense of confidence in the power

and virtue of self-rule among citizens enjoying equal basic rights. The American Revolution had fundamentally influenced the ways in which people thought about social and political relationships. In his classic book *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, Gordon Wood depicts “a momentous upheaval that not only fundamentally altered the character of American society but decisively affected the course of subsequent history.”⁷ It was less a revolution in outward structures than in attitudes and ideas. Wood acknowledges the obvious fact that the Revolution did not suddenly bring about equal freedoms for all Americans. He does argue, however, that it ultimately paved the way for nineteenth-century abolitionist and women’s-rights movements, and indeed made possible the entire tradition of American egalitarian thinking.⁸

More recent strains of scholarship tend to approach the Revolution, and the republic it established, with far more cynicism than Wood. But in focusing on all the ways in which the young country fell short of its highest ideals, such criticisms come close to losing sight of the powerful discourse of equality and opportunity that the fight for independence had set in motion. As Wood shows, it is hard to overlook the significance of the fact that traditional distinctions of status and education no longer automatically bestowed respect and authority.⁹ Distrust of hierarchy and centralized power became foundational in a nation wedded to the idea of democracy over aristocracy. Although suffrage and equal rights were as yet extended only to propertied white males, the basic rights of citizens strengthened as time went on, most notably under the presidency of Thomas Jefferson (1801–1809). The principle of the sovereignty of “the people” stood inviolate, even if the question of just who the people were remained unsettled.

⁷ Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 5.

⁸ Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 7.

⁹ Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 6. Hatch argues that the more dramatic changes came not with the Revolution itself, but in the subsequent decades: “This vast transformation, this shift away from the Enlightenment and classical republicanism toward vulgar democracy and materialistic individualism in a matter of decades, was the real American Revolution” (23).

It is difficult to exaggerate the sense of boundless freedom, pride, and possibility that characterized young America's Anglo-Saxon majority, especially after 1815 when the nation emerged victorious from the War of 1812.¹⁰ Historians have traditionally designated the period from c. 1815 through the 1820s as the "Era of Good Feelings" to describe the overall sense of optimism and political unity that held sway.¹¹ Rather ironically, the advocates of Jeffersonian-style republicanism soon found their comfortable social vision challenged by more radical strains of populism, newly strident declarations on behalf of "the common man." With Andrew Jackson's election in 1828, a new Democratic party emerged with an ethos that de-emphasized education as a prerequisite for political office, thus opening up participation in government affairs to a far larger portion of the population. Jacksonian democracy extended political representation to all adult white males, and within a generation removed completely the requirement to hold property. Although Jacksonianism did bring an increase of centralized federal power, the movement is rightly associated with an unprecedented push for political egalitarianism, and more broadly for equal opportunity in all aspects of life.¹²

Scholars have sharply questioned the extent to which equal political, economic, social or cultural opportunities were actually open to all, even to male citizens, during this era. As historian Sean Wilentz asserts, it does appear that the vigorous economy of the early republic allowed "widened opportunities" so that ordinary freemen could at least "hope to gain a measure

¹⁰ Higham, *Hanging Together*, 154.

¹¹ The phrase "Era of Good Feelings" derives from a piece by Benjamin Russell for the *Columbian Centinel* of July 12, 1817, which covered President James Monroe's visit to Boston, Massachusetts as part of his "goodwill tour" of the United States.

¹² We can acknowledge this association without downplaying the oppressive, divisive, and destructive aspects of the nation's development.

of propertied security for themselves and their families through their own efforts.”¹³ But the point here is not to assess objective truths about economic circumstances or class distinctions. Historical understanding requires us to pay attention not only to past “realities,” but also to shared outlooks and assumptions. Edward Pessen is among those scholars who have pointed out that for many if not most antebellum Americans, what mattered was the widely held perception of fundamental equality. Despite abundant evidence to the contrary, the conceit persisted that among free white citizens of the U.S., social classes did not exist—at least not in a way that limited anyone’s potential for advancement.¹⁴ Some present inequalities could hardly be ignored, yet Americans thought themselves essentially equal to one another by virtue of their equal opportunities; one’s success depended only on one’s intelligence, talent, diligence, and moral virtue.¹⁵ Every American might cultivate these gifts to some degree, and through the 1820s and 1830s most assumed that virtually all could and would rise to the common challenge.

Newspapers and magazines of this period teemed with paeans to the virtues of democracy, the framework and guarantor of basic equality. American writers discussed democracy as the great inevitable outcome of millennia of human progress. A commentator in *The Boston Quarterly Review* of 1838 extolled the advancement of the species evident in the fact that the United States had made reason and morality the domain of all: “The universe opens its pages to every eye; the music of creation resounds in every ear; the glorious lessons of immortal truth, that are written in the sky and on the earth, address themselves to every mind, and claim attention from every human being.” In these decades, the public market in ideas saw the potential

¹³ Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: Norton, 2005), 485.

¹⁴ Edward Pessen, “Social Structure and Politics in American History,” *The American Historical Review* 87, no. 5 (Dec. 1982), 1292–93.

¹⁵ Pessen, “Social Structure and Politics in American History,” 1304.

social benefits of democracy as almost limitless. Everywhere one encountered the belief that government of and by the people was leading toward the freest, most egalitarian society the world had ever seen.

A major influence on this pervasive democratic vision lay in the religious landscape of the period.¹⁶ Tocqueville gave a great deal of credit to what he saw as the striving for virtue in the Puritan settlers, but he was especially impressed with the separation of church and state in the U.S., which he thought had allowed for a great flowering of spiritual expression both personal and communal. He was witness to the enormous surge of Protestant revivalism known as the Second Great Awakening. In many ways a reaction against Enlightenment rationalism, this outpouring drew sustenance from the Romantic emotionalism that was simultaneously spreading across the European cultural scene. Throughout the Northeast, South, and Midwest, fiery Evangelical preachers gathered followers, organized “camp meetings,” and established churches whose membership soared. The ostensible separation between church and state laid out in the Constitution, however, existed paradoxically alongside the fact that evangelists employed American exceptionalist rhetoric and, in so doing, helped to advance the cause of democracy. Democratic and egalitarian ideals were indeed integral to the Second Great Awakening, a massive movement which according to Nathan Hatch inspired great numbers of “increasingly assertive common people” who “wanted their leaders unpretentious, their doctrines self-evident and down-to-earth, their music lively and singable, and their churches in local hands.”¹⁷ The essential goal was a spiritual leveling, but the common expectation was that this movement

¹⁶ Nye, *Society and Culture in America*, 291.

¹⁷ Hatch, *Democratization of American Christianity*, 9.

would lead to social equality and harmony.¹⁸ Tocqueville was struck by the populist flavor of Evangelical Christianity, famously noting of the populist gospel preachers, “Where I expect to find a priest, I find a politician.”¹⁹

Indeed, conversion itself had become a matter of free human effort, and was available to all who admitted a sinful nature and need for divine salvation. During the First Great Awakening of the 1740s, George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards had called revivals surprising and unpredictable works of an inscrutable God. But Charles G. Finney, the most prominent revivalist of the 1830s, exhorted his auditors simply: “just do it!” In his best-selling *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (1836), Finney insisted that revivals were man-made affairs, not miraculous, divinely inspired occurrences. One simply needed to know the proper recipe to bring about conversions under a supervising God. A greater testament to the populism and egalitarianism of the evangelical spirit is hard to imagine.²⁰

Inspired evangelical Protestants focused on erasing worldly sin through advocating the moral reform of individuals, joining newly fervent causes including abolition, temperance, and prison reform. They sought to work through “moral suasion”—that is, encouraging people to abandon harmful behavior by appealing to their moral sensibilities and convincing them that foregoing such activities was in their best interests.²¹ These reformers wholeheartedly believed that they were fulfilling a providential plan, an outlook that was again intimately connected with

¹⁸ Hatch, *Democratization of American Christianity*, 14.

¹⁹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, quoted in Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 13.

²⁰ See Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles G. Finney and the Spirit of American Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdsman Publishing Co., 1996), 87 and William McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607–1977* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 123.

²¹ Steven Mintz, *Moralists and Modernizers: America's Pre-Civil War Reformers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 73.

the political idealism of the day. The most palpable idealism arose from the union of religious excitement with the cause of American democracy. In Nathan Hatch's formulation, for many ordinary Americans "democracy was the cause of God."²² The Second Great Awakening gave rise to a culture that sought to challenge and transcend mere worldly authority, and to champion the power of common people in the service of Christ's future kingdom on earth. In its most intense forms the movement was characterized by powerful millennial hopes; the quick progress of democracy in the United States seemed in many eyes a sure sign that an age of apocalyptic fulfillment had arrived, that the return of Christ was imminent.²³

Some Americans took it upon themselves to realize such fulfillment through measures far more radical than broad efforts at "moral suasion." The second quarter of the nineteenth century witnessed mushrooming efforts to achieve communal utopian societies in the United States. Inspired to new heights of human possibility by the prospect of fresh beginnings, these societies were all fundamentally egalitarian, preaching equality not only in the eyes of God and in regard to opportunity, but also in shared property. Through the 1820s and 1830s, utopianism embodied a positive, extreme expression of the expansionist, democratic, universalist mood. The oldest and best known utopian group, the Shakers, fled England in 1774 to escape religious persecution. Led by Mother Ann Lee, thought to be the female incarnation of Christ, Shakers sought to establish a godly kingdom on earth. Concentrated primarily in New England, at its height around 1840 the movement had attracted some 6,000 members, remarkable for a group with celibacy as a central tenet. As early as the 1780s, the Shakers maintained the equality of the sexes, reflecting their belief in God as both male and female. Although they undertook different labors, Shaker

²² Hatch, *Democratization of American Christianity*, 188.

²³ Hatch, *Democratization of American Christianity*, 184. Hatch writes, "Judging by the number of sermons, books, and pamphlets that address prophetic themes, the first generation of United States citizens may have lived in the shadow of Christ's second coming more intensely than any generation since."

men and women performed equally necessary work and held equal leadership roles. These communities achieved remarkable consistency in rejecting private property, assigning work to members according to their skills, and distributing the products of their labor to their members according to the needs of each.

The Shakers established a formidable model of egalitarian living that helped to inspire a host of other utopian movements. The German Pietist Johann Georg Rapp (1757–1847), for instance, established the “Harmony Society” in western Pennsylvania in 1805.²⁴ Rapp taught a millennial doctrine, emphasizing repentance for sin and the strict sharing of earthly goods in preparation for the second coming of Christ, which he believed was soon at hand.²⁵ Incorporating around 800 members at its height, this was a relatively small and isolated social experiment. Yet the utopian impulse was growing rapidly in American society and would soon flourish in broader efforts to achieve social perfection such as Fourierism. The French thinker Charles Fourier (1772–1837) offered an elaborate system of beliefs about the social arrangements most conducive to human happiness and fulfillment. He sought to pursue the goal of universal harmony by replacing the market economy and wage-labor model with what he called “Associations,” categories that grouped people by occupation according to their strongest basic passions and skills. In this system women enjoyed equal pay, job opportunities, and representation in group discussion and decision-making.²⁶ In 1839, American Albert Brisbane (1809–1890) began to disseminate Fourier’s doctrines. His 1840 book *Social Destiny of Man*

²⁴ Rapp moved his society to Harmony, Indiana in 1814 and to Economy, Pennsylvania in 1824. For more on the Harmony Society in the context of Icarian Communism and especially in regard to Germania Musical Society violist Henry Albrecht’s flirtation with utopian ideas, see Nancy Newman, *Good Music for a Free People: The Germania Musical Society in Nineteenth-Century America* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2010).

²⁵ “Harmony, Economy, and George Rapp,” *America and the Utopian Dream*, Yale University Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, <http://brbl-archive.library.yale.edu/exhibitions/utopia/uc05.html> (accessed February 3, 2016).

²⁶ Mintz, *Moralists and Modernizers*, 149.

enjoyed great success, and the publisher Horace Greeley helped Brisbane publicize his ideas in the *New-York Tribune* in 1842. By the mid-1840s more than twenty-five Associationist “phalanxes” or “phalansteries” were established from Massachusetts to Texas.²⁷ Effectively co-opting the sort of progressive language that pervaded contemporary millennial Christianity, the Associationist movement became one of the most idealistic, rapidly disseminated, and vociferous utopian experiments of the age.²⁸

Efforts to carry the utopian impulse beyond narrow sectarian boundaries were similarly notable in Transcendentalism.²⁹ Arising in the 1830s, this famous movement combined contemporary intellectual and spiritual currents. Hoping to achieve a vision of life they believed possible in the here-and-now, the Transcendentalists attempted their own versions of utopia, forming several communities during the 1840s, the most famous of which was Brook Farm. Founded by Unitarian preacher George Ripley (1802–1880) in West Roxbury, Massachusetts, this experiment involved a number of leading New England thinkers including Nathaniel Hawthorne and John Sullivan Dwight. Brook Farm espoused principles of shared labor, equal apportionment of profits, and time for leisure and creative activities. In 1842 the prolific and

²⁷ Mintz, *Moralists and Modernizers*, 148–49.

²⁸ Carl J. Guarneri, “The Americanization of Utopia: Fourierism and the Dilemma of Utopian Dissent in the United States,” *Utopian Studies* 5, no. 1 (1994): 77. Guarneri notes that the Fourierists “argued insistently that far from repudiating American values, utopian socialism was merely a more effective way to realize the consensual goals of republicanism, democracy, Protestant Christianity, and missionary nationalism.”

²⁹ Transcendentalism will be discussed more fully in Chapter Two. It was not so much a unified movement as a loose set of ideas about the relationship between the individual human spirit and its natural surroundings. Its prominent exponents—Ralph Waldo Emerson (foremost disseminator), Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, Theodore Parker, Frederic Henry Hedge, and Amos Bronson Alcott—rarely agreed on specifics, but shared a general intellectual admiration for German Romantic idealism, a vision that rejected the austerity and objectivity that increasingly characterized Unitarianism in favor of a celebration of the subjectivity of the individual person’s senses. Transcendentalists wrote on a great variety of subjects, often contradicting each other, but largely held that individuals may “transcend” the banal quotidian through their subjective experience, coming to know timeless, universal truths.

volatile publicist Orestes Brownson introduced a discussion of the community by connecting it with a fervently progressive democratic vision:

. . . that mankind are susceptible of a far higher degree of moral and physical well-being, than they have ever yet attained to, has become a very general conviction, and is every day becoming wider and deeper. The spread of Christian principles, the great doctrines of the unity of the race, human brotherhood, and democratic equality, has enlarged men's hopes, and made quite apparent the glaring disproportion there is everywhere between the actual and the possible condition of mankind. . . . Everywhere is the question raised, How shall the actual condition of mankind be made to correspond to the Christian ideal? How shall be introduced that equality of moral and physical well-being which is the expression of the equality of all men before God and the State."³⁰

In 1844 the members of Brook Farm began to adopt Fourierist principles in organizing themselves, and sought to disseminate these ideas in their organ of public outreach, *The Harbinger*.

Established in 1848 and influenced by Fourierist ideas, the Oneida community took utopianism in a startling new direction. This mid-century experiment flourished less as an extreme expression of democratic ideals than as a self-conscious reaction to, and departure from, the perceived values of antebellum American society. Trained as a Congregationalist preacher, Oneida's founder, John Humphrey Noyes (1811–1886) embraced "Perfectionism," the idea that humans must be free of all sin to bring about the millennium. He and his followers established their community in Oneida, New York, on the principles of a Christian communism. To combat sinful selfishness as fully as possible, Noyes rejected monogamy in favor of "complex marriage," in which all men were married to all women; any person could engage in sexual intercourse with any other of the opposite sex pending mutual consent and community approval. This practice, as well as a system of eugenics known as "stirpiculture," clearly distinguished

³⁰ O. A. Brownson, "Brook Farm," *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* Vol. 11, no. 53 (Nov. 1842), 481.

Oneida from utopian experiments of an earlier period.³¹ As Lawrence Foster writes, this highly controversial community “represented [Noyes’s] attempt to overcome the religious and social disorder that he and his followers had experienced in the rapidly expanding America of his day.”³² In this sense, Oneida might be viewed as a tipping-point of sorts in the history of American utopian movements, a point at which disillusionment began to weight at least equally with social idealism.³³

Indeed, by this time the sanguine hopes of the earlier decades were manifestly fading, and Americans began to recognize the serious challenges facing the integrity of their national experiment. From the 1840s, as the nation’s mobility increased and as communications accelerated, observers expressed rising doubts that the outlook was as bright as so many had declared, especially in regard to national unity and social equality. Obstacles to social cohesion and to a genuine egalitarianism based on the principle of democracy seemed increasingly to loom everywhere. The issue of slavery and its spread into new territories was beginning to cause severe political and regional rifts. Class hierarchies widened as wealth became more unequally distributed. Vast numbers of European immigrants made the United States their home, sparking nativist resentment and highlighting ethnic differences. To be sure, it would be misleading to portray a sudden flip of the switch from idealism to despair in the early 1840s. Yet it is fair to see

³¹ Mintz, *Moralists and Modernizers*, 151–52. Noyes is recognized as having coined the term “free love” in reference to the allowance of multiple sexual pairings, though emotional and sexual exclusivity was not allowed. See Lawrence Foster, *Women, Family and Utopia: Communal Experiments of the Shakers, the Oneida Community and the Mormons* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 75, 77, 91. For more on the sexual practices of the Oneida community and to read primary documents from the community’s early period, see *Free Love in Utopia: John Humphrey Noyes and the Origin of the Oneida Community*, compiled by George Wallingford Noyes; edited with an introduction by Lawrence Foster (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

³² Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia*, 106–8.

³³ In other words, Oneida symbolized in the largest sense the shift from an earlier utopianism that sought to fulfill the highest goals of democratic egalitarianism to later forms of utopianism that were more an indictment than an affirmation of American values.

the two decades preceding the Civil War as a period when the mood of the nation grew notably less cheerful and confident.

Severely undercutting the soaring rhetoric about the democratic promise was the fact that millions could claim no part of that promise. The slaves who labored throughout the American South had no legal rights, were bought and sold as property, and were subject to violent punishments. Although legislation to end slavery had been passed in every northern state by 1804, slaveholding took time to die out altogether. In New Jersey, the institution was not entirely eliminated until the end of the Civil War.³⁴ But by 1840 nearly all slaves had been freed in the North, and the basic sectional differences were becoming glaringly obvious. “With a hurtling force after 1840,” Wilentz declares, “two American democracies emerged, the free-labor democracy of the North and the slaveholders’ democracy of the South—distinct political systems as well as bodies of thought.”³⁵ The Mason-Dixon line between Pennsylvania and Maryland came to represent a quite literal dividing line between what were increasingly becoming two very different legal and moral philosophies. A correspondent for the abolitionist *New-York Daily Tribune* in 1848 called slavery a “horrible cancer,” a blot on the nation’s reputation as a beacon of political freedom.³⁶ The moral dimension of the question intensified enormously in 1852 with the publication of the anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe. In addition, by this time the possibility of slavery’s spread into newly acquired American lands greatly escalated the national debate. The Compromise of 1850 was passed to defuse the tension, overturning the Missouri Compromise of 1820 and asserting that the question of slavery would

³⁴ See for example Edgar J. McManus, *Black Bondage in the North* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1973) and Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and “Race” in New England, 1780–1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

³⁵ Wilentz, *Rise of American Democracy*, xxii.

³⁶ “Things and Thoughts in Europe: Foreign Correspondence of the Tribune,” *New-York Daily Tribune* Vol. 7, no. 228 (January 1, 1848), 1.

be decided by “popular sovereignty” in the newly settled territories. Over the next decade, the conflicts and arguments mounted dramatically with court battles such as that which culminated in the Dred Scott decision of the Supreme Court in 1857, which affirmed that slaves were property. Abolitionist sentiment soared in the North, giving rise at its most extreme to violence such as John Brown’s Raid in 1859. The issue of slavery became the focus of the greatest crisis to face the nation since its founding.

Slaves were not the only residents of the United States deprived of the rights accorded to white male citizens. Free blacks, of whom there were many in the North, were granted very few of the rights and privileges of their white male counterparts.³⁷ Through the middle of the nineteenth century, many if not most white Americans thought blacks definitively inferior in a variety of dimensions, and used racial justifications to keep free blacks in poverty and disenfranchised. Even many of those who favored slavery’s abolition denied the full equality of the races. Using a combination of religious and scientific rationalizations, whites argued that blacks lacked the intelligence, motivation, and moral virtue necessary to gain a legal status equal to that of whites.³⁸

While during the 1840s and 1850s slavery was increasingly regarded as a direct political threat to the survival of the United States and a moral quandary for its people, Americans also began to notice that even among free white citizens, inequality was on the rise. As the country made the transition to a full market economy, it was becoming clearer by the year that a small upper class controlled more and more wealth; thus, too, social classes demarcated on the basis of

³⁷ By 1860, universal white male suffrage regardless of property ownership had been granted in all states, but free blacks could vote in only five of thirty-three states. See Charles A. Kromkowski, “Suffrage,” *The Oxford Encyclopedia of American Political and Legal History*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

³⁸ Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 363.

affluence were becoming more evident. Americans began to notice not only increasing class stratification during this period, but a seemingly insatiable need for constant acquisition of wealth. Over the course of the 1840s and 1850s, countless articles appeared in American newspapers and magazines lamenting a sobering development: growing numbers of Americans seemed unconcerned with their responsibilities as citizens, or with helping their neighbors and communities. Rather, most seemed intent on accumulating more and more wealth, for as one sober writer put it in 1853, “this is decidedly a money making age. All, or nearly all, seem to be struggling for a portion of that wealth which at present is so unequally divided among mankind.”³⁹ Americans pursued wealth as if it were its own virtue, for “the error of life into which man most readily falls, is the pursuit of wealth as the highest good of existence.”⁴⁰ The authors of such laments were careful to note that possessing great wealth did not bestow honor, integrity, or taste. A prominent expression of this view came from the pen of the distinguished Unitarian preacher and theologian William Ellery Channing. An excerpt from one of his 1840 Harvard lectures, “On the Elevation of the Laboring Classes,” was reprinted in various publications as “The Arrogance of Wealth.” Channing acknowledged the reality and necessity of unequal wealth distribution, but warned that “to be prosperous is not to be superior...the only distinctions which should be recognized are those of the soul, of strong principle, of incorruptible integrity, of usefulness, of cultivated intellect, of fidelity in seeking truth.”⁴¹ Many others echoed Channing’s sentiments. In the two decades preceding the Civil War, more and more observers found the temptation to think oneself better than others on the basis of crude capital to be one of the greatest dangers threatening the social fabric of their republic.

³⁹ O.C. Gibbs, “Wealth the Stimulus to Labor,” *The Country Gentleman* Vol. 1, no. 15 (April 14, 1853), 234.

⁴⁰ Anon., “Wealth,” *Home Magazine* Vol. 1, no. 1 (Oct 1852), 47. Reprinted from *Portland Eclectic*.

⁴¹ Dr. Channing, “The Arrogance of Wealth,” *New York Evangelist*, vol. 13, no. 29 (July 21, 1842), 116.

The historian Edward Pessen argues that egalitarianism was far more an imagined ideal in the American mind than a reality during the second quarter of the nineteenth century.⁴² He also grapples with the elusive notion of class in the antebellum United States, pointing out the extreme difficulty of delineating differences among social classes when we must consider that so many factors played a role (social prestige, education, leisure time, standard of living, etc.).⁴³ But he claims that if we have to distill all of these factors to a single metric, wealth remained the most accurate determinant of class status in that era.⁴⁴ Unsurprisingly, then, Pessen concludes that “inherited social and economic advantages” predicted successful careers and comfortable lives far more accurately than inherent qualities of aptitude and drive.⁴⁵ While much popular rhetoric of this period continued to insist that Americans of every background could attain their goals if they were willing to invest the requisite time and effort, more sobering realities such as economic, social, and racial divisions were increasingly difficult to ignore.

During the 1840s and 1850s, another major development threatened the cohesion of the American social landscape. Thousands of European immigrants, particularly from Germany and Ireland, arrived on American shores, fleeing the political convulsions of their homelands, escaping the horrors of the Irish potato famine, and seeking better economic futures. Accurate numbers of immigrants as a percentage of the total U.S. population before 1850 are difficult to determine, but between 1840 and 1850, the total population grew from approximately 17.1 million to 23.2 million, an increase of 36 percent. By 1860, the population had reached some

⁴² Pessen, “The Egalitarian Myth and the American Social Reality: Wealth, Mobility, and Equality in the ‘Era of the Common Man,’” *The American Historical Review* 76, no. 4 (October 1971), 1030.

⁴³ See Edward Pessen, “The Beleaguered Myth of Antebellum Egalitarianism: Cliometrics and Surmise to the Rescue,” *Social Science History* 6 (1982): 111–28, and “Social Structure and Politics in American History,” 1290–1325.

⁴⁴ Pessen, “Social Structure and Politics in American History,” 1293–94.

⁴⁵ Pessen, “Social Structure and Politics in American History,” 1306.

31.4 million another increase of 36 percent.⁴⁶ Immigration statistics illustrate the enormous wave: in 1840, 84,066 immigrants arrived in the United States. Ten years later in 1850, the annual influx had jumped to 310 thousand.⁴⁷ By this time the foreign-born accounted for nearly ten percent of the U.S. population.⁴⁸ Immigration from Germany in the antebellum era peaked in 1854.⁴⁹ Chapter Three discusses at greater length the details of German immigration to the United States, successful German strategies of assimilation, and positive American responses to the German presence in regard to musical culture. Here I am concerned with the opposed currents of anti-immigrant, and especially anti-German, sentiment in the U.S. during the mid-nineteenth century.⁵⁰ The rise of anti-immigrant rhetoric represented a new threat to the goal of an open, unified society.

Many native-born Americans, especially those in the larger cities, found themselves overwhelmed by the influx of foreigners. Although the American response to these newcomers can hardly be characterized as uniformly or even largely negative, the sudden presence of these unfamiliar people inspired annoyance, exasperation, and even strong strains of vitriol in certain corners. The flood of new immigrants during this era brought new intensity to discussions of

⁴⁶ Michael R. Haines, "Table Aa1-5: Population, population density, and land area: 1790–2000," in *Historical Statistics of the United States: Earliest Times to the Present*, Millennial Edition, Vol. 1, Part A: Population, edited by Susan B. Carter, et. al. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 26.

⁴⁷ Susan B. Carter and Richard Sutch, "Table Ad1-2: U.S. immigrants and emigrants: 1820–1998" in *Historical Statistics of the United States*, 541.

⁴⁸ Michael R. Haines, "Table Aa22-35: Selected population characteristics – median age, sex ratio, annual growth rate, and number, by race, urban residence, and nativity: 1790–2000" in *Historical Statistics of the United States*, 36.

⁴⁹ Michael R. Haines, "Figure Ad-D: Immigrants, by country of last residence – Great Britain, Scandinavia, Germany, and Ireland: 1820–1920" in *Historical Statistics of the United States*, 534.

⁵⁰ Positive reactions to German musical culture stood in striking contrast to anti-German sentiment; in this way, German musical culture served to counterbalance nativist biases. This was an advantage that was far less pronounced in regard to the Irish.

American identity. More than ever before, Americans sought to identify what was distinctive about their country, to define themselves as a people and a nation.⁵¹

The rise of anti-immigrant sentiment in the United States during this period is evident as much in public defenses of the new arrivals as in attacks on them. New York papers reported on the callous reception of immigrants at the city's main harbor, "greedily pounced upon as prey by a flock of harpies who hover about our port, and who never scruple to take the last crust of bread from the mouths of famishing children if they can thereby put half its value into their own dirty pockets."⁵² Newspapers abounded with appeals to welcome the stranger. "Vex him not—let him be as one of you. He is a man, treat him as a man. Trust him, educate him, bestow on him the dignity of citizenship, and you elevate and win him," entreated the abolitionist newspaper *The National Era* in 1855. At a Whig Rally in 1845, the party's nominee for Mayor of New York, Dudley Selden, asked, "Are these brawny Germans, and Irishmen, and Englishmen and Scotchmen, the men to be rejected? . . . I say for one I am desirous of having the rugged men of other lands settle among and commingle with us, until we shall form a race such as the earth has not seen since the days of Pericles."⁵³ The treatment of immigrants concerned even the highest governing assemblies. In 1857 John Kelly of New York, spoke to the House of Representatives about the recent fashion "to charge directly that the foreign-born citizens are profligate in their suffrage; that they are vicious, while the native-born are exemplars of every virtue." Kelly continued by describing the widespread prejudice against Catholics, and noted that the United

⁵¹ Leonardo Buonomo, *Immigration, Ethnicity, and Class in American Writing, 1830–1860: Reading the Stranger* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2014), 1–2. Indeed, American literature of this period teems with examples of the attempt to isolate what was distinctive about the country.

⁵² Anon., "Immigrants Abused," *New-York Daily Tribune* (June 28, 1845), 1.

⁵³ Anon., "The Whig Rally," *New-York Daily Tribune* (March 19, 1845), 1.

States had fallen in the world's estimation with reports of anti-immigrant violence.⁵⁴ The Irish were an especially vulnerable target for xenophobic assaults. Many of them entered the United States with little money and few possessions, having left their homeland after the Great Famine that began around 1845. They were stereotyped as belligerent, prone to drunkenness, and lacking in intelligence.⁵⁵ Anti-Catholicism played a major part in shaping the native-born population's fear and hatred of the Irish.

The most visible political expression of anti-immigrant sentiment found a home in the short-lived and reactionary "Know-Nothing" party. Eventually designated officially as the "American Party" and referred to frequently in the press as the "Native American" movement, this nativist political group emerged first in New York City in 1843 in response to the booming immigrant population in the 1840s and 1850s. The central ideology driving the movement was anti-Catholicism, which had intensified with the influx of Irish, and to a much lesser extent, Germans, into the city. Know-Nothings actively worked against the immigration, naturalization, and election of the foreign-born. If asked about their involvement with the movement, members were obligated to answer with the phrase "I know nothing," a practice that prompted the *New-York Tribune* to introduce the label in 1853. Perhaps the most infamous incident associated with the Know-Nothing party was "Bloody Monday," a day of deadly riots in Louisville, Kentucky on August 6, 1855 when angry Know-Nothings attempted to prevent Irish and German Catholic

⁵⁴ "Speech of Hon. John Kelly," *The Daily Union* Vol. 6, no. 267 (February 24, 1857), 1–2. Kelly was of Irish descent, and as such was quite sympathetic to the Irish arrivals, many of whom were ostracized for their Catholicism. But this does not take away from the fact that anti-Irish and especially anti-Catholic feeling traces a long history in the United States. Indeed, it is worth noting that even in 1960, the election of John F. Kennedy—the first Catholic president—was shocking to many Americans.

⁵⁵ Anon., "The Irish in America," *Littell's Living Age* Vol. 35 (Oct. 2, 1852), 47. Reprinted from *The Spectator* of August 21, 1852.

immigrants from voting, resulting in over twenty deaths.⁵⁶ Later that year, the *Daily American Organ*, a Know-Nothing newspaper based in Washington, D.C., entirely denied blame for inciting the Bloody Monday violence, claiming that any deaths or injuries to the Irish were the result of self-defense on the part of native-born Americans.⁵⁷

Outside of the Know-Nothing movement, reaction toward the German arrivals was decidedly mixed.⁵⁸ Because so many native-born Americans claimed at least some German ancestry, Germanic values and culture already played a significant role in shaping the culture of the United States. Many Germans were Protestants, and were generally regarded as honest, industrious, culturally advanced, and pious; for these and other reasons many American natives were predisposed to welcome the newcomers. But these circumstances in no way muted frequent public criticism of German immigrants, along with the voicing of worries about the degree to which they would be able to assimilate. One oft-voiced complaint dealt with the German tendency to engage in secular musical entertainments on Sundays—and, even worse, to serve beer. In New York especially, the proliferation of beer gardens and other socially oriented public concert venues gave hundreds of German-Americans the opportunity to congregate and enjoy familiar music, beverages, and company. Such gatherings were a major element of life for German immigrants in the United States.⁵⁹ Many native-born Protestant Americans, whose Puritan heritage bestowed a deeply respectful attitude toward the Sabbath, found themselves

⁵⁶ George H. Yater, “Bloody Monday,” in *The Encyclopedia of Louisville*, ed. John E. Kleber (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 97.

⁵⁷ Letter to the Editor by W.E.N., “Ireland an Aceldama—A Field of Blood!”—No. 4, *Daily American Organ* Vol. 1 no. 302 (October 25, 1855), 1–2.

⁵⁸ I will discuss positive antebellum American reaction to immigration in Chapter Three.

⁵⁹ Mischa Honeck, *We are the Revolutionists: German-Speaking Immigrants and American Abolitionists After 1848* (London: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 18.

scandalized by the Germans' apparent disregard for the holy day.⁶⁰ In 1855, a writer for the *Home Magazine*—carefully avoiding specific reference to Germans—lamented that in New York “there is at present a particular *penchant* for cellar-music, washed down by cloudy beer...the day of rest is sadly prostituted, and with impunity.” The *Home Magazine* writer acknowledged that New Yorkers wanted music “to be popular with the masses; but we think they should drink in its inspiration on week days, and unmingled with barning bad brandy, and cloudy, body-and-soul-killing Lager.”⁶¹ In the mid-nineteenth century many Americans—Protestants, especially—felt that German immigrant social culture threatened the sanctity of Sunday, and by extension, the pious, cohesive Christian society they saw as the bedrock of the American nation.

In broader ways, too, the American religious landscape was beginning to look bleak. By the 1840s, the Second Great Awakening was losing not only much of its original spiritual fire, but also the larger currents of millennial hope that had accompanied it. One of the motivating visions of the religious revivalists had been to unite all American Protestants under a common progressive mission, but that vision now began to crumble, especially as the issue of slavery came to divide Christians more and more deeply along moral and regional lines.⁶² Furthermore, one of the characteristic elements of the Awakening had been its heavy emphasis on the Word of God. The role of the preacher in proclaiming the Word, and of the congregation in hearing it, was understood as absolutely fundamental to inspiring religious feeling and, ultimately, to salvation.⁶³ But with the waning of the movement, the Word—Scripture—had lost its central

⁶⁰ John Koegel and Jonas Westover, “Beethoven and Beer: Orchestral Music in German Beer Gardens in Nineteenth-Century New York City,” in *American Orchestras in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. John Spitzer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 139.

⁶¹ Anon., “Musical Affairs,” *Home Magazine* Vol. 6 (Oct 1855), 231.

⁶² Mintz, *Moralists and Modernizers*, 54.

place in arousing spiritual enthusiasm. A wide range of commentators, from popular revivalists to more urbane advocates of social progress, began to find inspiration at least as much in the sounds of music as in the words of sermons. As I will propose in Chapter Two, “good” music began to represent for many a form of worship, a connection with divine energy in an increasingly secular and socially fractured society.

Another shift involved the attitude of religious reformers toward social reform. Reformers of the 1820s and 1830s had placed their hope for the salvation of society in the collective redemption of individuals from sinful behaviors, especially the evils of alcohol. By the 1840s and 1850s, such highly idealistic, personal, and spiritual calls to morality were yielding to more realistic, secular, and bureaucratic reform efforts. Reformers founded a multitude of societies and agencies for alleviating poverty and suffering: improving cleanliness to prevent the spread of disease, building housing, providing medical attention, and the like.⁶⁴ We can view these more systematic approaches to social reform as evidence of creeping questions about the presumed inevitability of national progress.

Musical Concerns

We have seen in the previous section that the early idealism about the possibilities afforded by American democracy gradually deteriorated in the 1840s and 1850s under mounting anxieties about sectionalism, slavery, social inequality, immigration, and the secularization of the country. These anxieties carried over into fears that American society was stratifying and dividing such

⁶³ Sari Altschuler, “‘He That Hath an Ear to Hear’: Deaf America and the Second Great Awakening,” *Disability Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (2011), <http://www.dsqsds.org/article/view/1368>. In his letter to the Romans, Paul wrote, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17, KJV). Hearing the word—as opposed to reading it or speaking it—was of such great importance that it was thought impossible for the deaf to be saved.

⁶⁴ Mintz, *Moralists and Modernizers*, 76–77.

that artistic culture was becoming limited in its audiences, discriminatory in its producers, and either too reliant or not reliant enough on European models. The concerns that American writers voiced about art music as an element of society—concerns that often contradicted one another—tended to fall into one of three major categories. First, some commentators worried that concert music in the United States did not adequately reflect the inclusive American ideal. Their vision was of a musical culture with aspirations to aesthetic excellence that simultaneously appealed to the common American, and was affordable to all, and repudiated elitism. The second major area of concern lay in the prevalence of European (particularly German) music and musicians in the United States. American composers and other cultural figures sometimes expressed resentment that foreign music and musicians were dominating American concert halls and concert repertory, and argued that this domination not only alienated American audiences unfamiliar with European art music, but also stifled American efforts at establishing a national sound and musical tradition. The third category of concern contradicted the previous one: another cadre of writers maintained that Americans were lacking in aesthetic taste, and should look to the venerable German musical heritage as an example instead of resisting European musical influence. Furthermore, these same commentators believed, American composers wrote too much “clap-trap” which threatened to lower the tastes of their audiences. Others lamented that the music one could truly call “popular”—minstrelsy, comic opera, dance music—failed to edify Americans and would not contribute to unifying and elevating Americans as a people.

During this era, even as Americans were increasingly exposed to European art music and were developing a taste for music as art rather than entertainment, concerns about its implications for American democratic ideals was also on the rise. Just as some elite American writers tended to idealize the degree of social equality they had or would achieve, they also

hoped that their musical culture would mirror the free, democratic, accessible society toward which they strove. When musical life seemed not to mirror that vision, it was cause for anxious comment, and often for open hand-wringing. The highly vaunted arrival of the Swedish soprano Jenny Lind on American shores in September 1850 evoked a wave of such worries in the press. A writer for the New York- and Boston-based magazine *The Independent* quoted from the *Congregationalist*, a Boston newspaper, about prohibitive costs to attend Lind's concert: "At these rates very few of our citizens can *afford* to hear Jenny Lind...[they] will be effectually barred the privilege by the present exorbitant price of tickets..."⁶⁵ Tickets to concerts in this period were frequently in the range of 50 cents to one dollar—not a small sum in an age when the average American employee earned seven dollars per week. But to attend a concert by Jenny Lind during her U.S. tour, concertgoers had to pay three or four dollars.

Still, the hype surrounding her visit was so high that many people of limited means nevertheless took the financial plunge and bought tickets to hear the "Swedish Nightingale."⁶⁶ As the *Congregationalist* made clear and the *Independent* highlighted, a sense of worry about the price of musical entertainment was becoming increasingly visible in the press during the 1840s and 1850s. This was true too of opera; numerous writers echoed the *Home Journal's* assertion that "Nothing is wanted to make the opera succeed in our country, but the best of troupes and the

⁶⁵ Anon., "Jenny Lind," *The Independent...Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts* Vol. 2, no. 96 (Oct. 3, 1850), 162.

⁶⁶ See Cavicchi, *Listening and Longing*, 14. Several public relations stunts accompanied Lind's American tour. The New Yorker named John Genin bid \$225 at an auction in New York City for a Lind concert ticket, and then a few weeks later the eccentric singer, writer, and composer of comic songs Ossian Dodge bid \$625 at an auction in Boston. These public-relations ploys set the value of fame in high relief, as well as the reality that very few could have afforded such extravagance (14–17). Advertisements in the *New York Daily Tribune* for Jenny Lind's concerts in Castle Garden in September of 1850 indicate that tickets to hear her averaged about \$3, although tickets were sold at a range of prices, anywhere from \$2–\$8 for regular seats and \$1 for the promenade. See for example "Amusements," *New York Daily Tribune*, September 10, 1850, 1, and "A String of Items," *The Daily Crescent* (New Orleans), September 28, 1850, 2.

smallest possible prices.”⁶⁷ Although in this period opera was largely understood as popular entertainment, Americans were just beginning to see it as something more than common entertainment, the contemporary discourse surrounding the price of operatic performances provides clear evidence of the importance of music’s financial accessibility in general in this period. Writing home from Leipzig, the American composer William Batchelder Bradbury complained that foreign soloists who concertized in the United States “can perform only to those who can pay their dollar per ticket. This is all very good and edifying to those who can afford to hear them; but our *people*, our ‘bone and sinew’ cannot and will not. Now let us have more good music ‘for the million’—music that all can understand, love, and *afford*, also.”⁶⁸

But why could so many people not afford a ticket to hear the Swedish Nightingale or other performers of “good,” uplifting music? With a strong current of moralistic judgment, the *Independent* writer sneered that “if men would spare from the disgusting weed, and poisonous liquors one-half of what they spend every month, there are few so poor as not to be able to hear Jenny Lind.”⁶⁹ The author claimed that all would eventually be granted an opportunity to attend a concert by this woman of “unimpeachable virtue”—if they behaved in a certain way. The explicit message was that if only Americans emulated Lind’s virtuous life, most of them would have no trouble coming up with the cash required to benefit from her musical and moral gifts. This conclusion harks back to the salient narrative of equality of opportunity that traces such deep roots in the American consciousness. According to this rationale, virtually everyone would have the chance to hear great and uplifting music if only they took the right steps.

⁶⁷ Anon., “Musical Affairs,” *Home Magazine* Vol. 5, no. 6 (June 1855), 400.

⁶⁸ William Batchelder Bradbury, “Music for the People,” *Home Journal* Vol. 33, no. 131 (August 12, 1848), 3. It is worth noting here that Bradbury was also a composer of hymns, and was likely sensitive to the possibility that music composed by native-born Americans might be displaced by European composers and performers.

⁶⁹ Anon., “Jenny Lind,” *The Independent...Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts* Vol. 2, no. 96 (Oct. 3, 1850), 162.

To be sure, the primary concern of the majority of the crowd clamoring for tickets to hear Lind may not have been to be morally and spiritually elevated, but simply to have a chance to witness and partake in the excitement over her celebrity status. Nevertheless, the conviction that Lind had embarked on a “mission” to uplift her audiences to a high plane of virtue remained strong among journalists, who along with advertisers helped to advance her celebrity through endorsing the idea that Lind was as much a moral guide as a brilliant musician. In advance of Lind’s arrival in the United States in 1850, a writer for the *New York Evangelist* attributed to Lind the statement that “music has a high and holy mission to perform, and we should not sing simply to amuse, but to purify, to elevate, to instruct.” The *Evangelist* writer then continued, “Have we not, then, much to expect from her mission to our country, and should not the lovers of purity, and of pure and elevated song, hold it as a great blessing?”⁷⁰ Lind’s own intentions in performing were after all quite secondary; what mattered was how she was portrayed in the press. If Lind was a moral guide, writers argued, it stood to reason that when she visited the United States, a nation that self-consciously strove for democracy as many people as possible should have the chance to hear her. Indeed, in this period and through c. 1860, the democratic ideal remained strong, and was expressed in ways that partly reflected new challenges to it.

Others worried openly about growing musical elitism, arguing that any truly great and democratic music would be supported by “the people.” A writer under the pen name of “Vale” expressed resentment in 1854 over the apparently increasing sense that “good, *scientific* music, to Yankees, is pearls before swine. Now, ‘rot your Italianos,’ I say, if their music is so scientific that it cannot touch the hearts of the ‘million.’ Must we therefore conclude the ‘million’ are without hearts?” With the expression “rot your Italianos,” Vale alluded to a famous anecdote related by Lord Byron. The poet had described a concert of florid Italian music at which a

⁷⁰ “Jenny Lind in America,” *The New York Evangelist* 21, no. 35 (August 29, 1850), 0-1.

provincial English mayoress articulated her populist attitudes, exclaiming, “Rot your Italianos! For my part I loves a simple Ballat!”⁷¹ Vale argued that “the greatest of composers have shown that no sacrifice of *science* is necessary in order to please the simple as well as the learned.” Furthermore, the author contended, the greatness of music could ultimately be measured only by the money it brought in from audiences.⁷² This sort of anti-elitist, populist thinking in regard to music was clearly in part a reaction to a sense of increasing cultural stratification. We see here a polarizing of attitudes, a certain resentment against what some saw as snobbish aristocratic posturing of the worst kind. For Vale, democratic Americans determined the “best” music with their feet and their willingness to pay, and should not bow to pretentious musical tastes. Of course, here Vale seems to have conflated elitist “scientific” music with all European concert music, a conflation that does not hold when we consider the huge popularity among all classes of Italian music of many sorts in nineteenth-century American culture—operatic and theatrical music, dance music, piano music, and so on. But Vale’s comments put into sharp relief two central concerns: first, how the masses could be exposed to art music, and second, whether art music was relevant to the masses.

⁷¹ Peter Cochran, “*Romanticism*”—and *Byron* (Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 96.

⁷² “Vale,” “A Prosing About Music,” *Spirit of the Times: A Chronicle of the Turf, Agriculture, Field Sports, Literature and the Stage* Vol. 24, no. 21 (July 8, 1854), 242. Five years earlier, Vale was making the same complaints in the same newspaper. In “Cursory Cogitations about ‘Things in General’” of January 1849, Vale rebuked the patrons of opera in New York for their hypocritical allegiance to the ideal of egalitarianism. Vale wrote, “What a robe of shreds and rags is our pretended code of distinctions in society! We boast that in these United States ‘all men are born free and equal’—no accidents of position, no possession of wealth, avail in the great struggle for honors or fame... So we pretend, but never practice... When, in that good day coming, character, virtue, and intelligence, shall be the claims to position in our social system, what a rattling among the dry bones will there be in high places...” Vale again professed a love for the simpler music of the masses: “I have no ‘chromatic ears,’ that can alone be tickled by some superhuman scraps of catgut. I like the good old ‘flat-footed’ music for the million, the homely, simple airs, which sink into the heart, such as were sung an hundred years ago, with moistened eyes, and will continue to be, till ‘the heavens are rolled together like a scroll,’” *Spirit of the Times* Vol. 18, no. 46 (Jan 6, 1849), 542.

Despite the ubiquity of Italian operatic music in this period, protests like Vale's were voiced often and as early as the 1830s. In 1839, a writer for the *New York Mirror* commented approvingly on a recent article from *Blackwood's*, an English magazine, which censured the recent popularity and affectation of fashionable foreign music—especially Italian opera. The author of the *Blackwood's* article described audiences at such fashionable concerts as if they were in a house of worship, hypocritically claiming to love and understand music beyond their ken: “They are alike most admiring and devout listeners to a service, of the meaning of which nine-tenths of them have no more comprehension than a cow has of mathematics.” The *New York Mirror* writer wrote in response “we must confess that we are Vandals enough to sympathise” with these sentiments.⁷³ Both authors evidently felt that the vogue for foreign music had corrupted the general taste for old “English ballads” and other simpler, seemingly less pretentious stylistic traditions. Vale, the *Blackwood's* writer and the *New York Mirror* correspondent all betrayed more than a hint of anti-Italian ethnic prejudice. But for the American writers, the concern was less about the presence of foreign music *per se* than about the frenzy to appear knowledgeable and elite—to the detriment of a sense of social unity out of genuine love for a shared musical life.

In a similarly populist vein, a music correspondent for the *Albion* in 1856 wrote a rambling piece about the current problems with the opera at the Academy of Music in New York City. In order to build the most respectable such institution, according to this writer, the prima donnas and other celebrity musicians should not dominate the bill; rather, the offerings should “burn with a steady light” of stable talent. “The masses in America are the true chord to strike. Democratic they are at heart; and albeit there is a varnish of exclusiveness in certain circles, we

⁷³ Anon., *New York Mirror* vol. 17, no. 16 (Oct. 12, 1839), 127. *Blackwood's Magazine* was published from 1817 to 1980 in Edinburgh and London.

do them the justice to believe that even there, if you scratch the aristocrat, you come to the democrat.”⁷⁴ For this writer, the great majority of Americans were populist democrats by virtue of being American, and thus warranted a more democratic art than the Academy of Music was promoting. The most expansive writers held a quite broad and generous conception of what counted as good, “democratic” music for the people: it might have included symphonies, overtures, popular ballads, operatic arias, and other genres.

The Philharmonic Society of New-York was also subject to criticism for its failure to cultivate the masses in its publicity and programming. In 1850, the music journal *Figaro!* published a biting sarcastic commentary on the organization’s exclusivity, elitism, and resultant low ticket sales:

We hear, by accident, that this Society still exists and actually gives a concert occasionally, taking great pains to keep the fact as much as possible from the knowledge of the public, in order to prevent anything like an increase of patronage to the institution, or improvement in the public taste for music. We learn that in these efforts the managers are succeeding to their hearts’ content, that the list of subscribers is in a rapid decline, and at their last concert the Apollo Room was about one-third full! Go on, gentlemen, and in another year or two the Philharmonic Society will be altogether unheard and unheard of.⁷⁵

The Philharmonic Society’s members and administration after 1848 consisted overwhelmingly of German immigrants, and so we might interpret this writer’s comments as an indictment of an institution that, in its European attitudes and personnel, had forgotten its duties to its democratic-minded American listeners. Its infrequent concerts—four or five per year—did little or nothing to reach a broader public.⁷⁶ Of course, the Philharmonic was far from the only orchestra offering concerts of instrumental music at mid-century. In the 1840s and into the 1850s, the number of

⁷⁴ Anon., “Music: Stradella and the German Opera,” *The Albion* Vol. 15, no. 44 (Nov. 1 1856), 8.

⁷⁵ *Figaro!* (December 20, 1850), 231, quoted in Vera Brodsky Lawrence, *Strong on Music: Reverberations* Vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 16.

⁷⁶ Preston, “American Orchestral Music,” xlv.

orchestral ensembles in the United States was noticeably increasing.⁷⁷ These included American organizations such as the St. Louis Musical Society Polyhymnia (established 1845) and the Classical Musical Society of New Orleans (established 1855); ensembles organized for opera performances; and European instrumental groups that toured the country, most prominently Jullien's orchestra. These ensembles performed a greater range of repertory than the Philharmonic (which was modeled on the European "society" orchestra, and not dependent on public patronage); while they did play more "classical" fare such as symphonies and overtures, they also included quadrilles, dances, and potpourris.⁷⁸ Enjoying tremendous popularity and success, Jullien's orchestra stood in stark contrast to an ensemble such as the Philharmonic Society, which seemed to many observers to betray the worst features musical elitism.

Some of the above concerns that implied a certain resentment against European music and its practitioners' apparent elitism resonated with our second broad category of worry: that Europeans, especially Germans, were coming to dominate and shape American musical culture to such an extent that American musicians and composers experienced serious difficulty in cultivating their own musical traditions. Indeed, in the realm of music, as in other cultural arenas, the mid- to late-nineteenth century saw a struggle by Americans to claim some measure of creative progress in the face of the overwhelming presence of European musical models. Those composers, musicians, and commentators fighting for recognition of music by the American-born sought to resist what they perceived as an invasion of foreign composition and musical influences that they felt prevented characteristically American traditions from taking root and

⁷⁷ Aside from the activities of major instrumental ensembles in metropolitan centers on the east coast, however, rather little is known about the performance of what we today think of as "art" music in the U.S. before the Civil War. Indeed, Preston notes that "we still do not know much about the public performance of concert music in urban areas outside of Boston and New York during the antebellum period. A great deal of research remains to be done" ("American Orchestral Music," xxviii fn66).

⁷⁸ Preston, "American Orchestral Music," xviii–xxxii.

flourishing. Evidently what would later come to be called the “melting pot” was not quite hot enough to overcome inherent differences between German and American musical cultures. Both sides included factions that resisted assimilation: the famously cliquish German immigrant and visiting musicians sometimes balked at consorting with their “uncultured” American counterparts, while the comparatively few American musicians and composers active at mid-century tended to resent the Teutonic domination of their musical culture.⁷⁹ These perceptions represented a potentially serious impediment to the goal of a cohesive musical life open to all participants, and thus ultimately posed a threat to a united and democratic nation.

The situation was complicated by the fact that—as subsequent chapters will show—a formidable and increasingly predominant cadre of American critics and commentators came to champion what they perceived as German music’s humanizing, elevating, and unifying potential.⁸⁰ But a number of American composers—while they certainly respected and appreciated this music, and indeed had largely learned their craft from it—felt its prevalence in their concert halls put American musical efforts at a distinct disadvantage. They were justified in their worries: most of the orchestral, chamber, and operatic music composed by native-born Americans in the nineteenth century did not gain a foothold in the performance repertory of the period (and still has not today).⁸¹ The predominance of European music, and the visible presence

⁷⁹ Ibid., xxxvii–xxxviii.

⁸⁰ Chapter Three will examine the widespread public acclaim for German music in American newspapers and magazines.

⁸¹ The neglect of works by nineteenth-century American composers is rapidly becoming rectified, at least in the scholarly literature if not in the performance canon. Such scholars as Michael Broyles, Denise von Glahn, Katherine Preston, Laura Moore Pruett, Douglas Shadle and others have laid invaluable groundwork for the serious investigation of concert music by American composers before 1900. Shadle’s recent book, *Orchestrating the Nation: The Nineteenth-Century American Symphonic Enterprise* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) sheds much-needed light on the now-largely forgotten American composers of symphonies in the nineteenth century, specifically why this music failed to achieve a place in the concert hall canon despite its enthusiastic public reception. Katherine Preston has released an edition of George Frederick Bristow’s Symphony no. 2, the *Jullien*,

of European performers, led to worries that American audiences would fetishize foreign music and musicians. As one commentator grumbled in the *Home Magazine* in 1855, “A performer, in order to take, must have a foreign name and a foreign accent... We trust the foreignism which pervades art in our country will soon be obliterated, and that American genius will have its deserts from Americans.”⁸² American composers’ meager representation in their own country’s concert-hall canon during the nineteenth century did not come about for lack of trying on the part of certain pioneering figures, in particular the American composers William Henry Fry (1813–1864) and George Frederick Bristow (1825–1898).

The tensions between newly arrived German musicians and American artists attempting to establish a distinctively American musical culture gained public expression especially in New York City, where many of the major American ensembles, composers, critics, and musical publications were based. In 1853 and 1854 a now-notorious and well-documented debate over the representation of American music in orchestral repertory seared the pages of the *New-York Musical World* and *DJM* driven by the likes of Fry, Bristow, the critic John Sullivan Dwight, and Richard Storrs Willis, who was at the time the editor of the *New-York Musical World*.⁸³ The terms of this specific dispute were relatively simple and straightforward, and while scholars have already devoted attention to the controversy, another look can help illustrate much broader conflicts over the state of concert music in antebellum America.⁸⁴ The debate itself represented only a small thread in the larger discourse on the subject in the American musical scene.

with A-R Editions (2011), as well as written liner notes for a new recording of the symphony performed by the Royal Northern Sinfonia on the New World Records label.

⁸² Anon., “Musical Affairs,” *Home Magazine* Vol. 5, no. 6 (June 1855), 400.

⁸³ The name of this journal changed numerous times; during the 1853–54 debate, it was officially known as *The Musical World and Times*.

The argument began in earnest when in January of 1854, Richard Storrs Willis in the *Musical World and Times* disparaged Fry's *Santa Claus: Christmas Symphony*, which had been commissioned by Jullien and premiered by his orchestra on Christmas Eve 1853. The disagreement boiled down to a difference of opinion over musical form: in essence, the critics felt that Fry's music did not possess sufficient "unity," while Fry resented the Philharmonic Society of New-York for its clear and worsening bias against American composers, as well as the use of Beethoven as the final standard against which to judge new American works.⁸⁵ Jullien, who had arrived in the fall of 1853 to tour the country with his famous orchestra of virtuosi, performed music by Bristow and Fry in New York and in other towns along the Eastern seaboard.⁸⁶ He had even commissioned a new symphony from Bristow and new orchestral works from Fry. This lavish support for native-born American musicians (by a European, no less) prompted Fry to heap criticism on the Philharmonic Society in the *New-York Tribune*, where he had a regular editorial outlet, for its failure to honor its documented promise to program at least one work composed in the United States each season. Fry praised Jullien for recognizing the talents of American composers and giving their work a chance to be heard.⁸⁷ Dwight then entered the fray, but swerved past the issue, arguing that the quality of music was determined by audience support it received over the long-term, meaning ultimately how well it withstood the

⁸⁴ For discussions of the debate and its broader context, see (among others) Douglas Shadle, *Orchestrating the Nation: The Nineteenth-Century American Symphonic Enterprise*; Katherine K. Preston, "American Orchestral Music at the Middle of the Nineteenth Century: Louis Antoine Jullien and George Bristow's *Jullien Symphony*," in *Symphony No. 2 in D. Minor, Op. 24 ("Jullien")*, by George Frederick Bristow, ed. Katherine K. Preston (Middleton, Wisconsin: A-R Editions, Inc. 2011), lxx–lxxvi; Vera Brodsky Lawrence, *Strong on Music: The New York Music Scene in the Days of George Templeton Strong*, 3 vols (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995–99 [1988]), II: 479–89; and Betty E. Chmaj, "Fry versus Dwight: American Music's Debate over Nationality," *American Music* 3, no. 1 (1985): 71–75.

⁸⁵ Preston, "American Orchestral Music," lxx–lxxi.

⁸⁶ Shadle, *Orchestrating the Nation*, 84.

⁸⁷ Chmaj, "Fry Versus Dwight," 71.

test of time. Fry shot back with the question of how audiences could come to any conclusions about the relative merits of musical works if they were not given an opportunity to hear them. Furthermore, Fry contended, the leaders of the Philharmonic and music critics who judged orchestral music by its adherence to the structural outlines of European works should have no basis to snub Bristow, whose music was conceived in the manner of Schumann and Mendelssohn.

Willis disagreed that the Philharmonic Society ignored Americans, citing the fact that important members of the society, including Bristow were Americans themselves.⁸⁸ At this point Bristow stridently denounced the Philharmonic and the critics in its corner for what he saw as their extreme bias in favor of German music, and their general neglect of American-made music. With an attitude that seemed to border on nativist hostility, he condemned the Philharmonic for being in thrall to an old-world police state:

If all [the Philharmonic Society's] artistic affections are unalterably German, let them pack back to Germany and enjoy the police and bayonets and aristocratic kicks and cuffs of that land, where an artist is a serf to a nobleman, as the history of all their great composers shows. America has made the political revolution which illumines the world, while Germany is still beshrouded with a pall of feudal darkness. While America has been thus far able to do the chief things for the dignity of man, forsooth she must be denied the brains for original Art, and must stand like a beggar, deferentially cap in hand, when she comes to compete with the ability of any dirty German village.⁸⁹

Bristow emphasized the political freedom of the United States, using it as a foil to highlight the hierarchical, politically restricted nature of German society. His words carried hints of Know-Nothingism, although we have no indications that Bristow was involved in that party. Shadle argues that for the most part the debate ultimately “had little to do with music,” and instead

⁸⁸ Preston, “American Orchestral Music,” lxii–lxiii.

⁸⁹ “The Philharmonic Society—Letter from Mr. Bristow, New York, Feb. 27th, 1854,” *New-York Musical World* Vol. 8, no. 9 (March 3, 1854), 100.

reflected broader antagonisms between native-born Americans and the immigrants who were flooding U.S. shores.⁹⁰ But while it is important to recognize that these larger national hostilities certainly played a role in the rhetoric employed here, in its initial stages the debate *did* in fact have to do essentially with music rather than with national sentiment. Fundamental disagreements over issues of musical form, universality, canon formation, and measures of aesthetic quality were involved in this exchange. It was only when the argument switched to the repertory of the Philharmonic Society that the national origin of the composers programmed by the Society became a point of contention.

For one thing, the European musical tradition writ large—including German, French, and Italian strains—was simply inescapable when it came to any discussion of concert programming. By the 1850s, a concert canon had developed on both sides of the Atlantic. Orchestral and vocal music by the likes of Beethoven, Haydn, Mozart, Handel, Mendelssohn, Auber, Gluck, Donizetti, Weber, and others were well established in European concert halls and opera houses. This same basic repertory prevailed in the major American concert venues, which often echoed British and German programming choices. The growing status of the symphony as a peculiarly German genre led ensembles such as the Philharmonic Society of New-York to program German symphonies—even those of minor composers such as Kalliwoda—to the exclusion of examples from other national traditions. As Shadle notes, when so many critics and concert programmers felt that the German symphony was the preeminent model for the genre, it was reasonable to ask, “why look elsewhere for untested products?”⁹¹

⁹⁰ Shadle, *Orchestrating the Nation*, 88.

⁹¹ Douglas Shadle, “Music of a More Perfect Union: Symphonic Constructions of American National Identity, 1840–1870” (PhD diss. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2010), 6.

This state of affairs boded ill for composers such as Fry, whose music largely did not conform to formal designs typical of the German orchestral music performed by the Philharmonic. His “Santa Claus” symphony, for example, is what we might today consider a work of “program music” (the term did not come into existence until 1855).⁹² The work presented a narrative, and did not observe European conventions of symphony writing. The fact that Fry called the work a “symphony” even as he patently flouted symphonic convention led to a critical controversy over the merits of the work, and whether it counted as a “symphony” at all.⁹³ Some reviews found the work too frivolous.⁹⁴ Fry’s programmatic music might favorably have been compared with the programmatic works of Mendelssohn, Spohr, Weber, Berlioz, and other European composers that the Philharmonic often performed.⁹⁵ But it was starting to appear to Fry that the Philharmonic snubbed him deliberately for being an American.⁹⁶ In fact, since their founding the Philharmonic had performed only one orchestral work by an American—Bristow’s *Concert Overture*.⁹⁷ But the Philharmonic largely ignored Bristow, too, even though

⁹² Douglas Shadle, “How Santa Claus Became a Slave Driver: The Work of Print Culture in a Nineteenth-Century Musical Controversy,” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 9, no. 4 (2014): 508–9.

⁹³ Shadle makes the important observation that this controversy arose several months before the appearance of Eduard Hanslick’s *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* (“On the Musically Beautiful”) in September of 1854. Interestingly, then, an American debate over the aesthetic worth of what would come to be called “absolute” and “program” music prefigured the “War of the Romantics” in Europe that would reach its zenith in subsequent years (“How Santa Claus Became a Slave Driver,” 503).

⁹⁴ The *Santa Claus* found its main critic in Richard Storrs Willis, editor of the New York’s *Musical World and Times*, who called it “a good Christmas piece: but hardly a composition to be gravely criticized like an earnest work of Art” (“Musical News from Everywhere. New York,” *Musical World and Times* [January 7, 1853], 6). Other critics included Charles Burkhardt, who called the *Santa Claus* a “capital musical Christmas piece” and a “*pièce d’occasion*” in “Music. Jullien’s Concerts: Mr. Fry’s New Symphony,” *The Albion* Vol. 12, no. 52 (December 31, 1853), 632, and anonymous critics in the *New York Times* and *New York Musical Review and Choral Advocate*.

⁹⁵ The Philharmonic performed works of Mendelssohn and Spohr frequently, and first performed a work by Berlioz (*Les francs-juges* Overture) in March 1846. The Philharmonic also performed Berlioz’s *Overture to King Lear*, Op. 4 in November 1846 and November 1853. See New York Philharmonic, Leon Levy Digital Archives, <http://archives.nyphil.org/index.php>.

⁹⁶ Preston, “American Orchestral Music,” lxiv–lxv.

his music followed German symphonic conventions to a great extent. Dwight even admitted to assessing Bristow's music negatively "without having heard a note of it."⁹⁸

In fact, we might justifiably maintain that critics such as Dwight and Willis talked out of two sides of their mouths. As Katherine Preston notes, on the one hand, when American composers wrote music in the cultivated European tradition, American and European observers alike sometimes disparaged it either for what they saw as its too-close resemblance to the works of the European masters, or its failure to equal the quality of those works. But when American composers attempted to set themselves apart stylistically from their European counterparts, those same critics complained that the music did not match the sophistication and originality found in works by European composers, or failed to paint their themes in vivid enough ways.⁹⁹

The laments that arose over these circumstances remain familiar even today: the canon formation of the nineteenth century created a core performance repertory (and musicological focus) in both Europe and the United States that was heavily German—except in the case of opera—and resulted in the marginalization not only of works by composers from other backgrounds, but of living composers.¹⁰⁰ The "great transformation" of musical taste that

⁹⁷ Preston, "American Orchestral Music," lxxiii.

⁹⁸ "The Philharmonic Society—Letter from Mr. Bristow, New York, Feb. 27th, 1854," *New-York Musical World* Vol. 8, no. 9 (March 3, 1854), 100. By 1854, the New York Philharmonic had only performed Bristow's music in concert once (the *Concert Overture* op. 3 in January 1847, which was, incidentally, the first time the Philharmonic programmed a work composed by a native-born American (Preston, "American Orchestral Music at the Middle of the Nineteenth Century," xxxi).

⁹⁹ See Preston, "American Orchestral Music," xxxiv, in reference to the critical response to Bristow's *Concert Overture* Op. 3, performed by the Philharmonic Society in January 1847.

¹⁰⁰ Discussing the problems Dvořák and other non-German composers experienced in being taken seriously as artists, Richard Taruskin describes this kind of Germanocentric nationalism in music as a "double-bind." "Without the native costume [of nationalist stylistic markers]," he observes, "a 'peripheral' composer could never achieve even secondary canonical rank, but with it he could never achieve more," in "'Nationalism': Colonialism in Disguise?" in *The Danger of Music and Other Anti-Utopian Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 26. This situation is rapidly changing, at least in the academic realm. Still, many worry that the repertory of most ensembles that perform "classical" music—still heavily skewed toward the German—continues to influence both the general public and musicologists to think of the German canon as the world's default form of cultivated music, and

William Weber has identified, occurring over the greater part of the nineteenth century, indeed led to the “canonization” in the concert hall of a certain group of mostly deceased composers.¹⁰¹ But in the mid-nineteenth century—when in some ways the canon was still fluid—the primary issue for American composers was not that their works were not being admitted to the developing canon, but that they were not even receiving performances. Like Dwight, a writer for *Putnam’s Monthly Magazine* apparently missed Fry’s main concern that his and other American composers’ works were not receiving a fair hearing: “why does [Fry] not go on composing, and leave his works to appeal to the discriminating and thoughtful both of this and of all ages?”¹⁰² Clearly Fry, Bristow, and their American contemporaries faced a difficult battle.¹⁰³

One prominent American composer of this era whose name was noticeably absent from the public debate was Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829–1869). What allowed him some degree of recognition in his native country may have been the very obvious stylistic differences of his music from that of Europeans, his refusal to engage in public disputes with critics, his positive reception during his eleven-year European sojourn (a reception highly vaunted in the United States), and his hailing from the distinctive cultural scene of New Orleans. But even Gottschalk suffered relative disregard from fellow Americans. As one contemporaneous commentator complained about Gottschalk’s reception in the United States, “our people are disposed to give

to analyze all other musics according to that standard. Certainly to some extent this is true, especially when we observe ethnomusicologists using traditional European notational methods to communicate the music of very different cultures.

¹⁰¹ See William Weber’s *The Great Transformation of Musical Taste: Concert Programming from Haydn to Brahms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Weber makes the important point that “it is easy to glide through the first half of the nineteenth century without recognizing how massive a set of changes was occurring in the most fundamental aspects of repertory, taste, and musical values” (3).

¹⁰² Anon., “Music,” *Putnam’s Monthly Magazine of American Literature, Science, and Art* Vol. 3, no. 17 (May 1854), 563.

¹⁰³ For a clear account of the battle as it played out in the press, see Preston, “American Orchestral Music at the Middle of the Nineteenth Century.”

but feeble support to the best native genius, while they are ready to encourage the most indifferent foreign artist.”¹⁰⁴ But the *Home Magazine* commentator clearly felt that Americans did not sufficiently support their musical countrymen.

In their protestations against German hegemony in American musical life, Fry and Bristow were in many ways echoing arguments that had been made before by others concerned about American cultural independence. The Transcendentalists, who claimed Dwight as one of their number, represented a major voice in the call for a peculiarly American creative expression. In his 1837 speech “The American Scholar,” Ralph Waldo Emerson had stated that “Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close. The millions, that around us are rushing into life, cannot always be fed on the mere remains of foreign harvests.”¹⁰⁵ Though Emerson had rather little appreciation or liking for music, his sentiments regarding the need for national self-reliance in cultural matters followed a line of thinking that went back to the earliest days of the American republic. Promoters of American cultural independence more vociferously expressed these concerns as the nineteenth century wore on, however, especially as their national and social unity appeared increasingly threatened by immigration and the conflicts over slavery in the 1840s and 1850s.

Even so, an American sense of overall inferiority with regard to music remained salient throughout this period and into the latter part of the century.¹⁰⁶ This attitude was evident in the

¹⁰⁴ Anon., “Musical Affairs,” *Home Magazine* Vol. 6 (October 1855), 231. One of the difficulties of reception studies lies in the fact that the historical record rarely preserves much information about audience reaction, as opposed to the critical reaction, to a work.

¹⁰⁵ Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The American Scholar,” speech given to the Phi Beta Kappa Society at the First Parish in Cambridge, Massachusetts, August 31, 1837. In Emerson, *The American Scholar: Self-reliance, Compensation*, ed. Orren Henry Smith (New York: American Book Company, 1911), 22.

¹⁰⁶ By mid-century, this American inferiority complex was perhaps most conspicuous in discussions about music. American intellectuals and other cultural elites felt more or less proud about their progress in other realms such as literature and visual art. As one writer for the *American Whig Review* noted in 1852, “Painting and statuary are

many commentators who claimed that Americans in general demonstrated bad aesthetic taste or none at all, or were simply an unmusical people who required the help of Europeans aesthetic missionaries. According to our commentator Vale, “the remark that ‘there is no musical taste in America,’ has been so often made, that in the minds of many it has become ‘true as a proverb.’”¹⁰⁷ The American composer and musician William Batchelder Bradbury wrote home from Leipzig in 1848, “until we can raise up our own native musicians, will we not encourage the German musician—intelligent, industrious, and universally respected—to our shores? Why shall we not say to them, ‘Come over and help us’ cultivate a taste for good music among the people.”¹⁰⁸ Batchelder’s explicit view was that Americans required training, a certain period of apprenticeship under those whom he perceived as the European masters of the musical art.

Commentators also worried about a lack of aesthetic discrimination among Americans, and that this lack might not be rectified for many years. As the *Message Bird* asserted in 1850, Americans could not be called musical “so long as the real, genuine, deep love of *music in itself* so often makes place for mere superficial attachment to the accessories, the associations, or the fashionable novelties of the art proper... That only is a truly musical people, which has this genuine interest in *music for its own sake*.”¹⁰⁹ In order for Americans to become truly musical, such critics declared, they would need to appreciate it in a “pure” way, ignoring the glittering temptations of celebrity divas, virtuosi, or the vicissitudes of fashion. Lamenting that a

acquiring honorable distinction among us; but where sits music?” See “Critical Notices: Music, Retrospective and Prospective,” *The American Whig Review* Vol. 16, no. 1 (July 1852), 92. But one might easily argue that an American inferiority complex with regard to high culture persisted well into the twentieth, or even twenty-first, centuries.

¹⁰⁷ “Vale,” “A Prosing About Music,” *Spirit of the Times: A Chronicle of the Turf, Agriculture, Field Sports, Literature and the Stage* Vol. 24, no. 21 (July 8, 1854), 242.

¹⁰⁸ William Batchelder Bradbury, “Music for the People,” Letter from Leipzig, *Home Journal* Vol. 33, no. 131 (August 12, 1848), 3.

¹⁰⁹ Anon., “Musical Tastes and Prejudices,” *The Message Bird: A Literary and Musical Journal* Vol. 2, no. 25 (August 1, 1850), 405. Second emphasis added.

permanent Italian opera company had still failed to take root in New York, a writer for *Holden's Dollar Magazine* asserted in 1848 that Italian opera was “caviare to the multitude,” while “the African Opera, which is assuredly the very lowest circle of musical art, [has] been in the most eminent degree successful in this city.”¹¹⁰ Others wondered whether Americans could possibly value the arts as cultivated in Europe for many hundreds of years. The *Albion* asked, “Can a man who has been brought up in our western wilds, the backwoods of America, whose tastes and enjoyments are necessarily of a corresponding character, be suddenly transplanted to the Imperial City [Rome], and at once appreciate the wondrous conceptions and still more wonderful productions of Michael Angelo or Raphael?”¹¹¹

Some recent European arrivals to the United States expressed still more serious doubts about the aesthetic discrimination of Americans. The German Forty-Eighter and composer Charles Ansorge (1817–1866) remarked in 1859 that most Americans regarded music more as a source of steady, cheap amusement than of divine inspiration: “perhaps, the large majority do not regard music as a ‘heaven-born art,’ but, to speak with the poet, only as a ‘cow which gives them milk and butter.’”¹¹² In a similarly patronizing tone, the female German writer and abolitionist Otilie Assing, who immigrated to the United States in 1852, declared the next year, “I would feel more comfortable here if there were more paintings, better drama, and less religion!”¹¹³ During his American tour in 1848 and 1849, the Austro-Hungarian conductor Josef Gungl commented in a Berlin music journal that Madam Musica in America “nourishes herself on sugar

¹¹⁰ Anon., “Topics of the Month,” *Holden's Dollar Magazine of Criticisms, Biographies, Sketches, Essays, Tales, Reviews, Poetry, Etc.*, Vol. 1, no. 6 (June 1848), 379.

¹¹¹ Anon., “Music,” *The Albion* Vol. 12, no. 32 (Aug. 6, 1853), 380.

¹¹² Charles Ansorge, “Music at Home and in Schools,” *Massachusetts Teacher and Journal of Home and School Education* Vol. 12, no. 5 (May 1859), 174.

¹¹³ Quoted in Honeck, *We are the Revolutionists*, 22.

teats.”¹¹⁴ And as he racked his brain to recall the name of a single American composer, one Ampere, a French visitor to the United States in the early 1850s, rather sneeringly exclaimed, “It is easier [for Americans] to unharness the horses of European singers and to pay \$1,000 for a concert ticket, than to possess musical taste.”¹¹⁵

In some cases, native composers were blamed for failing to cultivate more refined tastes in their audiences. *The Albion* gave a scathing assessment of William Henry Fry’s music, describing the composer as “the avowed champion of the very school of music, which is of all others the most calculated to destroy any genuine love for the art and any real enjoyment of it.” The writer denied that Fry’s work contained any hint of “real music;” it was too suffused with “chromatics and clap trap, and utter discord.” Presumably the “school of music” to which the writer referred was what would become known as the programmatic, narrative type—Europe’s “music of the future” steered by the likes of Berlioz, Liszt, and Wagner—as opposed to works by deceased composers of the past, such as Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. Judging that Fry had properly recognized that the orchestral music of the time represented the summit of human musical achievement, the *Albion* writer pronounced that the German sort surpassed all others, for “it is a thing of the purest intellectual life and beauty,” unlike Fry’s, which was “pernicious” to the interests of the masses.¹¹⁶ One irony here was that the *Albion* writer was not only condemning Fry in this analysis, but (probably unintentionally) his European contemporaries in the *Zukunftsmusik* movement. Fry took the same basic position as these foreign composers, who

¹¹⁴ “Josef Gung’l on Musical Taste in America,” from the *Neue Berliner Musikzeitung*, Feb. 4, 1849, trans. (?) J.S. Dwight, *DJM* vol. 2, no. 11 (Dec. 18, 1852), 83.

¹¹⁵ Anon., “Ampere in Philadelphia,” *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature* Vol. 30, no. 1 (Sept 1853), 52. Translated from the *Revue des deux Mondes*.

¹¹⁶ Anon., “Music,” *The Albion* Vol. 11, no. 50 (Dec. 11, 1852) 596. I have not been able to identify this critic.

all advocated the development of novel musical structures and the fusion of the arts, rather than musical “purity.”

The same perceptions that led this observer to worry about the effects of Fry’s music on the masses stoked fears that the types of music most popular with American audiences were not those that would best facilitate social harmony and moral uplift. Here again the case of Jenny Lind is revealing; her U.S. tour offers a prism through which we may investigate many dimensions of mid-century American musical culture. Lind’s 1850 arrival and subsequent concert tour—brilliantly orchestrated by P.T. Barnum—generated a frenzy of publicity (dubbed “Lindmania”), much of it focused on Lind as a virtuous woman and a musical missionary.¹¹⁷ In a paean to the powers of music, the author of a letter to the editor of the *New York Tribune* hailed Jenny Lind as a gift from heaven, sent down to earth to bring social peace. But this letter writer was troubled by one aspect of Lind’s performance: her choice of repertory. The author felt that “it is impossible for Jenny Lind to perform her *full* mission, so long as she confines herself to ballads, the music of which [is] so servilely adapted to a merely *acquired* taste, and so foreign to the present great aspirations of humanity, as many of her songs have been...let the bulk of her music represent the gushing aspirations of the great heart of mankind at this age of moral, social

¹¹⁷ Again, how Lind herself conceived of her mission is secondary. The *New York Evangelist* had her state: “I always felt, as I do now, that music is divine, that it is from heaven, that there is no manner of sin or wrong in it, and that it should not be debased, nor be made the instrument of evil. Music has a high and holy mission to perform, and we should not sing simply to amuse, but to purify, to elevate, to instruct,” Vol. 21, no. 35 (August 29, 1850), 1. The *Evangelist* writer then continued: “Have we not, then, much to expect from her mission to our country, and should not the lovers of purity, and of pure and elevated song, hold it as a great blessing?” Still, Lind’s public image was certainly shaped largely by her promoters and the press, Daniel Cavicchi describes the tactics Barnum employed to excite the public about the “Swedish Nightingale’s” visit—he “arranged song-writing contests, held massive public rallies, and secured Lind’s endorsement for products in local shops.” He quotes Barnum’s boast that “We had Jenny Lind gloves, Jenny Lind bonnets, Jenny Lind riding hats, Jenny Lind, shawls, mantillas, robes, chairs, sofas, pianos—in fact, every thing was Jenny Lind” (Cavicchi, *Listening and Longing*, 15). This was typical “puff” that would have been true about many very famous singers of the period, including the operatic sopranos Henriette Sontag, Marietta Alboni, Teresa Parodi, and Adelina Patti. Lind’s visit to the U.S. is especially remembered today largely because of Barnum’s involvement and the fact that her concerts were extraordinarily highly anticipated.

and spiritual regeneration.”¹¹⁸ The letter writer did not specify what repertory Lind *should* sing, only that it should be aesthetically and morally inspiring. The clear message was that Lind’s repertory too often did not do justice to the unifying, uplifting spirit in which she delivered it.

How did American observers and publicists deal with these concerns about music and their expanding society? Ultimately, positive attitudes toward the value of art—German instrumental art music, especially—came to predominate in the public discourse. Critics portrayed this music as a central means by which progress toward social unity and democratic egalitarianism might be achieved. They accomplished this, at least rhetorically, by appealing to several different but closely related themes, each of which I discuss in the following chapters. Perhaps the most salient theme concerned the idea that “good” music—meaning especially instrumental art music—had mysterious, inherent connections with the spiritual world. This art could thus unite listeners in the experience of divine harmony, revealing the equality of all in the eyes of God.

¹¹⁸ F., “Music, Natural and Artificial—Jenny Lind and her True Mission,” Letter to the Editor, *New-York Tribune* (December 10, 1850), 6. The term “ballads” is odd here and would seem to suggest that the letter writer was unfamiliar with musical terminology. This interpretation seems incorrect, however, given that earlier in the letter the author explained the structure of the diatonic scale and the production of sound through vibrations in the air. We can conclude that by “ballads” the letter writer probably meant popular Italian opera arias that were highly tuneful—such as the ubiquitous aria “Casta diva” from Bellini’s opera *Norma*. This and other tremendously successful arias had become so familiar to American ears that they were evidently beginning to take on the connotation of “popular,” and therefore for some, morally bankrupt. What the letter writer meant by a “merely *acquired* taste” is more ambiguous, but seems to refer again to the highly florid Italian aria style, which was seen not as “natural” but as “artificial” and therefore an “acquired taste.”

CHAPTER TWO

AN APPEAL TO THE SPIRITUAL IN MUSIC: AMERICAN *KUNSTRELIGION* AND DEMOCRACY

During the revolutionary upheavals of the decades around 1800, European attitudes about the social role and uses of music underwent a veritable transformation. Critics and philosophers began to accord to instrumental music a status equal to if not superior to vocal music. Concert music in general was no longer relegated to ordinary entertainment, and its composers were becoming recognized as much more than mere servants. In the minds of some critics, instrumental music overtook vocal music to sit atop the musical hierarchy.¹ Although opera would maintain its supreme position in Europe throughout the nineteenth century, the argument for instrumental music's value was astonishing and unprecedented at the time. These developments would have an incalculable influence on the perception and reception of music throughout the Western world, the effects of which are still very much in evidence today. Of the many aesthetic and philosophical implications of this musical revolution, one in particular—the growth of *Kunstreligion*—deserves attention here, as it had an especially far-reaching impact on the development of musical life in nineteenth-century America.

In German-speaking lands around 1800, a complex of related beliefs surrounding the fine arts and their association with the divine coalesced under the rubric *Kunstreligion* (“art religion”)

¹ Prominent studies in English on these developments in musical aesthetics around 1800 include Mark Evan Bonds, *Music as Thought: Listening to the Symphony in the Age of Beethoven* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Bonds, “Idealism and the Aesthetics of Instrumental Music at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 50, no. 2/3 (Summer-Autumn 1997): 387–420; and Weber, *Great Transformation of Musical Taste*.

among philosophers and thinkers on aesthetics.² The term referred in the most basic sense to the idea that artworks are in some way divine. Those who subscribed to the ideas of musical *Kunstreligion* expressed a variety of related convictions about the ways in which the facets of musical life—composers, concerts, and compositions—directly or indirectly channeled the divine, possessed spiritual properties, and brought listeners closer to the spiritual world. *Kunstreligion* arose out of the interplay among a cluster of historical circumstances in place around 1800, including the impulse of Romanticism reacting against eighteenth-century Enlightenment rationalism, the growing interest in spiritual experience as a form of knowledge, increasing attention to the musical sublime, and the emergence of the work-concept and related ideas such as formalism in music discourse and criticism.³

As Elizabeth Kramer eloquently explains in her dissertation on the subject, *Kunstreligion* has been employed since its inception by many writers as a “catch-all notion” to “connote a vague connection between art and spirituality.” Rather than perpetuating this ambiguous definition of the concept, we should attempt to understand it in its original philosophical context.⁴ *Kunstreligion* allowed for two primary ways of understanding the relationship between music and the spiritual world: musical works as themselves divine, or as “striking manifestations

² The first known instance of the term in print occurred in 1799 in Friedrich Schleiermacher’s *Über die Religion: Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* (see Elizabeth Kramer, “The Idea of *Kunstreligion* in German Musical Aesthetics of the Early Nineteenth Century” [PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2005], 3).

³ Kramer, “The Idea of *Kunstreligion*,” 11–15. Lydia Goehr has formulated the idea of the “work-concept” to describe how musicians and critics came to understand and write about musical works in the West after 1800. For Goehr, the “work-concept” emerged as a “regulative” force dominating how individual musical works became reified, cemented as virtually sacred texts, and included in a canon of performance. See Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), esp. chapter four, “The Central Claim.” “Formalism” here refers to a mode of aesthetic critique that derives meaning from the formal aspects of a musical work. This kind of analysis considers the work as an abstract structure, and strengthens interpretations of music as belonging to a pure, “ideal” realm.

⁴ Kramer, “The Idea of *Kunstreligion*,” 17.

of the divine,” that is, as windows into the divine realm.⁵ Furthermore, *Kunstreligion* could also entail the belief that musical experience was similar to religious experience in its ritual, its material relics, its quiet reverence, and its “worship” of a creator (in the case of music, the composer-genius; in the case of religion, the deity).⁶ It is also important to note that the “religious” and the “spiritual” were not so neatly divided in the early nineteenth century, when *Kunstreligion* began to spread. Thus in many ways conceiving of musical experience as a “spiritual” kind of experience also brought strongly religious—and divine—associations.⁷

In broader European culture during the early nineteenth century, *Kunstreligion* had the effect of gradually altering public perceptions of what cultivated music could be. Where it had earlier been recognized as a form of refined entertainment, the literate musical tradition increasingly took on prestige as an art with ethical and spiritual associations. Thanks in part to an active transatlantic literary exchange, by the mid-nineteenth century, cultivated music in the United States had likewise attained an unprecedented status as not only an art, but as a portal to the world of the spirit, among some music critics and general writers. A wide range of commentators came to describe art music as a divine gift, one that uplifted and improved the lives of listeners. A distinctive form of *Kunstreligion* emerged in the United States during the mid-nineteenth century. The different contexts and historical forces at play meant that *Kunstreligion* performed a unique cultural role in the country’s social landscape. I argue that in the American environment, the presence of *Kunstreligion* was intimately associated with the view that certain kinds of music could be a powerful force for democratic progress and social egalitarianism.

⁵ Kramer, “The Idea of *Kunstreligion*,” 1.

⁶ Kramer, “The Idea of *Kunstreligion*,” 19.

⁷ See Kramer, “The Idea of *Kunstreligion*,” 7, fn 10.

This chapter will first provide an overview of the historical circumstances that led to the American adoption of *Kunstreligion* during the first half of the nineteenth century. I will explore an early and prominent expression of American *Kunstreligion*: that which arose in the activities and writings of the New England Transcendentalists. John Sullivan Dwight, the most musically inclined of the Transcendentalist thinkers, merits special attention because his rhetoric was thoroughly laced with the language of *Kunstreligion*. Finally, through an investigation of broad forums for public discourse throughout the 1840s and 1850s—not only music journals but general interest magazines, including publications aimed at women—this chapter will demonstrate how various expressions of musical *Kunstreligion* rippled more widely through American culture during these decades. Commentators placed most of their emphasis on instrumental music in discussing music's spiritual powers. By virtue of its wordless, abstract quality and hence its capacity to transcend divisions of class, language, and nationality, instrumental music appeared to function as a means of sacred communion for individuals and for groups, as well as a way for all souls to experience the spiritual in an equally inspiring and uplifting way.

An Emerging Environment for American *Kunstreligion*

A variety of influences had combined by the 1840s to predispose Americans—at least the more literate and cultivated classes—to embrace their own form of *Kunstreligion*. In the broadest terms, the stage was set by an erosion of the boundary between sacred and secular realms of experience over the course of the first half of the century. As Daniel Cavicchi cogently explains in his monograph on listening practices in the era of P.T. Barnum, middle-class audiences made little distinction among modes of listening in the theater, concert hall, lecture hall, or church

sanctuary. The prevalence of oratory and rhetorical demonstrativeness in both the theater and in church, the necessity of mixed-use facilities, the growing professionalization of music in all performance contexts during the early to mid-nineteenth century: these and other confounding factors rendered clear divisions between sacred and secular modes of listening difficult if not impossible. Such distinctions blurred not only in the more or less public domains of theater, lecture hall, and church, but also in the concert hall.⁸ One result was that concertgoers now began to listen in ways that were closer to the experiences of churchgoers. In the eyes of many observers, the right kinds of music—including instrumental music with few direct connections to traditional forms of worship—could in practice afford sorts of inspiration that traditional modes of religious worship could not. Because its non-verbal, non-doctrinal ideality by definition carried no specific social or class-conscious associations, instrumental music could at least in theory speak spiritually to and for the soul of *every* listener. The interpretation of art music through a religious or devotional lens could thus reinforce the Christian belief that social class had no bearing on any person's potential for salvation.

This nineteenth-century blurring of boundaries between sacred and secular music owed much, especially in its earlier phases, to the activities of composer and pedagogue Lowell Mason (1792–1872). Mason exercised an enormous influence on the practice of Protestant church music and music education in the United States, and Michael Broyles and Carol Pemberton have done much to enrich our understanding of Mason's place in the nineteenth-century American musical landscape.⁹ But, as Pemberton and Harry Eskew note, Mason's legacy has “generally been

⁸ See Cavicchi, *Listening and Longing*, 59–74.

⁹ Of the more recent literature, see Michael Broyles, “Lowell Mason on European Church Music and Transatlantic Cultural Identification: A Reconsideration,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 38, no. 2 (Summer, 1985): 316–48; *A Yankee Musician in Europe: The 1837 Journals of Lowell Mason* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1990); and Carol Pemberton, *Lowell Mason: His Life and Work* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1985);

regarded as a mixed blessing,” partly as the result of the common view that Mason’s work represented a barrier to the flourishing of an American musical tradition, even while he was central to the institution of music education in American public schools. Mason did not encourage an American school of composition in either sacred or secular domains but instead called for the abandonment of the vernacular, amateur, and relatively unlearned sacred music and performance styles developed by William Billings (1746–1800) and his contemporaries. Mason wished, rather, to professionalize both the repertory and the performance of sacred music. Regardless of the extent to which his work actually contributed to the elevation of American musical standards, it certainly did much to bestow a spiritual aura even upon ostensibly secular music.¹⁰

Mason set out to accomplish his goals in two ways: first, from the 1820s to the 1870s he produced collections of sacred music, arranging melodies from European art music (including that of Haydn and Mozart) to be sung to the words of psalms and hymns. His arrangements proved highly successful and congregations employed them widely. Second, Mason was a pioneer in the arena of American music education, founding the Boston Academy of Music in 1833 with George James Webb and organizing annual conventions to train music teachers from across the nation. Mason also helped to introduce a music curriculum into the Boston public schools as part of his attempt to raise the overall standard of musical knowledge, skill, and taste among the general population.¹¹

Lowell Mason: A Bio-Bibliography (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), and “‘Singing Merrily, Merrily, Merrily’: Songs for the Skeptics of 1838,” *American Music* 6, no. 1 (Spring, 1988): 74–87.

¹⁰ *Grove Music Online*, s.v. “Lowell Mason,” by Harry Eskew and Carol Pemberton, accessed March 14, 2014.

¹¹ Eskew and Pemberton, “Lowell Mason.”

In his project to reform sacred music, Mason worked alongside the American composer, church musician, and writer Thomas Hastings (1784–1872).¹² It is not entirely clear why Hastings’s legacy has been overwhelmingly overshadowed by Mason’s in scholarship on nineteenth-century American sacred music; one reason may be that Mason gained greater prominence through his performance activities and published works. The two men promoted the professionalization of sacred music in terms of both repertory and performance, but they differed in one major respect. While Mason felt strongly that sacred music would be most effectively improved through the use of European-derived melodies and harmonic models, Hastings, while open to the use of those models, felt even more strongly that a distinct and unique American style of psalmody and hymnody should constitute the ultimate goal of sacred music reform. Mason’s approach eventually prevailed, and his “Europeanization” and stylistic secularization of sacred music brought countless ramifications for music in the United States more generally.¹³

Nevertheless, the acclaim for Mason and his work to reform sacred music was widespread and enthusiastic as early as the 1820s, a decade during which he published *The Boston Handel and Haydn Society Collection of Church Music* (1822) and led the Handel and Haydn Society to prominence, among other activities. When Mason released his *Cantica Laudis, or the American Book of Church Music* with George James Webb in 1850, New York’s *The Independent* reviewed it as a collection of the loftiest taste. The work “evinces an acquaintance and familiarity with the great masters, both of olden and modern times, which few men have ever attained... Beautiful specimens are found in its pages from Handel, Haydn, Gluck, Mozart,

¹² Hastings published the first edition of his well-known *Dissertation on Musical Taste* in 1822. It represented the first major discourse on the subject of musical taste and analysis issued in the United States. See Hastings, *Dissertation on Musical Taste, or General principles of Taste Applied to the Art of Music*, new introduction by James E. Dooley (New York: Da Capo Press, 1974) [1822].

¹³ To be sure, Mason opposed the use of secular music for religious purposes. Nevertheless, I maintain that his willingness to adapt secular music for worship inevitably had effects in the opposite direction as well, leading listeners increasingly to associate “scientific” music with the sacred.

Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Schubert, and many others... We must say that this appears to be a standard work of the highest excellence; and we cannot doubt that its universal adoption by church choirs would do much to elevate the standard of musical taste throughout the country.”¹⁴ The review proved insightful: Mason (and Webb) worked to achieve precisely this “elevation of musical taste” through setting psalm texts to works by then-canonic European, primarily German, composers. Germans themselves apparently found much to recommend in Mason’s work as well. In 1852 *The Message Bird* translated a piece from the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* by a German who had traveled to the United States and reported on the state of cultural life there. “Music is already procured from the German treasures, and imported into the American mind through a special medium of transmission,” wrote the German correspondent. “A single man, LOWELL MASON, of Boston...deserves the laurel wreath for introducing a nobler music throughout America...He is thus the actual creator of the taste for music in America.”¹⁵ While one might detect a tone of cultural imperialism here, it is more likely that this correspondent was merely expressing the widely accepted view on both sides of the Atlantic that German music represented an aesthetically superior, even a universal standard.¹⁶

Summarizing Mason’s overall objectives, Michael Broyles asserts that “There is no question that Mason was an idealist, a reformer, and a strict moralist when it came to music, that he revered the music of the European Classics above all other, and that he wholeheartedly endorsed the idea of science and taste as the proper foundation for music.” Mason thus sought

¹⁴ C.T., Review 1, *The Independent...Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts* Vol. 2, no. 103 (Nov. 21, 1850), 192.

¹⁵ Anon., “Germans and German Music in America,” *The Message Bird* Vol. 3, no. 17 (May 1, 1852), 252.

¹⁶ For evidence that this view was indeed “widely accepted on both sides of the Atlantic,” as well further information about the United States’ relationship to the German musical tradition, see Chapter Three.

quite straightforwardly to improve not only church music, but American music more generally.¹⁷ The far-reaching effects of Mason's campaign, which became known as the "Better Music" movement when he launched it in earnest in 1830, have been widely acknowledged by music historians. The authors of the *Grove Music Online* biographical entry for Mason conclude that he exerted "an extraordinary influence over American tastes."¹⁸ Thus while Mason is often discussed only in reference to church music or music education, his influence extended beyond these realms, above all by encouraging American listeners to associate European art music with the sacred. Taking into account what we know about his activities, as well as the scholarly consensus about his influence, we can reasonably see Mason's work as playing an integral role in the increasing rhetoric surrounding art music's spiritual qualities during the mid-nineteenth century.

Through the activities of Samuel Atkins Eliot (1798–1862), a Boston politician, mayor of the city from 1837–39, and member of the U.S. House of Representatives, Mason's influence extended still further. In 1835, two years after Mason had founded the Boston Academy of Music for the cultivation and reform of church psalmody, Eliot took over its leadership and altered its focus. Under Eliot, the Academy became an organization committed to the promotion of secular orchestral music and what Eliot saw as its potential to elevate and unify society.¹⁹ While we might see Eliot as transforming the entire *raison d'être* of the Academy in shifting its focus from psalmody to secular orchestral music, it is equally plausible to interpret Eliot's actions as merely a secular extension of Mason's efforts to improve public taste. Whereas Mason wished to reform and elevate the specific practice of American psalmody through infusing

¹⁷ Broyles, "Lowell Mason on European Church Music," 338.

¹⁸ Eskew and Pemberton, "Lowell Mason."

¹⁹ Broyles, "Bourgeois Appropriation of Music," 235.

European music into its repertory, Eliot attempted to advocate that same music as a means to uplift and harmonize the American people as a larger body. There can be no doubt that Mason's program to Europeanize American psalmody informed the activities of the Boston Academy under Eliot, as he sought to raise the position of secular music from a form of entertainment to an art with ethical implications. Thus through the work of both Mason and Eliot, the ground was being prepared for an American manifestation of *Kunstreligion* to take root.

One of the more obvious but less well-understood developments that fertilized the soil for American *Kunstreligion* was the introduction of German Romantic philosophy to the United States during the 1820s and 1830s. Much of this philosophy was absorbed in the United States via the New England Transcendentalists. Ralph Waldo Emerson, for example, developed a close intellectual and personal bond with the English writer and philosopher Thomas Carlyle, who wrote on German idealism and translated some of its authors.²⁰ Through the writings of Frederic Henry Hedge, Americans could learn of the work of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, another English Romantic, who wrote on Kant and German idealism.²¹ The European travels and subsequent activities of Americans such as the historian and diplomat George Bancroft, the politician and orator Edward Everett, and teacher and editor Joseph Cogswell helped to familiarize Americans with the literature of German Romanticism on a broader scale.²²

Another factor that helped to set the stage for the American adoption of *Kunstreligion* involved the rapid influx of foreigners. While it provoked widespread concerns of the sort we noted in Chapter One, the great wave of German immigrants in the 1840s and 1850s also evoked

²⁰ Carlyle wrote for *Fraser's Magazine*, a long-running London publication, whose material was sometimes reprinted in American publications such as *Littell's Living Age*.

²¹ Russell Goodman, "Transcendentalism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Fall 2015 Edition, ed. Edward N. Zalta, accessed February 2, 2016, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/transcendentalism/>.

²² Nye, *Society and Culture in America*, 327.

a surge of Germanophilia, especially in American intellectual and artistic communities. German immigrant musicians, conductors, and others involved in the music business brought over attitudes toward music-making that had a profound influence over American musical discourse and arguably over the more general public reception of art music in the United States as well.²³ In the most obvious sense, music was far more central to German immigrant culture than it was to the lives of native-born Americans. Americans perceived Germans as a “race of singers,” and singing societies and festivals, to be discussed further in Chapter Three, constituted a beloved element of social life among German immigrants.²⁴ German performers filled the ranks of American ensembles, and German or German-oriented orchestras such as the Germania, Styrian (or Steyermarkische) Orchestra, Josef Gungl’s orchestra, and the Saxonia Orchestra toured the United States during the late 1840s and 1850s.²⁵ The oldest literary journal in the country, the *North American Review*, commented on German immigration to the United States, hoping that the Germans would “kindle within us an appreciating love of heaven-born Art.”²⁶ As we will see, however, the original ideas of *Kunstreligion* as manifested in the German regions became re-inscribed and reinterpreted distinctively in the American environment.

We have seen how a number of developments and circumstances helped to nurture a fertile soil for the cultivation of a form of *Kunstreligion* in the United States: the increasingly ill-defined boundaries between sacred and secular experiences of hearing and listening; the efforts

²³ On American Germanophilia at mid-century, see Chapter Three.

²⁴ Anon., “Music: Close of the Season,” *Putnam’s Monthly Magazine of American Literature, Science, and Art* Vol. 6, no. 32 (Aug 1855), 222. Although Europeans and Americans strongly associated Italians with opera and singing more generally, at least as often Americans described Germans in terms of their highly social choral traditions.

²⁵ On the repertory of these traveling orchestras, see Katherine K. Preston, “American Orchestral Music,” xxxi–xxxv.

²⁶ Anon., “German Emigration to America,” *The North American Review and Miscellaneous Journal* Vol. 82, no. 170 (Jan. 1856), 268.

of Lowell Mason and his contemporaries to remake American sacred music in the image of European art music; Eliot's equally fervent desire to reframe secular orchestral music as an ethically enriching art; the growing American acquaintance with German Romantic idealism; and the swift influx of German immigrant musicians. The American cultural landscape was now fully prepared to adopt its own variety of *Kunstreligion*. All that remained was for it to find expression through American authors with the learning and eloquence to give it voice. One of the first to do so was the music critic John Sullivan Dwight.

John Sullivan Dwight, Transcendentalism, and the Spiritual Force of Music

Music's the measure of the planet's motion,
Heart-beat and rhythm of the glorious whole;
Fugue-like the streams roll, and the choral ocean
Heaves in obedience to its high control.
Thrills through all hearts the uniform vibration,
Starting from God, and felt from sun to sun;
God gives the key-note, Love to all creation;
Join, O my soul, and let all souls be one!²⁷

It is no accident that this particular poem by the first significant American-born music critic, John Sullivan Dwight (1813–1893), appeared in *The Harbinger*. The Boston journal was a primary organ of the Transcendentalist movement and was, according to its editors, “devoted to social and political progress.”²⁸ By the late 1840s, Transcendentalist thought had spread throughout New England's intellectual circles, giving rise to various clubs, utopian communities, and periodicals including *The Harbinger*. Dwight's eight-line verse reflects its author's two

²⁷ John Sullivan Dwight, “Music,” *The Harbinger* Vol. 5, No. 21 (30 October 1847), 328.

²⁸ Ora Frishberg Saloman writes that *The Harbinger* “was a highly influential weekly reform periodical reaching well beyond its estimated 2,000 readers through pirated articles in other journals or private circulation” in “Dwight, Transatlantic Connections, and the American Premiere of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony in New York, 1846” in *On Beethoven, Berlioz, and Other Music Criticism in Paris, Boston, and New York, 1764–1890* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 188. On the influence of the *The Harbinger*, see Sterling F. Delano, “*The Harbinger*” and *New England Transcendentalism: A Portrait of Associationism in America* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1983).

greatest inspirations: Transcendentalist ideals and the mysterious spiritual power of music. The poem virtually bursts with characteristically Transcendentalist praise of the natural world, and celebrates musical movement as the emanation of a divine Creator.

While music scholars comment often enough on Dwight's work as a critic, they have rarely placed his career in the context of his Transcendentalist associations during the 1840s.²⁹ By the same token, Dwight's introduction of music into the Transcendentalist conversation constitutes an aspect of that movement that has been sorely neglected by scholars of American intellectual history. Paradoxically, despite Dwight's lifelong commitment to beauty and to the experience of that beauty through music, his role in the Transcendentalist movement has sometimes been minimized or ignored altogether. I would attribute this neglect to two related factors: first, that scholars of American Transcendentalism feel ill-equipped to deal knowledgeably with Dwight's music criticism, and second, that scholars of music in the United States wish to stress Dwight's overall contribution to the fledgling musical culture in the young country, rather than to add to the already voluminous literature on Transcendentalism, about which music scholars, in their turn, may understandably feel less than fully informed.

Dwight's musical perspectives as demonstrated in *Dwight's Journal of Music* (1852–1881) were profoundly informed by his earlier Transcendentalist beliefs and writings at Brook Farm and elsewhere. In particular, Transcendentalist views regarding spiritual realities and the value of the individual deeply influenced Dwight's opinions about the role of music in human life, especially the music of Beethoven and other European composers of the common practice era (c. 1720–1830). In his Prospectus and "Introductory Notice" to the first issue of *The Harbinger* (1:1, June 14, 1845), for example, George Ripley wrote not only that the new journal

²⁹ An important exception is Ora Frishberg Saloman's work, especially her 1995 book *Beethoven's Symphonies and J.S. Dwight: The Birth of American Music Criticism* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1995).

would serve the cause of democracy, but that in doing so it would pay “due honor” to the fine arts. He wrote:

Music, the art most appreciable to the many, most associated with the hopes of Humanity, and most flourishing always where Humanity is most alive, we shall watch with almost jealous love; striving not only by criticism of all musical performances, schools and publications, but also by historical and philosophical essays on the principles of the Art itself, and the creations of its master minds, to keep it true to the standard of pure taste, true to the holy end for which the passion of hearing harmonies was given to man.³⁰

Transcendentalists such as Dwight, Ripley, and the many who echoed them about the relationship between music and spiritual experience proved to be early and influential promoters of *Kunstreligion* in the United States.

Transcendentalism emerged as one of the most powerful intellectual movements in nineteenth-century America. Rooted in European Romanticism, and particularly in the works of such German writers as Schiller and Schleiermacher, the movement arose initially in New England in the 1820s and 1830s as a philosophical revolt against the perceived rigidity of Unitarian religious practice.³¹ Unitarianism relied heavily on scriptural revelation and human rationality for spiritual guidance, and Unitarian sermons typically unfolded as levelheaded, highly logical treatises. Ironically, many of the first Transcendentalists began their professional careers as Unitarian ministers but became disillusioned by what they felt was an increasingly confining, remote, and unfeeling doctrine. Unitarianism had become, in Ralph Waldo Emerson’s famous turn of phrase, “corpse-cold.”³² The seeming aloofness of Unitarian religious ritual led

³⁰ Cited in from Joel Myerson, ed., *Transcendentalism: A Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 478-483; here 482.

³¹ Marcia Wilson Lebow suggests that “part of the sense of identity with the new German philosophy may be ascribed to the family kinship which the leaders of the Transcendental movement felt with ‘fellow Anglo Saxons,’” in “A Systematic Examination of the *Journal of Music and Art* Edited by John Sullivan Dwight: 1852–1881, Boston Massachusetts” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1969), 135.

Transcendentalists to reject institutional religion in favor of the individual search for spiritual truth. The first Transcendentalists championed an idealism of the individual human being in the divine creation. They affirmed the essential goodness of humanity rather than emphasizing its sinfulness. Furthermore, they stressed the value of the individual human *experience* of the world, rather than received wisdom and empirical analysis, as a path to spiritual discovery. In other words, Transcendentalism cherished feeling as obtained through the human senses as a means of divine revelation. Its proponents advocated a searching of the individual spirit for divine wisdom as experienced in nature, as well as in human endeavors such as art, literature, and music.

Dwight stood close to, if not fully within, the inner circle of Transcendentalists. As editor of *DJM* for almost three decades, he probably did more than any other journalist to introduce a knowledge of, and to cultivate a taste for, European art music on U.S. soil. Among others, Ora Frishberg Saloman has shown how Dwight's music journalism familiarized the American public with the symphonies of Beethoven.³³ Dwight is widely recognized among musicians and music scholars alike for transmitting and promoting European art music among fellow critics and the literate American public during the crucial years of American cultural development in the mid-to late-nineteenth century. But both some of his contemporaries and many modern scholars excoriate him for failing to support the musical initiatives of American-born composers and choosing instead to perpetuate the European musical canon in the New World. It is true that he never concerned himself with the fact that his definition of "good music" was an extremely

³² Quoted in Lance Newman, "Environmental Thought and Action," in *The Oxford Handbook of Transcendentalism* ed. Joel Myerson, Sandra Harbert Petrucci, and Laura Dassow Walls (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 173. From *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson* ed. William H. Gilman, et. al. 16 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960–82) 9: 381.

³³ See Saloman, *Beethoven's Symphonies and J.S. Dwight*.

narrow one; instead, his loyalty to Bach, Handel, Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, and Schubert became almost a matter of unquestioning religious devotion for Dwight.³⁴

Regardless of their views on whether Dwight effected positive or negative change in American musical life, many scholars and musicians familiar with Dwight refer to him exclusively in terms of his musical activities, journalistic or otherwise, and not in terms of his Transcendentalist thought. But there is much more to the story of Dwight's career than his music journal editorship. During a brief and relatively unsuccessful stint as a Unitarian minister in the late 1830s, Dwight began to express an affinity for the Transcendentalist movement. During his formative years, he became enamored of the progressive social, religious, and philosophical ideas of the Transcendentalist thinkers with whom he associated. Along with George Ripley and several other Transcendentalist activists, in 1841 Dwight helped to found Brook Farm, an experimental utopian community outside of Boston established on the basis of shared intellectual values and practical collective living. He taught Latin and served as music director at Brook Farm during its five years of active operation. After Brook Farm's dissolution, Dwight continued to propound Transcendentalist sentiments in his numerous writings on music over the following decades.

Certainly the dry, unfeeling Unitarian religious institutionalism as perceived by Emerson was unlikely to sit well with a figure such as Dwight, who by all accounts was a highly emotional, sensitive, and expressive man.³⁵ But Dwight expressed his newfound convictions

³⁴ From his earliest writings in the 1830s until the last issues of his journal in the 1880s, Dwight held fast to his vision of what great music was and should be. Dwight did not unthinkingly voice his preference for these composers. Over the course of his career, he regularly defended his aesthetic choices with reference to issues of form, content, and unity—often drawing on the writings of German aesthetic philosophers and critics such as Adolf Bernhard Marx and Gottfried Wilhelm Fink.

³⁵ In an 1898 biography of Dwight, his friend George Willis Cooke described the “sensitive, refined, and unworldly cast of Dwight's character” and further depicted him as “shy, bashful, diffident in the extreme,” Cooke, *John Sullivan Dwight, Brook-Farmer, Editor, and Critic of Music: A Biography*, ed. Kenneth Walter Cameron (Hartford:

differently from his fellow intellectuals. Most of his compatriots in the Transcendentalist project tended to focus largely on interconnections among the domains of religious doctrine, social progressivism, literary criticism, and moral rectitude. Dwight, by contrast, stood as the single most prominent voice for music in the discourse. He championed the musical experience as far and away the fullest earthly approximation of the truly beautiful and infinite. In fact, even though modern scholarship has tended to overlook Dwight as a Transcendentalist figure, his extensive writings on music stand as some of the most consistently powerful expressions of Transcendentalist idealism.

In particular, Dwight's emphasis on the unmediated individual experience of hearing music reflected one of the central tenets of Transcendentalist thought: that the experience of the beautiful is the only true source of wisdom, a belief frequently voiced by Emerson. In 1840, he published an essay called "The Religion of Beauty" in the Transcendentalist journal *The Dial*, in which he wrote that "Beauty always suggests the thought of the perfect. The smallest beautiful object is as infinite as the whole world of stars above us. So we feel it. Everything beautiful is emblematic of something spiritual...Is it not God revealed through the sense? Is not every beautiful thing a divine hint thrown out to us? . . . The Eternal speaks to us from the midst of decay...The beautiful, then, is the spiritual aspect of nature."³⁶ The beauty that Dwight perceived when listening to a Beethoven symphony or a Mozart string quartet was a beauty he believed to be a direct revelation of the divine, brought about through the instrument of human ingenuity, and recognized as a spiritual message by human perception. It was as if listening to music made

Transcendental Books, 1973), 9–10. In a recollection of her days as a schoolgirl at Brook Farm, a Mrs. Nora (Schelter) Blair wrote, "such was his gentle diffidence that comparatively few then recognized his high merit as a scholar" ("Some School Memories of Brook Farm," St. Elmo, Tennessee, December 22, 1892, Boston Athenaeum Digital Collections, MssL181, 8). Michael Broyles describes Dwight as "a dreamer, a wispy personality floating through life as if on a cloud, cushioned from the realities of the world" (*Beethoven in America*, 47.)

³⁶ Dwight, "The Religion of Beauty," *The Dial* (July, 1840): 313.

one more innocently faithful, for “the soul that is truly receptive of music learns angelic wisdom, and grows more childlike with experience.”³⁷

But music did more than impart religious wisdom to listeners: Dwight felt that music channeled the individual spirit of its composer. This reflected the Transcendentalist emphasis on the worth of the individual person. Indeed, he claimed that “a musical composition is the best expression of its author’s inmost life.”³⁸ Writing for *The Harbinger* in 1845 about a performance of some of Mozart’s string quartets by the Harvard Musical Association, Dwight rhapsodized that the “very soul and life of the man were there audibly present to us.” But through Mozart’s music, he felt, listeners could do more than gain a sense of the composer as a human being—they could detect traces of the beyond, for “the material envelope which separated him from the world of spirits, was the thinnest possible, and even that transparent.”³⁹

In addition to preaching belief in the worth of the individual, the Transcendentalist project also sought a kind of universality. As noted in Chapter One, the generation reaching adulthood in the U.S. in the 1820s and 1830s felt a new and boundless optimism about the world in which they lived—anything seemed possible. The young intellectuals who formed the core of the Transcendentalist movement desired an emotional and spiritual union of all souls in the process of experiencing the infinite and the divine. Dwight took up this aspect of Transcendentalist belief with particular fervor. In 1841, he delivered a lecture on the subject of Handel’s *Messiah* in which he summarized his points by portraying the work as the very quintessence of music in its noblest manifestation. “It is not so much some *kind* of Music, as it is

³⁷ John Sullivan Dwight, “Music,” in *The American Transcendentalists: Essential Writings*, ed. Lawrence Buell (New York: The Modern Library, 2006), 411–12.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Dwight, “Music in Boston During the Last Winter,” *The Harbinger* Vol. 1, no. 8 (August 2, 1845), 123.

the soul of music itself. Music in its highest office, as the expression of the universal religious sentiment. An atmosphere of reconciliation between all minds, or rather, a medium between our mind and the universal.” Music provided “an outlet of escape” from the worldly conflict of opinions; it offered “a promise, a foretaste of a better world...” For Dwight, music did not express a specific doctrine or faith system, for “when we call it the natural language of religion, we must understand a very Catholic religion; one which lies broad and deep under every heart, and in whose depths the superficial boundaries of creeds and sects cast not even a shadow.” For Dwight, *Messiah* achieved the goal he ascribed to all music—to unite all hearts, to erase all humanly imposed divisions—through the invocation of the divine in tones and rhythms. He went on to explain that it was the music alone, not the text of *Messiah*, that achieved this goal—“no words can utter it”—thus firmly delineating instrumental from vocal music in his framework of musical-spiritual significance.⁴⁰

In an 1849 essay, “Music Philosophically Considered,” Dwight echoed these sentiments, writing of the power of music to communicate among humans as a sort of universal language, as a spiritual force of unification among all nations:

Feeling communicates by sympathy, or fellow-feeling, the earth round; and music is its common language, which admits no dialects, and means the same in Europe and America... Music is religious and prophetic. She is the real Sibyl, chanting evermore of unity. Over wild, waste oceans of discord floats her silvery voice, the harbinger of love and hope. Every genuine strain of music is a serene prayer, or bold, inspired demand, to be united with all, at the Heart of all things. Her appeal to the world is more loving than the world can yet appreciate... In music there is no controversy; in music there are no opinions; its springs are deeper than the foundations of any of these partition walls, and its breath floats undivided over all their heads.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Dwight, “Handel and his Messiah: An Old Lecture (concluded),” *DJM* Vol. 2, No. 13 (January 1, 1853), 98. Although Dwight capitalized the word “Catholic,” he clearly was not referring to the Catholic Church of Rome.

⁴¹ Dwight, “Music,” 411–12.

Dwight genuinely felt that music possessed the power to overcome linguistic, cultural, religious, and political differences, uniting them in an all-encompassing, God-given harmony.⁴² Dwight might well have substituted the word “God” or even “Christ” for “music.” For him, music essentially represented a yearning for union, for oneness with one’s fellow human beings, with the whole creation, and with God.

But here we run the risk of oversimplifying Dwight’s beliefs. In his tremendously hopeful convictions about the capabilities of music both to speak to the individual person and to bring together all peoples, Dwight reflected a complex dialectic between individualism and universalism basic to Transcendentalist thought. The Transcendentalists wished human beings to become unified in their striving toward divine wisdom and knowledge of the infinite. But they argued at the same time that each person possessed an infinite nature and could, through the subjective and intuitive experience of the world, transcend human limits and experience the infinite. Perhaps the clearest way of articulating this dialectic tension between universalism and individualism in Transcendentalist belief is to say that these thinkers aspired to a universal striving toward the divine, and that each person played a unique role in that process of universal transcendence. Thus for Dwight, music could bring together diverse groups of people in one common understanding, but it could also transport individual listeners into a state of divine transcendence, a process which would then lead to a life of heightened spiritual and moral awareness. Because Dwight tended to portray music as a unifying force and a means to achieve the social harmony the reformers of the age so craved, he generally emphasized the communal

⁴² Rather conspicuously left out of the discussion here is any mention of how non-Western peoples (or even non-white Americans) might figure in Dwight’s utopian vision of social harmony through musical experience. Occasionally the musical traditions of non-Western peoples made an appearance in *DJM*, and, perhaps surprisingly, were sometimes portrayed in a positive light. The important point to be taken here, however, remains that for Dwight, German instrumental music, especially the music of Beethoven, was the single most powerful means to overcome barriers of language, nation, culture, and religion.

ideal espoused by George Ripley at Brook Farm rather than the solitary one advocated by Emerson.

Dwight did, however, closely agree with Emerson on certain basic philosophical matters. Emerson spoke frequently of what he called “correspondences”—that is, we see in the natural world a reflection of eternal truths, because everything in nature is ultimately a reflection of, or corresponds to, the human mind given to us by God. Dwight held similar views regarding music. As he wrote in the newly founded journal *The Harbinger* in 1846, “Everything in nature has a correspondence to something in the soul of man. This correspondence a deep and earnest soul not only sees, but *feels*; and every feeling has its melody; thus every object has its music.”⁴³ Several years later he described how music reflected other dimensions of reality: “there are correspondences in other spheres, both natural and social” to everything in the musician’s sphere. For Dwight, even in—or perhaps because of—its inherent abstractness, music provided the most precise illustration of the movements of the human soul, a way to express one’s innermost thoughts and yearnings. But for Dwight the task of music was less a celebration of the infinite within the individual (which was Emerson’s concern) than an eventual unification of all souls in a great universal harmony.

The crux of Dwight’s association with the Transcendentalist movement was his involvement in Brook Farm, the utopian community in West Roxbury, Massachusetts, nine miles southwest of Boston. Unlike many social experiments of this time, Brook Farm was only marginally communal; participants retained private property. Economic issues were of secondary concern to Ripley and the other founders. They wished instead to make manifest a transcendental ideal of harmony, which was the union of mind and body, spirit and flesh. Thus all Brook Farmers, including writers and poets, were to spend some hours every day in physical labor,

⁴³ Dwight, “Musical Review,” *The Harbinger* I (August 1846), 331–32.

contributing to the operation of the community and to their own mental wellbeing. The rest of their time could be spent in intellectual and cultural pursuits.⁴⁴ Dwight taught school and led the musical activities at the farm with zeal.

Many years later, in 1870, he reflected on those days in a piece for the *Atlantic Monthly*. He wrote that “it is equally a curious fact, that music, and of the best kind, the Beethoven Sonatas, the Masses of Mozart and Haydn, got at, indeed, in a very humble, home-made and imperfect way, was one of the chief interests of those halcyon days...those plain farmers, teachers...met to practice music which to them seemed heavenly, after the old hackneyed glees and psalm-tunes, though little many of them cared about the creed embodied in the Latin words that formed the convenient vehicle for tones so thrilling; the *music* was quite innocent of creed, except that of the heart and of the common deepest wants and aspirations of all souls darkly locked up in formulas, till set free by the subtle solvent of delicious harmonies.”⁴⁵ There are several important points to take from Dwight’s recollection. Clearly he had reveled in the communal performance of the works of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, which to him represented just the sort of unifying activity that might lead ultimately to the harmonization of all humankind and communion with the divine. He made a clear distinction between the “old hackneyed glees and psalm-tunes” and the emotional and spiritual thrust of music by the Classic-era triumvirate. True to his Transcendentalist allegiances, Dwight also stressed the complete insignificance of any texts or doctrinal confessions attached to the works—Protestant, Catholic, or otherwise.⁴⁶ It was the intermingling of tones themselves that reflected the “common deepest

⁴⁴ Richard Francis, *Transcendental Utopias: Individual and Community at Brook Farm, Fruitlands, and Walden* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 33–37.

⁴⁵ Dwight, “Music as a Means of Culture,” *Atlantic Monthly* Vol. 26 (July-December, 1870), 321–31.

⁴⁶ Indeed, Transcendentalists rejected all forms of religious dogma or doctrine, whether Protestant, Catholic, or otherwise.

wants and aspirations of all souls.” For Dwight, no verbal declaration could match the eloquence of music for expressing the universal yearning for oneness.

Dwight’s early Transcendentalist associations at Brook Farm manifested themselves later in his career during his editorship of *DJM*, published 1852–1881. As we will see, this journalistic outlet allowed Dwight to disseminate his views among a much broader readership than the relatively narrow Transcendentalist community. His ideas and articles from the *Journal* were echoed often in other publications, including both major and relatively obscure ones.⁴⁷ From its inception, the journal made plain its editor’s philosophical orientation. Dwight’s “Introductory” message in the journal’s very first issue of April 10, 1852 clearly revealed the editor’s preoccupations as a critic and music lover, preoccupations that would be evident in virtually every issue.⁴⁸ Characterizing Germany as “the land of real music,” Dwight went on to explain (in the plural first-person) that his love of music began in childhood, when even “the rudest instrument and most hacknied [*sic*] player thereof seemed invested with a certain halo, and saving grace, as it were, from a higher, purer and more genial atmosphere than this of our cold, selfish, humdrum world.” Music spoke to a higher plane of reality even for the very young Dwight. It appeared a harbinger of secret knowledge from some otherworldly realm because it “spoke a *serious* language to us, and seemed to challenge study of its strange important meanings, like some central oracle of oldest and still newest wisdom.” Dwight concluded that because music seemed prophetic, it “must have some most intimate connection with the social destiny of Man,” a destiny that applied to every person. Its structure, its abstract but beautiful rhetoric in tones, portended some ideal future in which humanity lived in peaceful harmony.

⁴⁷ For discussion of the reach of *Dwight’s Journal*, see the Introduction to this study, pp.34–35 and fn. 61 and 62.

⁴⁸ For an exhaustive account of the contents of *DJM*, see Lebow, “A Systematic Examination of the *Journal of Music and Art*.”

But only a certain class of music could herald this future. Dwight wrote of the recent explosion of musical life in the country, much of which was very “confused, crude, heterogeneous,” the production of a “young, utilitarian people.” A multitude of less worthy “specious fashions” challenged the status of “true Art”; here he was likely referring to the recent explosion of interest in Italian opera, which was quickly gaining popularity, and about which Dwight had mixed feelings at best. In a somewhat condescending tone he claimed that his journal would point the way to a truth at once spiritual and aesthetic, because American society “needs a faithful, severe, friendly voice to point out steadfastly the models of the True, the *ever* Beautiful, the Divine.”⁴⁹ Dwight was not only claiming critical authority, but also presuming to teach his readers what was true, good, and beautiful. His words demonstrate with utmost clarity the Transcendentalist view that music possessed the capacity to perfect society and even communicate with the spiritual realm.

Perhaps the single most salient attitude present in the journal throughout its thirty years of publication was that German music, and particularly the instrumental works of Beethoven, offered to people the world over not only the most intellectually gratifying musical experience possible, but also a glimpse of the divine that carried socially redeeming power. It is a challenge to locate an issue of *DJM* that does not hail German music in some way as containing a uniquely powerful spiritual element. Early in the journal’s tenure, Dwight described in glowing terms how the gatherings of German singing clubs in America expressed a union of democratic ideals and religious worship: in his view, observing the Jubilees of the German singing clubs “even benefits us by the example of popular mass-gatherings so brimming with the sentiment of liberty, and yet kept so orderly, harmonious and peaceful by a certain practically religious worship of Art *with*

⁴⁹ Dwight, “Introductory,” *DJM* Vol. 1, no. 1 (April 10, 1852), 4.

Liberty, which it is refreshing and encouraging to witness.”⁵⁰ Dwight recognized a “practically religious worship of Art” in the German immigrants’ attitude toward music, and felt that Americans would do well to emulate such behavior.

Decades later, Dwight would recall of the Germania Musical Society, an orchestra of some two-dozen young German men who toured the United States between 1848 and 1854: “There was a romantic flavor in the mutual devotion of the Germanians. They were young men, friends, who had been drawn together...It was the fraternal spirit of their union, with their self-sacrificing zeal for art, each member feeling bound to merge himself in the *ensemble* of performance,—it was this ‘art religion,’ so to speak, that gave them an immense advantage over all the larger orchestras in every city.”⁵¹ Later in the same reflection, Dwight wrote lamentingly about the 1854 disbanding of the Germania Musical Society, explaining that the group “had done good missionary work throughout the Union, spreading the gospel of pure, noble music.”⁵² The metaphor of “spreading the gospel” of “pure” music would not have been lost on Dwight’s readers. At this time American religious communities were heavily engaged in Christian missionary activity, both within the country and around the world. For Dwight, to disseminate great music was to preach the good news, a saving affirmation that carried both spiritual and social import.

In her dissertation on *DJM*, Marcia Wilson Lebow attributes Dwight’s often negative judgments of new and unfamiliar music, as well as his conservative convictions that jar

⁵⁰ *DJM* Vol. 3, No. 13 (July 2, 1853), 101.

⁵¹ John Sullivan Dwight, “Music in Boston,” in *The Memorial History of Boston, Including Suffolk County, Massachusetts, 1630–1880*, Vol. 4, ed. Justin Winsor (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1881), 429–30. Presumably in referring to “larger orchestras” Dwight meant to suggest that orchestras such as the Philharmonic Society of New-York, Boston’s Academy of Music, and the Musical Fund Society, as well as ad-hoc ensembles throughout the country, could not compete with the Germania’s idealism, unity, and spirited commitment to their cause.

⁵² *Ibid.*

postmodern aesthetic sensibilities, to his Kantian perspective (that is, his emphasis on formal structure and the universality of certain aesthetic judgments) and “the virtual impossibility of infallibility in an ever-changing world.” As Lebow writes, over the course of Dwight’s life, “his cultural world changed from the brief respite from materialism afforded by Transcendentalism, to the Reconstruction era of Westward expansion, accelerated immigration and industrialism, and the new set of values of a gilded age.”⁵³ But throughout his long tenure as editor of *DJM*, Dwight would remain steadfast in his principles, continuing to campaign for the recognition of music as the human endeavor most suited to the Transcendentalist aims of universal harmony, the social uplift of a free people, and communion with the divine through personal, intuitive experience. The Transcendentalist influence on musical discourse in the United States, and by extension, the spread of an American version of *Kunstreligion*, would not have been nearly as broad and profound had not Dwight been one of the preeminent voices in the musical press at mid-century.

Pervasive Ideals

Dwight’s voice, while highly prominent and influential, represented only one among many writers, and not only music critics, who propagated various ideas about the relationship between music and the spiritual, as well about their uplifting effects. Outside the narrower intellectual bounds of Dwight’s Transcendentalism, a multitude of commentators attributed divine properties to music, especially art music, in forums from Mississippi to New York, from *Godey’s Lady’s Book* to the *New-York Tribune*. Indeed, the printed commentary of the era attests to the prevalence of the view that music was, in one way or another, profoundly linked with divine revelation. Beyond this, writers often extended their claims about music’s spiritual powers to

⁵³ Lebow, “A Systematic Examination of the *Journal of Music and Art*,” 151–52.

make assertions about the social unification such powers might bring to the American public. Taken together, these commentaries make clear that in the mid-nineteenth century, broad segments of American public discourse were steeped in rhetoric about the power of music, through its close connection with divinity, to unite human hearts and nullify worldly social divisions.

Paeans to music as connected with the divine took a variety of forms. Most such tributes advanced either an assertion about what music was, what it could accomplish, or both. Of music's ontological status, writers set forth one or more of the following propositions: "good" music was 1) ultimately a gift from God; 2) abstract in its content and therefore ideal; 3) a connection between heaven and earth; and 4) a language of the soul or of emotional life. These claims frequently overlapped, and so to divide them into categories is admittedly somewhat artificial. But these categories allow us to take a closer look at each in turn to examine the significant implications of the lofty ideals attached to music, an art that had been and would continue to be for most Americans little more than a form of entertainment.

For mid-century American commentators, the first and most basic fact of music was that, like other things of beauty, it had been given as a gift from God for the enjoyment of all people. As one W.H.H. put it in a piece for the Unitarian *Christian Examiner and Religious Miscellany*, "no class can have a monopoly on this gift of God."⁵⁴ That music emanated from the Creator was accepted by countless critics and writers on culture, and informed all other claims about music's definition and function. Both more religious and more secular outlets alike propounded music's divine origins. In an 1854 piece for the *New York Musical World*, an anonymous contributor wrote of music's multifaceted nature, including its "social," "martial," and "sacred" aspects. The

⁵⁴ W.H.H., "Barnum's and Greeley's Biographies," *Christian Examiner and Religious Miscellany* Vol. 58, no. 2 (March 1855), 245.

sacred aspect was most pronounced in this author's scheme, "for heaven is the home of its birth;—and heaven, beyond all question, will be the theater of its grandest display, by the hosts of the redeemed, when its mission on earth has ended. What would be the character of the Church Militant, without the influences of music?"⁵⁵ For this writer, music—like angels or even Jesus Christ himself—had a divine origin and came to earth to perform great social, humanitarian, and sacred work. Tellingly, for a brief period in 1855, the *New York Musical World* was renamed *Musical World: A Journal for 'Heavenly Music's Earthly Friends.'*⁵⁶ That the title of a prominent music journal in the country's largest city would refer to music's divine origins says much about evolving American perceptions about music in general and about art music in particular. While the editor, Richard Storrs Willis, did not identify what music in particular he considered "heavenly," his own aesthetic preferences were hardly a secret to readers. Like Dwight, Willis was highly partial to the instrumental music of Beethoven, Mozart, Mendelssohn, Weber, Spohr and other Europeans, including relatively minor composers absent from the canon today.⁵⁷

The emphasis on Jenny Lind as a proselytizing force among the millions, spreading the gospel of great music through her angelic voice and humble manner, inspired breathless paeans to Lind's singing as a gift from God and her potential as a social unifier. In a remarkable letter to the editor of the *New-York Tribune* during the fall of Lind's American tour, an observer wrote, "In these days of spiritual aspiration and humanitarian reform—in these seasons (literally speaking) of angel visitations who come to herald the millennial day—God has sent JENNY

⁵⁵ "Observer," "Music as it is—Its Threefold Aspect,—Social, Martial, and Sacred," *The New York Musical World* Vol. 9, no. 10 (July 8, 1854), 111.

⁵⁶ Like many American magazines and newspapers of the nineteenth century, *The New York Musical World* underwent a multitude of name changes over the course of its existence.

⁵⁷ For an accurate characterization of Willis's musical-aesthetic preferences, see Douglas Shadle, "How Santa Claus Became a Slave Driver, 501–37.

LIND as a highly qualified exponent of the natural harmonies and melodies, that by translating these into her beautiful vocal tones, she may charm the rude hearts of this discordant humanity into something like brotherhood and mutual love.”⁵⁸ Lind was, in this rendering, quite literally an angelic being sent from above to soften human hearts and produce social unity. Even more lyrical was a “Letter to Jenny Lind” that appeared in *The Ladies’ Repository*. The author, a “Miss Custard,” implored the “Sweet Songstress of Stockholm” to come to the “rustic villages” of the rural West:

Welcome, thrice welcome, to the “Homes” of America and to the hearts of thine American sisters. . . . We know that crowned heads and titled nobility, philosophy and science, poetry and art, and even religion herself, have wreathed thy brow with their laurels. . . . And we know, also, that all these have failed to corrupt thy maiden spirit, and that Jenny Lind greets her sisters of republican America as lovingly as in the days of seclusion and endurance. . . . Come then . . . and, in the quiet of our Eden groves, sing to us the songs of home, of love, and heaven. Our fathers and our brothers shall protect you, our mothers shall be your nurses in sickness, our sisters shall lead you forth in the pure air, our children shall cull the sweetest of flowers as the votive offerings of innocence, and the aspirations of all shall bring you the blessings of heaven.⁵⁹

Here, Jenny Lind became a virtual prophetess.

For many writers in this period, another attribute of music related to its divine origins was its fundamentally abstract nature. Because it emanated from an “ideal” realm, it was by definition devoid of specific content. Or, rather, its form *was* its content. This idea drew once again upon the musical idealism of *Kunstreligion* in the early nineteenth century, which championed the abstraction of instrumental music as a reflection of the Platonic ideal. An 1849 article from *The American Review* asked in its title, “What is Music?”⁶⁰ A significant portion of it is worth reproducing here, for it forcefully demonstrates the equation of musical abstraction

⁵⁸ F., “Music, Natural and Artificial—Jenny Lind and her True Mission,” Letter to the Editor, *New-York Tribune* (December 10, 1850), 6.

⁵⁹ Miss Custard, “Letter to Jenny Lind,” *The Ladies Repository* Vol. 10, no. 12 (Dec. 1850), 402–3.

⁶⁰ H.S.S., “What is Music?” *The American Review: A Whig Journal Devoted to Politics and Literature* Vol. 4, no. 3 (September 1849), 247.

with divinity and moral goodness. The author, identified by “H.S.S.,” was almost certainly the German-born composer and critic Herrman S. Saroni (c. 1824–1901), an enthusiastic immigrant who also founded a fleeting music journal, *Saroni’s Musical Times*.⁶¹ In his essay Saroni attributed a multitude of virtues to music. He highlighted first music’s abstract nature, writing that music “has no model, after which to form itself, nor has it one to compare itself to. Independent it stands there, the pure fabric of the imagination.” He wrote that music differed in kind from visual art and poetry because, as he explained it, these other art forms depended on reference to nature and concrete ideas. He further suggested that music was most powerful when it existed purely for its own sake, for “music makes never a deeper impression than when it absolutely resembles nothing; when it creates, at one and the same time, the principal idea and the accessory means which serve to develop [sic] it.”

Clearly the author had in mind purely instrumental, “absolute” music—chamber and symphonic works. Remarkably, Saroni’s portrayal of music as autonomous, pure tonal motion unadulterated by attachments to specific ideas anticipated (by five years) Eduard Hanslick’s aesthetics as articulated in his seminal *Vom-Musikalische Schönen* of 1854. As Hanslick wrote most famously, “The content of music is tonally moving forms.”⁶² Hanslick argued that the content and meaning of music consisted in its form, that music does not itself represent emotion, although it may evoke emotion in listeners, and that musical beauty is completely independent of

⁶¹ Saroni was born in Germany, is said to have been a student of Mendelssohn, and immigrated to New York around 1844. Saroni founded *Saroni’s Musical Times* in 1849 as a young man of twenty-five (though the editorial features in the first issue were all penned by Henry Cood Watson). The journal lasted as an independent publication only until July 1852, when it was absorbed by the *Musical World*. In the journal and in commentaries for other publications, Saroni made reference to and reprinted writings of foreign writers such as E.T.A. Hoffmann. In 1852 he left the city to move to Georgia, where he founded the Columbus Symphony Orchestra. For more on Saroni’s American career, see David Francis Urrows, “Herrman S. Saroni (c. 1824–1901) and the ‘First’ American Operetta,” *The Bulletin of the Society for American Music* 34, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 9–11; and Vera Brodsky Lawrence, *Strong on Music: Reverberations 1850–56* Vol. 2 (University of Chicago Press, 1995).

⁶² Eduard Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful: A Contribution Towards the Revision of the Aesthetics of Music*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey Payzant (1854; repr. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1986), 29.

listeners' reactions and aesthetic judgments. Yet Saroni took the implications of musical autonomy further than Hanslick ever did. Saroni maintained that because of its ideal, abstract nature, "music is the most spiritual of all the arts, and might well be placed above poetry, sculpture, and painting." Here Saroni posited a direct, immediate relationship between music's abstractness and its spiritual aspect—a relationship that we find presented repeatedly in the writings of this period. Because of music's ultimate ineffability and the impossibility of translating it into verbal language, Saroni seemed to reason, music is closer to the spiritual dimension. Comparing Hanslick's and Saroni's respective arguments reveals that whereas some Continental thinkers may have been moving toward a more detached philosophical view of music, a fully religious version of *Kunstreligion* was now finding exponents among major American writers and critics.⁶³

Saroni did not develop his line of reasoning about music's spiritual aspect, but turned instead to the argument that unlike other arts, music was "a truly democratic art," demanding no formal training or education in order to be loved and appreciated. Although he did not specify which types of music he meant, he clearly had a specific cast of European composers in mind. Saroni asserted that "music belongs to high and low, poor and rich; all are alike under its influence, and with the lower class it fills a vacuum which the want of education has left." He provided no real justifications for this claim, and did not link music's supposed democratic

⁶³ It is likely that in his youth in Germany during the 1820s and 1830s, Saroni was steeped in language about the relationship between music and the divine. Evidently he brought this general orientation with him to the United States and disseminated it to some extent in his journal and other writings. But Saroni avoided rhapsodic spiritual rhetoric, noting that his journal will "eschew...that ridiculous affectation of MYSTICISM that defaces much of the literature of Music," *Saroni's Musical Times* Vol. 1, no. 3 (October 13, 1849), 33. The fully religious version of *Kunstreligion* that Saroni captures in his commentaries was a natural outgrowth of the highly religious backdrop of the American cultural landscape, which was at this point still undergoing the effects of the Second Great Awakening. And although much of what Saroni (and Hanslick) were arguing in these years was from new, echoing as it did centuries-old themes in Neoplatonic thought, the ways these ideas were shaped and expressed in American musical discourse is what concerns me here.

aspect explicitly with its spiritual dimension, but the connection was nonetheless strongly implied.

Saroni had yet more laurels to bestow on music. He wrote that, again unlike other arts, music was unable to depict or express “anything immoral.” When united with words it “can be brought in connection with voluptuousness, frivolity, and all the other abominations which mankind are subject to,” but—and here Saroni quoted an unnamed source—“‘music *in itself* can never be made the interpreter of immorality.’”⁶⁴ In other words, as nothing but abstract motion and gesture through pitch and rhythm, music could not possibly participate in anything but ideal virtue. This idea had already found expression in American intellectual circles. As early as 1840, students at Yale had said of music, “of all the fine arts [it is] the least capable of perversion; it cannot be made to express bad passions unless joined with words. The muse is chaste; she is ever smiling indeed, but she is inviolable.”⁶⁵ Dwight had made similar claims about the text and music of *Messiah* in 1841, and decades later elaborated on his thoughts about the power of purely instrumental music when he wrote that “the highest kind of music is *pure* music, that which lives and moves in purely musical ideas.”⁶⁶ Saroni took this characterization of music even further. “Indeed,” he wrote, “Music the almighty, the all-powerful, possesses no means to gratify the lascivious, the licentious; and through its mysterious strains breathes nothing but purest good.” Here Saroni had raised music to the level of divinity itself: an entity of pure good, “almighty, all-powerful,” unable by its very nature to express or partake of sin, evil, or immorality. The implication here—that adding words and narrative to music could only debase

⁶⁴ Emphasis mine.

⁶⁵ Anon., “Music,” *The Yale Literary Magazine, Conducted by the Students of Yale University* Vol. 5, no. 3 (Jan. 1840), 125.

⁶⁶ Dwight, “The Intellectual Influence of Music,” from the *Atlantic Monthly, DJM* vol. 30, no. 18 (November 19, 1870), 345.

it—underscored the spiritual aspect of music that Saroni had mentioned in passing. Saroni’s stress on the moral dimension of music represented a virtually open endorsement of the art as a tool for general social improvement. Saroni made this explicit in a piece in the *American Whig Review* of 1849, in which he wrote that music’s “noblest use is undoubtedly in making it the aid for the education and improvement of mankind in general.” Indeed, he wrote, “No art, no science unites hearts more rapidly and firmly.” Moreover, he argued, “if music were taught properly in [this nation’s] schools, if it were continued afterwards in institutions of a higher character, it would not alone improve the morals of the community, but it would actually open a new field to them to gain a respectable livelihood.”⁶⁷ In other words, music could serve to develop the moral compass of all, dissuading them from engaging in harmful behaviors and pointing them in the direction of virtue. Furthermore, to argue for music’s fundamental moral goodness in this period of Victorian morality was almost inevitably to argue for its capacity to uplift the masses and produce social harmony.

Building on the proposition that music was a gift given from the Almighty, and by extension ideal in its ineffability, writers for a variety of both sacred and secular publications argued that music was also a mode of connection between earthly and spiritual realms, and as such possessed great potential to improve human society. A writer for *The Albion*, possibly Henry Cood Watson, drew on writers across time and space when he asked rhetorically in 1854, “Was there not truth in that maxim of the Chinese sage who declared that music was the golden chain uniting earth to heaven? And was not Dryden right when, in one of the finest lines our English poetry can boast, he said of Saint Cecilia, that—She drew an angel down.”⁶⁸ The composer Augusta Browne described music in 1849 as “the electric telegraph of the heart,

⁶⁷ Saroni, “Influence of Music,” *American Whig Review* Vol. 10, issue 22 (Oct. 1849), 393–99.

⁶⁸ Anon., “Music of Barbarous Nations,” *The Albion* Vol. 13, no. 20 (May 20, 1854), 132.

having its termination in heaven.”⁶⁹ A commentator playfully writing as “C minor” for Richmond’s *Southern Literary Messenger* in 1850 described music as not of this world, for “There is a divineness in Music; it belongs not to earth nor was it on it when the universal curse fell.” C minor believed that music caused “lofty thoughts and pure associations [to] vibrate to the world.”⁷⁰ For “C minor,” music was too pure, too exalted to have originated on earth—but it provided a hint of the divine perfection of the world beyond. Explicitly religious publications, too, such as the *Methodist Quarterly Review*, extolled the “divine force or energy sent forth from the eternal throne.” Music not only “touches the shores of the unseen, and deals with the dread verities of eternity,” but “it is a medium through which we receive much that is noble and exalted.”⁷¹ Yet more sentimental expressions of such ideas abounded in journals that published miscellaneous nostalgic and saccharine poetry and other Victorian literature. The short-lived *American Quarterly Register and Magazine*, for example, published an anonymous piece in 1848 that praised music as a liminal realm between the living and the dead, suggesting that it could summon the souls of deceased loved ones: “when in solitude the sounds of music have crept into our ears, while there seemed to breathe around us the voices of departed spirits, and the rapt soul has sought communion with the dead: ‘The lost, the loved, the dead were near.’”⁷²

⁶⁹ Browne, “An Olive Leaf for the ‘Message Bird,’” *The Message Bird* vol. 1, no. 3 (September 1, 1849), 37.

⁷⁰ “Some Musical Notes, by C Minor,” *The Southern Literary Messenger; Devoted to Every Department of Literature, and the Fine Arts* Vol. 16, no. 10 (Oct 1850), 619.

⁷¹ Anon., “Review of *Sacred Harmony; a Collection of Music adapted to the Greatest Variety of Metres now in Use: and, for Special Occasions, a Choice Collection of Sentences, Anthems, Motets, and Chants. Harmonized, and arranged with an Accompaniment for the Organ or Piano Forte*, by Samuel Jackson, with an improved System of Elementary Instruction, (New York: Lane & Tippet, 1848),” *The Methodist Quarterly Review* Vol. 8 (April 1848), 283.

⁷² Anon., “Music,” *The American Quarterly Register and Magazine* Vol. 1, no. 1 (May 1848), 198.

It was especially common for mid-century American commentators to describe music as a sort of “language,” a language of the soul or of the individual emotional life.⁷³ We have already seen that J.S. Dwight spoke of music as “the natural language of religion,” in the sense that it helped to reconcile and unite all with God and with one another, and as a common language of the emotions, allowing people from all over the world to share the movements of their inner life and thus achieve social harmony.⁷⁴ Like Dwight, when critics and other writers in this period described music as a language, they almost always meant that it was a *universal* one, not only existing in all cultures but also signifying essentially the same meaning to all listeners.⁷⁵ The writer for the Yale literary magazine we encountered earlier described music in 1840 as “the expression of the good feelings of the heart in a language that is intelligible to all hearts.”⁷⁶ Augusta Browne made reference to this idea numerous times, including in 1847 when she wrote that music was “a universal language, intelligible to all, a key to the heart, unlocking sympathies which but for its electric touch might forever have lain dormant.”⁷⁷ And as our *Albion* writer gushed in 1854, “It is surely very pleasant thus to find the humanizing delights of music springing up naturally, as it were, in the loneliest regions, and amid the rudest of God’s people...Music is the impulsive language of the emotions. It is innate in the hearts of all human creatures.”⁷⁸

⁷³ The image of music as a language has its origins in eighteenth-century thought. See Mark Evan Bonds, *Absolute Music: The History of an Idea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), esp. 61–65.

⁷⁴ Dwight, “Handel and his Messiah: An Old Lecture,” *DJM* Vol. 2, No. 13 (January 1, 1853), 98.

⁷⁵ I will discuss the continued thriving of this notion in today’s world in the conclusion of this study.

⁷⁶ Anon., “Music,” *The Yale Literary Magazine, Conducted by the Students of Yale University* Vol. 5, no. 3 (Jan. 1840), 125.

⁷⁷ “Reveries of a Musician, no. II” *The Columbian Lady’s and Gentleman’s Magazine* vol. 8, no. 4 (Oct. 1847), 26–27.

⁷⁸ Anon., “Music of Barbarous Nations,” *The Albion* Vol. 13, no. 20 (May 20, 1854), 132.

Such sentiments grew common in less exalted but much more widely disseminated publications, such as the Philadelphia-based *Godey's Lady's Book*, which boasted the widest circulation of any magazine in the U.S. before the Civil War. One D.H. Barlow wrote a long tribute to music for *Godey's* in 1852, claiming that “while no two nations can understand the meaning of each other’s words, all can apprehend alike the significance conveyed by music...music (the language of the affections) everywhere awakens kindred emotions.”⁷⁹ The German composer and Forty-Eighter Charles Ansong could not have been more explicit in his 1859 characterization of the art: “Music...is a universal language, consisting of the same elements, and producing the same effects, wherever it may be heard.” He granted that music’s abstract nature could not communicate concrete ideas or facts, but it was more immediately comprehensible than any verbal language because it appealed to the universally recognized gamut of human emotions. Music could voice “only feelings, and is therefore more limited than speech, while its language of tones is instantaneously felt and universally understood...Music cultivates and ennobles our feelings, while words employ mainly the intellect.”⁸⁰

Perhaps the most succinct expression of the notion that music was a universal language as well as a portal to the spiritual realm came from the pen of Richard Storrs Willis, composer, critic, and editor of the *New York Musical World*, who wrote in the *German Reformed Messenger* in 1858 that music “can be read in all lands. The accents of this universal language the child murmurs in his cradle, and affection understands its meaning. It is the language which connects this life with another—the present in which we live with the mysterious future in which we are to live.” Willis proposed not only that people from all regions could glean the same

⁷⁹ D.H. Barlow, “Music,” *Godey's Lady's Book* Vol. 64 (May 1852), 304.

⁸⁰ Charles Ansong, “Music at Home and in Schools,” *Massachusetts Teacher and Journal of Home and School Education* Vol. 12, no. 5 (May 1859), 174.

significance from music, but that this recognition began as early as infancy, and that the language of music gave the living a taste, an intimation of the life eternal. Willis continued, emphasizing the global extent of this truth: “French, German, English, Italian, may all perish with this perishable breath; music is the only language, we are assured by Scripture, we shall use in the state to which we are hastening.” Like Dwight’s earlier, Willis’s “universal language” did not seem to expand beyond the bounds of Western Europe and the United States. Nevertheless, he did seem to suggest that since music was the only “language” all peoples could understand, it would serve to join them in common understanding in preparation for the hereafter. Willis underscored that music was a conduit for the emotional, not the rational. “The significance of this language lies not in thought, but in feeling. Its words address themselves not to the intellect, but to the heart; its themes are joy and love. May we not, then, suppose that the supreme love is addressed in this language?”⁸¹ The human feelings that were most difficult to articulate in words—joy and love—were for Willis conveyed most eloquently in music, a language that would aid in uniting human hearts, and one that expressed the love of God.

We have so far dealt primarily with various mid-century American definitions of music that contributed to the burgeoning discourse of *Kunstreligion* in the young republic. Most of these definitions referred either explicitly or implicitly to instrumental music, with its non-specific but evidently emotional content. For many writers these definitions represented only a point of departure from which to argue for music’s capacity to effect salubrious change in society. We may thus turn to the various functions these writers attributed to music—what music does. Commentators in a broad range of publications claimed one or more of the following: music 1) indicates our yearning to be united with God; 2) reveals the presence of God; and 3) makes us more moral and devoted worshipers, helping to eliminate social discord.

⁸¹ Richard Storrs Willis, “Home Music,” *German Reformed Messenger* Vol. 23, no. 24 (Feb. 10, 1858), 1.

First, a natural conclusion of the basic proposition that music was a gift from God was the idea that the human inclination toward and passion for the beautiful was a sign of our desire to be connected with God, the creator of all beautiful things and the source of all good. In a lengthy piece for London's *Fraser's Magazine*, reprinted in New York's *Littell's Living Age* in 1848, an anonymous writer launched into a eulogy on Handel and his *Messiah*.⁸² The writer hailed Handel as the composer who had come closest to divine wisdom in his music, and bestowed especial praise on the last chorus, "Worthy is the Lamb," claiming that its "transcendent glory" was beyond mortal powers of understanding. It spoke of a divine realm, thus "it is not in this world we shall decipher the full meaning of that one of Handel's works." But the writer lamented that "The love of the beautiful *is*, alas! unconnected in many minds with the longing for the divine. Yet may we feel assured that the longing for the divine, and its final attainment in a future world, will be accompanied with the beautiful that we seek now in the half-light of a faint belief."⁸³ This *Fraser's* writer articulated the position of many Americans: that the love of the beautiful indicated a yet-ungratified craving to be enveloped in perfect, divine love.

Other writers felt equally strongly that cultivating music (and aesthetic taste more broadly) had the power to reveal the presence of God to humans, and thus afforded means by which mortals might draw closer to the eternal realm. Our writer for the *Methodist Quarterly Review* attributed to music the capacity to display, "dimly and vaguely it may be, a vision of the

⁸² As this example makes clear, a robust literary exchange took place between England and the United States in this period, such that it would not be inaccurate to speak of a discrete category of mid-nineteenth-century "Anglo-American" musical discourse. Not only were editorials and news items from England printed in U.S. periodicals (and vice versa), but Americans writing on and observing music also took careful note of contemporary musical life in England, hoping that their young country would emulate the venerable example of the old. In turn, English observers looked on with interest at and commented on the developing institutions, concert life, and other dimensions of musical culture in their erstwhile colonial territory on the other side of the Atlantic.

⁸³ Anon., "Some Words about Music and the Modern Opera," *Littell's Living Age* Vol. 19, no. 240 (Dec. 23, 1848), 529. Reprinted from *Fraser's Magazine*.

glory from which we have fallen, and of that perfection to which, assisted by divine grace, we may attain.” Music could console the grieving heart, “creating a deeper sense of the imminent and universal presence of the Almighty.” It evoked the hidden meanings of human life and creation, and “seems to be a distant and feeble echo of that everlasting hymn, that mighty chorus, which ever and ever swells around the eternal throne.”⁸⁴ In an 1849 piece on the faculty of “taste” for *Graham’s American Monthly Magazine*, one Miss Augusta C. Twiggs wrote that cultivating one’s inborn capacity for taste would not only elevate the moral sensibilities, but it could lead humans to a clearer understanding of the author of creation. For taste “was implanted in the mind by *Him* who formed us and it is as much the duty of man to cultivate and improve his taste, as it is his duty to improve and cultivate any other talent lent him to keep...It is intended that Taste shall act as a means of...searching out the beauties and glories of creation, and comprehending, as far as the mind of man is capable of comprehending, the wonderful omnipotence of the Deity.”⁸⁵ In other words, God gave us the faculty of taste—which “is not the birthright of a few”—at least in part in order for us to attain a greater knowledge of God. Besides its softening, ennobling qualities on the human character, Twiggs asserted, “It will enable us to look to the author of our being, through the exquisite manifestations of his works, through the signs of his providence, and to these signs themselves, as conducting us by their universal

⁸⁴ Anon., “Review of *Sacred Harmony; a Collection of Music adapted to the Greatest Variety of Metres now in Use: and, for Special Occasions, a Choice Collection of Sentences, Anthems, Motets, and Chants. Harmonized, and arranged with an Accompaniment for the Organ or Piano Forte*, by Samuel Jackson, with an improved System of Elementary Instruction, (New York: Lane & Tippet, 1848),” *The Methodist Quarterly Review* Vol. 8 (April 1848), 283.

⁸⁵ Miss Augusta C. Twiggs, “Taste,” *Graham’s American Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art, and Fashion* Vol. 34, no. 5 (May 1849), 310. Twiggs expressed a view typical of her day when she doubted that the faculty of taste could be equally developed in all cultures: “it is not intended that the natives of Central Africa, or of the inhabited regions around the Poles, can improve their moral condition, and rise to the same high standard as may the enlightened nations of Europe or of our own loved country. To assert such a thing would be preposterous, to expect it ridiculous. Our resources are not their resources, our advantages not theirs, but there is implanted in the breast of every man a frame-work and basis, with which, and upon which, he may build something that shall make him better than he now is.”

language to his throne.”⁸⁶ A year later in 1850, the American composer Asahel Abbott (1805–1888) wrote an article titled “Music as an Art and Science” for the New-York based *Ladies’ Wreath*.⁸⁷ He wrote that “The man of Science and Art”—the composer—“is learning to think God’s thoughts, and to feel the emotions of him in whose image we stand. Hence there is nothing so much like God as a devout and studious Artist.”⁸⁸ For Abbott, the composer could almost literally channel God through the composition of musical works, coming closer than any other human being to an understanding of God’s divinity. To what extent he had himself in mind is unclear.

Across the sub-genres of popular periodical literature, we encounter such references to music’s various functions as an indicator of the human desire to be joined with the creator, as a purveyor of divine wisdom, and as a mediator between the earthly and the heavenly. The most immediately visible and beneficial function attributed to music, however, was its supposed capacity to elevate listeners spiritually and morally, eliminating social discord and harmonizing all hearts in love and common purpose. Countless writers suggested that music could effect real social change, if only everyone could gain access to the best music. One especially enthusiastic author of a letter to the editor of the *New York Tribune* in 1850, for example, felt that music “in its most enlarged sense, is the breathing of God through all Nature and Heaven...It binds all systems and operations together in sympathy and accord” so that souls are “brought into harmony with Nature, with Heaven, and with God.” The letter-writer felt that music was quite

⁸⁶ Anon., “Alison’s Principles of Taste,” *The Nassau Literary Magazine* Vol. 18, no. 5 (Feb. 1858), 201.

⁸⁷ Abbott (also spelled Abbot) composed eleven oratorios, among other large-scale works. One of his oratorios, *The Waldenses*, was premiered by the New-York Harmonic Society in 1852 under the direction of George Frederick Bristow. The premiere was covered in *Saroni’s Musical Times*, *The Message Bird*, and *DJM*. Lawrence calls Abbott “a prolific but virtually unknown native composer” in *Reverberations*, 298.

⁸⁸ Asahel Abbott, “Music as an Art and Science,” *Ladies’ Wreath, a Magazine devoted to Literature, Industry and Religion* Vol. 4, no. 10 (Feb. 1850), 3.

literally the ‘music of the spheres,’ exerting some invisible force throughout the cosmos, bringing all into a congruent whole. The vision of this writer was lofty: “O, could its spirit be breathed by mankind universally, what social harmony and peace would replace our present discord and distractions! The different classes of mankind would then naturally fall into their appropriate places in the seven-fold series, and in their reciprocal and fraternal movement, would harmoniously chime in with the great realm of outer and interior being, in chanting the universal and eternal *Te Deum!*” The “seven-fold series” was clearly a biblical reference, most likely to the seven spirits of God in the Book of Revelation (first mentioned in 1:4), but also by extension to the “seven spirits of Isaiah 11:2–3 , and to the seven graces of Romans 12: 6–8. In general the image suggested a diversity of spirits united in adoration of the Lord; here all worldly differences ultimately dissolved. “If properly cultivated and directed among any people,” music would serve as “the most efficient means of promoting general refinement and diffusing the spirit of fraternal kindness and harmony.”⁸⁹ The author clearly believed the achievement of this universal social harmony would be a work of God. Yet he implied that by embracing and cultivating music, humans could help bring about this fulfillment.

Similar articles regarding the divine moral and social influence of music appeared in journals aimed at different sorts of audiences. For example, in the 1852 piece we encountered earlier from *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, D.H. Barlow wrote that because music was “the expression of love, and love being God, and the universe being a manifestation of God,” then “we should suppose that music must be *everywhere* found. And we *do* so find it.” Barlow felt that for setting children on an ethical course, music’s “moral action would be far above that of all precept.” Music was a guide to right living, which led humans “onward and upward, along a pleasant,

⁸⁹ F., “Music, Natural and Artificial—Jenny Lind and her True Mission,” Letter to the Editor, *New-York Tribune* (December 10, 1850), 6.

flower-bordered path, to one stage after another of that intellectual and moral progress which fits us for that heaven whose truest emblem is music, as its reality is the love, of which music is the voice!”⁹⁰ In an analogous vein, an anonymous writer for the Columbus, Miss. Democratic newspaper the *Southern Standard* described music in 1853 as “one of the most refining and elevating of the arts...cleansing the heart and purifying the spirit of gross and sensual desires”: it “opens, (so to speak,) the pores of the soul, and renders the whole being keenly sensitive to ennobling and heavenly influences.” The writer went on to praise Richard Storrs Willis’s *New-York Musical World* as a source of consistent news, information, and commentary on “the purest and most elevated styles of music.”⁹¹ In 1857 the *American Journal of Education* translated a piece called “Luther’s Views of Education and Schools” by the German geologist and teacher Karl von Raumer, in which Raumer quoted Luther’s argument that music should be taught in schools, for it is “a gift and bestowment of God...it drives away the devil, and makes men happy: in it, we forget all anger, lasciviousness, pride, and every vice.”⁹²

Some of the most fervent expressions of the notion that music could work for social harmony appeared in journals or in articles aimed specifically at women. In this period, general social harmony was commonly thought to begin in the home, and the ideology of “separate spheres” that characterized the social roles of the sexes held women primarily responsible for maintaining domestic peace and order for their families. Descriptions of this task regularly referred to the great value of music in the home. Writers such as the Rev. William C. Whitcomb, for instance, addressed female readers when he wrote in *The Message Bird* in 1852 that “Music

⁹⁰ D.H. Barlow, “Music,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book* Vol. 64, no. 5 (May 1852), 304.

⁹¹ Anon., “Musical Matters,” *Southern Standard* (Columbus, Mississippi) Vol. 2, no. 51 (Jan. 15, 1853), 3.

⁹² “Luther’s Views of Education and Schools,” from the German of Karl von Raumer, *The American Journal of Education* Vol. 4, no. 11 (Dec. 1857), 421.

is one of the best promoters of domestic happiness. As an awakener of sympathies, and a uniter of hearts, a more efficient agency cannot be employed, next to the religion of the Gospel. It humanizes and elevates the depraved soul, enlivens hospitality, and excludes the demon, discord, from the home-circle.”⁹³ Similarly, an anonymous female contributor to *Godey’s Lady’s Book* in 1860 extolled the many ways she saw music contributing to domestic tranquility. In a series of rhetorical questions, she asked, “when we gather in our own homes, is not the family happiness greatly augmented by the gift and cultivation of musical abilities?” Not only this, but the cultivation of music in the home would “raise the standard of mental acquisitions in the household, refining the manners and purifying the moral judgment, so that ‘the pursuit of happiness’ may always lead our sex ‘in the way of righteousness.’ Would not men follow?” The benefits of music, she wrote, were so many that she could not list them all. She ended by quoting the “Great Reformer” Martin Luther on “the moral power of music, and the benefits it might be made to confer on humanity.”⁹⁴ While these sorts of themes were far from new, they were adopted and widely publicized in the mid-nineteenth century United States in a way that linked them with expressions of faith in the progress of a democratic nation that was leading the whole world into a new and better age.

In an 1853 piece for the *Southern Literary Messenger* assessing the progress of American society up to that point, an anonymous writer noted that “Music is a new light in the homes of the country. It is an independent source of joy. Home will be more precious in the eyes of father and mother and brother and sister, because of it,” and it “has the power to make one happy.”⁹⁵

⁹³ Rev. William C. Whitcomb, “Music in the Family,” *The Message Bird* Vol. 3, no. 10 (Feb. 2, 1852), 158.

⁹⁴ Anon., “Editor’s Table: Music,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book* Vol. 61 (Nov. 1860), 461. Such commentators of course were not referring to all types of music; this point remained implicit in most discussions.

⁹⁵ Anon., “Where are We?” *The Southern Literary Messenger, Devoted to Every Department of Literature, and the Fine Arts* Vol. 19, no. 4 (April, 1853), 236.

Religious publications regularly propounded the influence of music as a source of happiness in the home for children and families. The Unitarian *Monthly Religious Magazine and Independent Journal* praised music as indispensable for leisure, but always with the glory of God in view. “The happiest place in the world for young people ought to be their own home,” wrote the contributor. Youth always required an outlet for recreation, but “Our amusements should, as far as practicable, be such as tend to the cultivation of refined and generous tastes, and social dispositions and habits. Music, in this respect, where there is a natural aptitude for it, is a great resource, and its humanizing influence in a household or neighborhood ought never to be overlooked.”⁹⁶

A minority of religious Americans resisted these prevalent views about music as a channel to the divine or an aid to general social harmony. Certain religious sects such as the Quakers, for example, had nothing to say in music’s favor (though the Quaker bias against music would relax later in the nineteenth century). Arguments against music appeared in a number of mid-century Quaker publications based in Philadelphia. In 1850 an anonymous ten-stanza poem, “Farewell to Music,” appeared in the *Friends’ Weekly Intelligencer*, its writer rejecting music as a distraction from devotion to God: “Thou shalt rob me no more of sweet silence and rest, / For I’ve proved thee a trap, a seducer at best.”⁹⁷ In an 1851 screed against music in the same publication, a writer under the pen name of “Aquila” asserted that because of its inherent sensuality, “Music is the handmaid of VOLUPTUOUSNESS,” because it “draw[s] away the attention from the highest object of our Creation.” Music offered “no curative virtue applicable to the soul” and it had a “tendency to drown the inward sense of divine admonition and

⁹⁶ Anon., “Amusements,” *The Monthly Religious Magazine and Independent Journal* vol. 21, no. 1 (Jan. 1859), 26.

⁹⁷ Anon., “Farewell to Music,” *Friends’ Weekly Intelligencer* Vol. 7, no. 37 (Dec. 7, 1850), 291.

reproof.”⁹⁸ In 1857, a commentator identified only by the letter “T” wrote in the *Friends’ Review* that “music has not that elevating and sublime influence which some claim for it,” but was only an “animal delight” that led to “ruined morality.”⁹⁹ While these sorts of critiques often applied specifically to music in worship, some Quaker communities still held any involvement in musical performance—especially public performance—deeply suspect. It is difficult to find this sort of hostility toward music outside circles such as the Quakers. The very stridency and relative rarity of such views in most of the public literature of the period is arguably evidence for the pervasiveness, in American public discourse in the mid-nineteenth century, of the idea that music could be a sign of or portal to the divine. Moreover, in Philadelphia, where Quaker influence was considerable in this period, concert music was thriving and publications such as *Godey’s Lady’s Book* regularly referred to music in terms of its divine power.

The mid-century worship of music in the sense of “art religion” as I have described it in this chapter was closely linked with the later nineteenth-century process of “sacralization” in high culture. But to conflate antebellum and postbellum trends as merely different chronological phases of a continuous historical development would be a gross oversimplification. It is clear that the “art religion” widely promoted during the 1840s and 1850s together with the increasing professionalization and reform of psalmody throughout the first half of the nineteenth century contributed to the later phenomenon of sacralization in musical culture. The appeal to musical universalism and democracy so evident in the art religion of mid-nineteenth century America, however, gave way quickly in later decades to a growing and increasingly recognized breach

⁹⁸ Aquila, “Music,” *Friends’ Weekly Intelligencer* Vol. 8, no. 1 (March 29, 1851), 1. A similar Quaker tirade against the negative effects of music can be found in an article titled “Music and its Influence” in the *Friends’ Review: A Religious, Literary, and Miscellaneous Journal* vol. 1, no. 18 (Jan. 22, 1848), 278.

⁹⁹ T, “The Monitor—No. V: Music,” *Friends’ Review: A Religious, Literary, and Miscellaneous Journal* vol. 10, no. 44 (July 11, 1857), 698.

between high “sacralized” art and lowbrow forms of musical entertainment, paralleling distinct and widening social hierarchies in the general population.

In the generation before the Civil War, American commentators embraced the ideals of a peculiar version of *Kunstreligion* in a common discourse that sought to cut across lines of gender, class, and faith, and in publications that ranged from women’s magazines to religious periodicals to newspapers with large circulations. Writers who espoused aspects of *Kunstreligion* made confident assertions about music’s status as an abstract and therefore universally expressive spiritual gift from God, a portal between this world and the eternal, and a language that allowed people from all over the globe to unite in common understanding. Often in the same breath, these commentators would attribute to music a variety of functions, including indicating the human yearning to become one with God, manifesting God, and elevating the moral lives of those who cultivated or listened to serious music, therefore contributing to social harmony.

Many of these attributes can be found in a single article, originally from England’s *Quarterly Review*, prominently reprinted in 1849 in the long-running and successful New York journal *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature*. Although the author was English, the sentiments articulated resonated deeply with widely publicized American ideals about music in this period. In this rendering, music was an especially precious gift from “the Giver of all good gifts,” and the “limitation of its material resources is the greatest proof of its spiritual powers.” Music’s inherent abstraction meant that its content was morally pure to all listeners: “Music is not pure to the pure only, she is pure to all.” Instrumental music was morally superior to texted music, for “It is only by a marriage with words that she can become a minister of evil. An instrument which is music, and music alone, enjoys the glorious disability of expressing a single vicious idea, or of inspiring a single corrupt thought...The very Fall seems to have spared her

department.” The noble social role of music was its capacity to “link those natures together whom nothing else can unite. Men of the most opposite characters and lives that history can produce *fraternize* in music... There is no broad mark: young and old, high and low—passionate and meek—wise and foolish—babies, idiots, insane people—all, more or less, like music.”¹⁰⁰ Next to death, “good” music was understood as the great spiritual equalizer, the one high art everyone could share and enjoy regardless of social status, and thus too a great social uniter. But as we shall see in the next chapter, for an overwhelming number of American musical observers in this period, the most universally expressive music had a very specific birthplace.

¹⁰⁰ Anon., “Music,” *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature* Vol. 14, no. 1 (Jan. 1849), 35. Reprinted from the *Quarterly Review*.

CHAPTER THREE

“MUSIC FOR THE MILLION”: THE PARTICULARITY AND UNIVERSALITY OF THE “GERMAN ELEMENT”

Writing in *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* in 1843, the American diplomat Auguste Davezac (1780–1851) praised what he perceived as the inherent virtue of the German people, remarking particularly on the Germans’ devotion to music:

Whoever has sojourned in Germany long enough to associate much with Germans, must have remarked the singular mildness, the pleasing simplicity of manners, the elegance of habits, and the general urbanity of deportment, forming the characteristics of a people which, in order to hold a first rank among the great powers of the earth, need only to be united under a single and national government.

...In Germany, music creates for the care worn laborer another and better world, a middle region between this earth, where wealth and the enjoyment it procures are allotted to the few, while to the many are assigned privations, contumelies, irremediable poverty[,] and that future world where equality, that banished exile from earth, has fixed its only and last abode. It is to that ideal region, that the German peasant’s mind is gently wafted on the wings of melody...It is music, in fact, which, while Frenchmen, Russians, and Englishmen lord it over earth and seas, has given to Germans the undisputed sway of boundless imaginary space.¹

Born in what is today Haiti, educated in France, and eventually becoming an American citizen, Davezac served during the 1830s as Secretary to the U.S. Embassy in the Netherlands, and would serve there again from 1845 to 1850. In that capacity, he had evidently traveled to the German principalities and made careful observations about the people he encountered there. His

¹ Auguste Davezac, “A Chapter on Gardening,” *The United States Magazine, and Democratic Review* Vol. 12, no. 56 (Feb. 1843), 122. Reprinted in part in “The Moral Effects of Music,” *Weekly Messenger* Vol. 8, no. 22 (Feb. 15, 1843), 1543. Emphasis mine. Davezac’s discussion of German music here constitutes the first of many digressions in a fairly long and, typical for this era, rambling piece that was meant to review two recent books on gardening in the United States. Instead, Davezac launched into a lengthy and fanciful discourse on plants and gardening in Europe, as well as the significance of various plants in antiquity.

reflections on the Germans here are noteworthy from a number of perspectives. First, Davezac identified a sophisticated people with a highly developed intellectual and artistic culture, and predicted that they had the potential to achieve international influence and stature if only they could consolidate as a single political entity.² Second, he identified the singular role that music played in German life, heralding the promise of an ideal, eternal world beyond this one where all souls would stand on equal ground. Third and most important, Davezac discerned that although certain major, politically unified Western cultures had managed to colonize far-flung lands, gaining control “over earth and seas,” the politically fragmented Germans—without any colonies of their own—nonetheless reigned over the intangible expanse of the human mind and heart with their music.

Almost a century later, Norbert Elias would famously present complementary notions in his classic 1939 book *The Civilizing Process*, in which he argued that modern German thinkers and writers desired to promote *Kultur*, especially their musical tradition, in order to establish an identity not only distinct from, but superior to, that of other peoples.³ In at least some respects they succeeded, as evidenced by the enormous influence of German *Kultur* in nineteenth-century America. Indeed, the effects of the attitude represented by *Kultur*, and of American responses to it, continue to be felt in contemporary musical culture in the United States and elsewhere. How and why did Germany come to possess such authority over the ears of antebellum Americans? The answers are many and complex, and this is not the place to address them fully. Scholars have certainly dealt ably with aspects of the history—and historiography—of the German

² Davezac’s prediction is all the more chilling in light of the ramifications of political unification for Germany, especially the rise of the Third Reich.

³ See Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, 2nd ed., trans Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000). Wolf Lepenies has echoed many of Elias’s ideas in *The Seduction of Culture in German History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

presence in American musical life, especially after the Civil War. But in recent years some have challenged the partial way in which American music history has been told with regard to the Germans, particularly in studies dealing with the early- to mid-nineteenth century. John Graziano, for one, has questioned the larger traditional narrative of German cultural domination in the U.S. during the nineteenth century, pointing instead to the fact that the new arrivals brought a musical tradition with them that was by-and-large welcomed, “digested and integrated into the emerging country’s new musical culture,” and that “led to the development of a language of musical plurality that was not heard elsewhere.”⁴ This view of a relatively smooth and unproblematic integration, however, represents a minority position among recent scholarly readings of the German musical element in the United States.

Although most scholars of music in the United States at least implicitly acknowledge the weight of German influence during the nineteenth century, over recent generations they have often chosen to concentrate instead on the contributions of American-born composers and musicians to the landscape of musical life in the United States. Jessica Gienow-Hecht, already cited in the introduction of this study, has identified a tendency in the more recent secondary literature on nineteenth-century American culture to avoid attention to European influences perceived to be colonialist or elitist, and to neglect the “elective affinity” between Germans and Americans during the nineteenth century and into the twentieth.⁵ She writes that “Americans’ invitation to German musicians who were eager to come to the United States gave way to a broad and long-lived affection for musical culture, even though this attraction seemed—from a political point of view—increasingly inappropriate. Americans did not consciously develop an

⁴ John Graziano, introduction to *European Music and Musicians in New York City, 1840–1900* ed. John Graziano (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2006), 6.

⁵ Gienow-Hecht, *Sound Diplomacy: Music and Emotions in Transatlantic Relations, 1850–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 7.

affinity for Germans, but covertly, they picked German music, associated it with the universal language of emotions, and then found themselves in a situation where they could not but develop an elective affinity for the ‘people of music.’”⁶ Though Gienow-Hecht’s construal is perhaps misleading about the degree of awareness or agency on the part of either Germans or Americans regarding the unfolding musical dynamics between them, she does identify one possible reason for the more recent general tendency to avoid full and appropriate engagement with German influences.

Perhaps because of the Germans’ glaring presence in American musical life during the mid- to late-nineteenth century, or because of Germany’s later international ignominy, or out of a desire to strike out against traditionally Eurocentric musicology, scholars writing since the middle of the twentieth century have often either taken for granted or avoided the subject of the Germans’ role in the development of American musical attitudes. Richard Crawford demonstrates how the classic histories of American music by Gilbert Chase, Wilfrid Mellers, H. Wiley Hitchcock, and Charles Hamm approach the problem of surveying “music in the United States” in four very different ways. All, however, take to some degree what Crawford calls the “provincial” outlook on American music, which “[rejects] Europe as a musical model for America” and concentrates “on the deeds of musicians who seem to have done the same, finding value chiefly in divergence from European practices.” This is in contrast to the “cosmopolitan” outlook, in vogue up through World War II, which “has been inclined to find European

⁶ Ibid., 15. We might fairly quibble with Gienow-Hecht’s depictions of certain aspects of American musical culture—such as her characterization of opera in the nineteenth century—but her goal of telling a story so many scholars have generally shirked represents a necessary counterbalance in the current historiographical landscape.

hegemony inevitable, or healthy, or both...technical mastery and the acceptance of European forms and aesthetic principles are [for the cosmopolitan outlook] signs of musical vitality”.⁷

To be sure, a number of scholars have worked to counter the so-called “provincial” outlook in American music historiography. Among them is Nancy Newman, who tells the story of the Germania Musical Society, an orchestra of German immigrant musicians who presented some of the first performances of European orchestral works in the United States. She observes that “Surprisingly little is known about the numerous individuals who immigrated to the United States at mid-century and affected our musical life so profoundly. The precise mechanism by which the ‘classical,’ predominantly German, repertory of instrumental works found its way into American concert halls is just beginning to be explored.”⁸ Newman here identifies an important deficiency in the recent and current historiography of music in the United States during the nineteenth century. Katherine Preston and Douglas Shadle have also contributed to our understanding of the German presence in the United States. Recently, Preston’s informative introduction to her new edition of George Frederick Bristow’s *Jullien* Symphony (2011) and Shadle’s book *Orchestrating the Nation: The Nineteenth-Century American Symphonic Enterprise* (2014) have both drawn greater attention to the significance of Germans and German music especially for the careers of American composers.

The German element indisputably constituted one of the most powerful ingredients in the American cultural environment during the antebellum and Gilded Age eras. In this chapter, I will consider the palpable idealism of many American writers regarding German music at mid-

⁷ Crawford, *The American Musical Landscape: The Business of Musicianship from Billings to Gershwin* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 7. Crawford refers here to Chase (1955), Mellers (1966), Hitchcock (1969, 1974, 1988) and Hamm (1983). For full bibliographic citations of these texts, see the Introduction, fn 45. Crawford’s chosen adjective to describe the post-war American music scholars, as having a “provincial” outlook, has a probably unintended and unfortunately negative connotation.

⁸ Nancy Newman, “Good Music for a Free People: The Germania Musical Society and Transatlantic Musical Culture of the Mid-Nineteenth Century” (PhD diss., Brown University, 2002), 12.

century. My focus will center on the paradox that the nationally specific tradition of German music boasted a significance that was supposedly “universal” to all eras and cultures.⁹ The universality of this music, many American commentators argued—its ultimate transcendence of any particular national or cultural tradition—meant that its dissemination could help to unify and democratize a pluralistic society that was subject to greater forces of division than the more homogeneous nations of the Old World, but that nonetheless embodied the highest social and political hopes of the age.

This chapter offers, first, a brief sketch of German immigration to the United States at mid-century, with particular emphasis on processes of cultural preservation and assimilation, and the ways in which native-born Americans responded positively to the German newcomers. I will then discuss the importation of German Romantic philosophy and musical nationalism to the United States through the writings of German, English, and American figures before and during the largest waves of German immigration. These attitudes informed American musical thinking, practices, and behaviors in both overt and subtle ways, and thus helped to lay the groundwork for the American reception of German music and musicians. I will then examine the various manifestations of German musical life in the United States, including various sorts of singing societies, beer gardens, traveling orchestras, participation in established American ensembles, and German cultural propaganda in public discourse, along with the ways in which antebellum American writers and observers responded idealistically to the musical activities of these foreigners. Countless writers—both elite commentators in leading publications and those who

⁹ This idea of universality is also intimately connected with the idea of aesthetic autonomy that Richard Taruskin calls “the dominant regulative concept of both art-theory and art-practice for more than two centuries” (“Is There a Baby in the Bathwater? (Part I),” *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 63, no. 3 [2006]: 163). In Taruskin’s memorable formulation, “Germanness [in music] is transparent. It must be dyed if it is to be tracked” (“Speed Bumps,” *19th-Century Music* 29, no. 2 [2005]: 198). Both Taruskin references are cited in Bonds, *Absolute Music: The History of an Idea*, 108 and 289.

wrote in humbler forums for a less educated audience—voiced their deep respect for the central European compositional tradition, admired the German tendency to use music as a means of social cohesion, and felt that the general public's exposure to German instrumental music could only work toward the realization of the highest American social ideals.

German Immigration and Assimilation at Mid-Century

Although German natives had made their home in what would become the United States since the seventeenth century, many native-born Americans began to feel the German presence more acutely during the middle decades of the nineteenth century. German immigration to the U.S. was already growing quickly before 1848, but with the political upheavals of the 1848–49 revolutions in Europe, German immigrants started arriving in droves, hoping both to gain political and religious freedom and to pursue economic opportunities. These immigrants, commonly known as “Forty-Eighters,” settled primarily, though not exclusively, in the northern and western states; Wisconsin and the Minnesota territory drew especially large numbers. Nearly one million Germans emigrated to the U.S. during the 1850s, with 215,000 arriving in 1854 alone, constituting 50 percent of total immigrants to the U.S. in that year.¹⁰ Only immigrants from Ireland matched, and in some years superseded, the number of Germans. These trends would continue in later decades: from 1855 until 1893, immigrants from German-speaking lands constituted the largest group of newcomers to the U.S. every year, and an average of 111,000

¹⁰ A total of 428,833 immigrants arrived in the U.S. in 1854, the highest number in any year during the decades from 1840 to 1860. It is important to remember that immigration from Ireland at mid-century was similarly prodigious. The potato famine brought thousands of Irish to the United States. During the 1840s and up through 1853, immigration from Ireland far outstripped immigration from Germany. By 1854, the trend had reversed. See “Historical Statistics of the United States, 1789–1945: A Supplement to the Statistical Abstracts of the United States,” United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census (1949), 34, accessed March 27, 2013, <http://www2.census.gov/prod2/statcomp/documents/HistoricalStatisticsoftheUnitedStates1789-1945.pdf>.

Germans arrived each year between 1865 and 1873—outstripping immigration numbers from other nations.¹¹ This influx would make an indelible mark on the nation’s economy and culture.

This enormous number of Germans arriving on American shores required some measure of support while they underwent the transition to living in a country that for the most part did not share the language, political organization, cultural history, or traditional customs of their native land. They found this support in a variety of outlets, as societies and associations were founded both by immigrants and native-born Americans to assist and support the newcomers in the process of acclimating to their new home. A writer in the *North American Review* described one such society in New York City called the “Germania,” which “was for some time the most active agent in arousing the national feeling of our Germans. The avowed object of its formation was to furnish relief to suffering exiles, and to send expressions of sympathy and ‘material aid’ to revolutionists in Germany.”¹² In addition to immigrant aid organizations, other bodies arose such as self-help groups, social clubs, lodges, and societies for the advancement of cultural interests such as choirs and drama clubs. A large number of German newspapers appeared in the U.S. during the middle decades of the nineteenth century, helping to introduce American ways to recent immigrants in a language that they could fully understand. Some immigrants established “Little Germanies” in more populous American cities during the 1830s and 1840s. Because these communities inevitably became Americanized over time, they essentially served as transitional spaces where Germans could live among one another, speak and read their native language, and

¹¹ Raymond L. Cohn, “Immigration to the United States,” *Economic History.Net Encyclopedia*. Robert Whaples, ed., accessed March 27, 2013, <http://eh.net/encyclopedia/article/cohn.immigration.us>.

¹² Anon., “German Emigration to America,” *The North American Review and Miscellaneous Journal* Vol. 82, no. 170 (Jan. 1856), 268.

patronize German establishments such as markets, beer halls, and theaters.¹³ In addition to the “Little Germanies,” nearly all-German cities were founded in places such as New Ulm, Minnesota, established in 1856 by a group of Forty-Eighters (and where, as recently as 1970, 41 percent of the population designated German as their mother tongue).¹⁴

Those Germans who arrived after 1848 differed from earlier arrivals in that they belonged largely to the middle and upper classes, and included many more intellectuals and creative types. These Forty-Eighters believed strongly in German cultural superiority over what they found on offer in America. As Kathleen Neils Conzen observes, these newcomers were torn between their appreciation for the political and cultural freedom bestowed by their adopted nation and their thirst for the cultural experience they had known in the Fatherland.¹⁵ The tension that German immigrants felt between these two different allegiances was evident in the German-American press, which continuously and prominently discussed the controversy over the degree to which Germans should integrate into American culture.¹⁶

A few groups of educated German immigrants in this period segregated themselves not only from the native-born Americans near whom they settled, but even from their fellow Forty-Eighters. These German intellectuals and academics established communities that became known as “Latin settlements,” so-called because they cultivated classical learning in philosophy, ancient history and poetry, literature, science, music, and other fields. Most of these communities

¹³ Günter Moltmann, “The Pattern of German Emigration to the United States in the Nineteenth Century,” in *America and the Germans: An Assessment of a Three-Hundred-Year History* Vol. 1, ed. Frank Trommler and Joseph McVeigh (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 22–23.

¹⁴ La Vern J. Rippley, “Status Versus Ethnicity: The Turners and Bohemians of New Ulm,” in *The German Forty-Eighters in the United States*, ed. Charlotte L. Brancaforte (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), 257–61.

¹⁵ Kathleen Neils Conzen, “German-Americans and the Invention of Ethnicity,” in *America and the Germans: An Assessment of a Three-Hundred-Year History*, 136–37.

¹⁶ Karen Ahlquist, “Musical Assimilation and ‘the German Element’ at the Cincinnati Sängersfest, 1879,” *The Musical Quarterly* 94 (September 2011): 387.

were founded during the 1840s in Texas, where many other German immigrants had made their homes, yet they remained largely separate from these surrounding German settlers. Partly because of their very isolation and partly because these “freethinkers” were not adept at practical skills such as agriculture, the Latin settlements proved short-lived. These communities represented the most extreme manifestation of a salient strain of self-conscious intellectualism and a sense of superiority within the Forty-Eighter wave. A significant number of academics and other highly cultured German immigrants who arrived in the U.S. in this period found it difficult to adapt to the typically pragmatic American outlook and lifestyle. In some cases native-born Americans detected an insufferable arrogance among these sorts of German newcomers. As one American writer expressed it in 1856 in the *North American Review*, “They complain that America offers no inducements to educated men; that it is too utilitarian for their aesthetic and speculative natures; that muscle and sinew may live, but genius must inevitably starve in our money-getting nation. Many a professor of the humanities drags out a few months of miserable existence on our shores, and then returns to add another to the list of books in which malcontents pour out their vials of wrath on our innocent heads.” If only these foreign intellectuals would learn English and assimilate to American social customs and ways of thinking, this writer insisted, they would find happiness and meaningful work in their chosen professions.¹⁷

Yet their manifest ambivalence did not prevent most mid-century German immigrants from engaging in earnest efforts to negotiate a place in their adoptive country. They tended to respect deeply the essentially political, rather than cultural, character that American citizenship implied. They were free to pursue the arts and the rich cultural traditions of their homeland, all the while benefiting from the legal and political protections provided by the American

¹⁷ Anon., “German Emigration to America,” *The North American Review and Miscellaneous Journal* Vol. 82, no. 170 (Jan. 1856), 268.

framework of government set down in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Many would express how dearly they valued their legal and political freedoms in their adoptive country by fighting for the Union during the Civil War.¹⁸ In the “land of boundless opportunities” (“das Land der unbegrenzten Möglichkeiten”), they hoped to pursue a virtually unlimited array of paths depending on their skills and interests, working as farmers, laborers, artisans, business owners and merchants, teachers, professors, or musicians.¹⁹ Many of these immigrants settled quite readily into the American “melting pot,” politically if not culturally.

The general metaphor of the fusion of immigrant cultures had been expressed in various ways in the U.S. since the eighteenth century, but was becoming more commonly accepted among German immigrants by the mid-nineteenth century. The Forty-Eighter Christian Essellen, who had settled in the U.S. in 1852, expressed this attitude in 1856 when he spoke of the “melting pot” (*Schmelztiegel*).²⁰ The melting-pot model was inherently appealing to many Americans, as well as to assimilation-minded German immigrants who perceived it as an approach to integration that would allow German newcomers to respect and enjoy American economic bounty and political representation while preserving what many immigrants felt were their own superior cultural forms and traditions.²¹ Essellen made this point clearly when he asked, “What is it that permits us to pursue our own most German ways and habits in a land in which we or our fathers were not born, whose language is not ours...? It is the grand concept of

¹⁸ Moltmann, “Pattern of German Emigration,” 22.

¹⁹ Peter Gay, *Schnitzler’s Century: The Making of Middle-Class Culture, 1815–1914* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002), 8.

²⁰ The term appeared in the July 1856 issue of Essellen’s German magazine *Atlantis: Eine Monatsschrift für Wissenschaft, Politik und Poesie*, Vol. 5, no. 1 (July 1856), 471. *Atlantis* was one of the earliest German magazines in the United States, published chiefly in Detroit and Milwaukee between 1853 and 1858.

²¹ Conzen, “German-Americans,” 138.

eternal and inalienable human rights, which was set down in the Declaration of Independence, the legal basis of this great Republic.”²²

Indeed, most Forty-Eighters experienced relatively few difficulties adapting to their new surroundings. As Theodore Hamerow notes, “Of all groups of European migrants who crossed the Atlantic in the nineteenth century to seek a better life in America, none adapted to their new homeland more willingly or completely than the million Germans who came to the United States during the 1840s and 1850s.”²³ For the most part these settlers proved industrious, entrepreneurial, and self-sufficient in their endeavors to carve out a new life. Our *North American Review* writer described the success that some German immigrants were already enjoying: “The German merchants who are found in our cities accumulate fortunes with rapidity. He who was the wealthiest man in America was born on the soil of Germany.”²⁴ Furthermore, the author remarked, the difference between earlier German immigrants to the U.S. and the Forty-Eighters was striking: “The lines which divided the races in the first generation are obliterated in the second, and the son of a poor emigrant from the Rhine surpasses in American enthusiasm the descendant of a signer of the Declaration of Independence.”²⁵ No doubt the writer was exaggerating. Yet as so many Forty-Eighters felt the need to leave behind family and friends to come to the United States, in some cases their affirmative attitudes toward “das Land der

²² Essellen, quoted in Conzen, “German-Americans,” 136. In reality, this “melting pot” model led to rapid Americanization. Faced with the increasing loss of their cultural identity after the Civil War, many German-Americans challenged the “melting pot” ideal and advocated the preservation of ethnic difference for Germans living in the United States.

²³ Theodore S. Hamerow, “The Two Worlds of the Forty-Eighters,” in *The German Forty-Eighters in the United States*, ed. Charlotte L. Brancaforte (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), 19.

²⁴ While it seems most likely that this writer was making a general, metaphorical point and was not referring to a particular person, it is possible that the reference applied to Cornelius Vanderbilt, who was of Dutch heritage but might have easily been lumped in with German immigrants by the casual observer.

²⁵ Anon., “German Emigration to America,” *The North American Review and Miscellaneous Journal* Vol. 82, no. 170 (Jan. 1856), 268.

unbegrenzten Möglichkeiten” must have been stronger than those of native-born Americans. The pattern is a familiar one in the nation’s history.

The Forty-Eighters’ active embrace of their adopted land was manifest in their various political involvements, particularly their commitment to the antislavery cause. Upon his emigration to the U.S. in 1852, the prominent Forty-Eighter Carl Schurz (1829–1906) participated enthusiastically in antislavery efforts.²⁶ David Gerber observes that at least partly because of their experience of the 1848 European political revolutions, these immigrants “saw in the antislavery struggle evidence of an American nation yearning to live up to cherished, universalistic ideals.” Christian Essellen and other German Republicans advocated voter registration in a democratically inspired attempt to overthrow slavery, an institution they thought was counter to the United States’ professed democratic principles. Gerber writes that the Forty-Eighters’ “conscious effort to assist in creating preconditions for national action on the momentous issue of slavery was unprecedented at a time when ethnic politics was typically defensive in its concerns.” Moreover, “while remaining distinctively ethnic, [Germans] were coming to feel at home in and at one with America.”²⁷ Differences of ethnicity, national origin, race, class, and faith still caused rifts among various American constituencies, but German immigrant abolitionists came to perceive the United States as a nation whose founding principles called for all citizens to be equal under the law and united under a common, voluntary allegiance to a “civic democratic ideology.” Indeed, “Against the vision of a racially exclusive nation, they pitted a cosmopolitan concept of nationality, one that conceives human diversity as a source of

²⁶ Schurz later served as a general in the Union Army during the Civil War, as a U.S. Senator, and as Secretary of the Interior under Rutherford B. Hayes.

²⁷ David Gerber, *The Making of an American Pluralism: Buffalo, New York, 1825–1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 404–5.

improvement, not discord.”²⁸ Christian Essellen wrote in his German-American journal *Atlantis* of the need for human advancement through unifying democratic ideals affirmed through individual, deliberate choice rather than national or racial leadership:

In past ages the nations of the earth that stood at the center of world history and at the pinnacle of this development used their preeminent position to suppress the subordinate peoples; now they must draw these peoples up to their same level of culture and freedom. ... [The Union is a] great melting pot of all nationalities and races, which have here come together without any force or compulsion in a common political body. National and religious differences are altogether pushed into the background by the growing power of political ideals... Likewise in America friendships and leanings divide more along political than along national lines. The relationships between individuals and peoples are becoming more and more spiritualized, the immediate natural connections done away with; they depend on free choice and inner agreement.²⁹

This markedly progressive attitude held by many of the German Forty-Eighters would prove a significant boon to the American antislavery movement in the dozen years preceding the Civil War. The active and expansive vision of these immigrants also played into the broader American discourse of democratic egalitarianism and social progress in this period.

In any discussion about immigration, ethnicity, and national identity such as this, we run the risk of falling into implicit, even unconscious assumptions about binary categories:

“American” versus “German,” “native” versus “foreigner.” Such crude formulations fail to account for the very real ways in which encounters between native-born Americans and German immigrants in the antebellum period resulted in a complex picture of cultural exchange,

²⁸ Honeck, *We are the Revolutionists*, 8.

²⁹ Essellen, “Die anglosächsische Race,” *Atlantis: Eine Monatsschrift für Wissenschaft, Politik und Poesie* Vol. 5, no. 1 (July 1856), 471–72. Trans. Molly Barnes. The German original is “Früher benutzten die Nationen der Erde, die im Mittelpunkt der Weltgeschichte und an der Spitze der Entwicklung standen, ihre hervorragende Stellung dazu, die untergeordneten Völker zu unterdrücken; jetzt gilt es nichts anders, als diese Völker mit zu gleichem Grade der Kultur und Freiheit heranzuziehen [...] die Union, dieser grose Schmelztiegel aller Nationalitäten und Racen, die sich hier ohne Gewalt und Zwang zu einem gemeinsamen staatlichen Körper vereinigen. Überhaupt werden vor der steigenden Macht der politischen Ideen die nationellen und religiösen Differenzen in den Hintergrund treten. [...] Ebenso theilen sich auch in Amerika die Freundschaften und Abneigungen mehr nach politischen wie nach nationalen Verschiedenheiten ab. Die Verwandtschaften zwischen den Individuen und Völkern werden immer mehr und mehr vergeistigt, der unmittelbaren Naturabhängigkeit enthoben, von freier Wahl und innerer Übereinstimmung abhängig.”

communication, and identity formation that often had no clear boundaries. After all, both the natives and the newcomers were members of a broad Western cultural milieu that shared ideas, literatures, and customs. Americans of means often studied or spent time in Western Europe, especially Germany and France, in order to further their own education and claims to cosmopolitanism. Even the American composer William Henry Fry—who was among those who consciously sought to produce and promote a new “American” music—spent time in France as a correspondent for the *New York Tribune*.³⁰ It was true, too, that many native-born Americans were descendants of earlier German immigrants and thus could claim some familial or ethnic relationship with the new arrivals. Thus a large number of Americans admired and identified with many aspects of German culture, lifestyle, and attitudes—even if in their praise they perpetuated stereotypes. As one writer in the *Christian Examiner and Religious Miscellany* put it in 1851, “As a branch of the same great family as the Anglo-Saxons, and having the same essential qualities of independence, domesticity, and rugged manhood, Protestants as they moreover are generally, the Germans might be supposed to coalesce readily with the American people.”³¹

While German immigrants and native-born Americans did show some strains of mutual animosity, they shared more in common than they sometimes acknowledged. Scholars have often pointed out the tensions and animosities that developed between natives and German immigrants—especially in larger cities, where cultural differences among ethnic groups could be stark—and while these tensions should not be overlooked, neither should the positive aspects be downplayed. On balance, at least in the antebellum decades under discussion and in the years

³⁰ Douglas E. Bomberger’s account of Americans who studied music in Germany in the latter half of the nineteenth century presents an exploration of one aspect of this tradition. See Bomberger, “The German Musical Training of American Students, 1850–1900” (PhD diss., University of Maryland at College Park, 1991).

³¹ S.O., “The German in America,” *Christian Examiner and Religious Miscellany* Vol. 51, no. 3 (Nov. 1851), 350.

just after the Civil War, mutual respect and congeniality appear to have prevailed, most visibly among politically liberal and upwardly mobile American natives and German immigrants.

Consistent with the major waves of immigration, in the years around 1848 and then again in the early 1850s, American newspapers teemed with news and commentary on the hordes of Europeans disembarking on the shores of their new home. With the exception of nativist publications, most American observers expressed at least benign interest, and very often sympathy and welcoming sentiments toward the foreign strangers, especially the Germans. A New York correspondent for Washington's newspaper *The Republic* offered a typical response to the latest wave in June of 1849: "Germany...furnishes large numbers of industrious, frugal, comfortable immigrants...in general the spectacle is gratifying for no one can look upon these bands of sturdy men and healthful women...without agreeable emotion, and a cordial desire to give them a hearty welcome. This annual influx of such large numbers of the hard-working European people, inured to toil, of simple and frugal habits, and thoroughly disposed to love the land which they have chosen as their home forever, is one of the most important elements in our prosperity and greatness."³² Similarly, in 1855 a commentator for the *New York Times* painted the "German peasant men" in terms likable to Americans, as "good friends of Liberty." The Germans, after all, were neither Irish nor Catholic. Americans could identify with the German arrivals because the "[Germans] have too long seen one class absorbing the unearned means of another class; they have too long struggled against the close bonds of a political mastership, to wish to behold the same system on this free [land]. Slavery in Austria and Slavery in Kansas will not seem to them two so different institutions." In this writer's eyes the Germans also did not display "that ignoble quality" of the Irish, a penchant for mistreating others in the same ways

³² "Immigration from Europe," Correspondence of the Republic, New York, June 18, 1849, *The Republic* Vol. 1, no. 7 (June 20, 1849), 3.

they themselves had been mistreated. In sum, the *Times* writer asserted, “any one who knows our foreigners knows there is not a race among them so industrious, so kindly, and so likely to become adapted to our institutions as the Germans.”³³ With the exception of the English, who shared language and many aspects of culture and character with Americans, the Germans were more primed than any other major ethnic group that immigrated to the United States during the nineteenth century to experience a relatively comfortable transition to American life.

Similarly, in predicting the overall outcome of German immigration to the United States, our *North American Review* writer expressed hearty assurance that the newcomers would assimilate readily: “Our experience gives us almost unlimited confidence in our power to fuse heterogeneous elements into one harmonious whole.” After all, “Their interests are identical with ours; therefore our language and customs are best suited to their needs.” Further, the Germans would show themselves as model citizens in the United States if they continued to nurture those social habits that had led to their virtuous reputation, for “If the Germans in America will only be true to the higher and more generous impulses of their nature, if they will cultivate those tastes and perpetuate those customs which lend so many charms to social life in Germany, they may prove of essential advantage to the land which has ever extended to them the hand of friendship and hospitality.”³⁴

As Konrad Jarausch notes, the infusion of German immigrants into the U.S. in this period meant different things for different classes of Americans. And although attitudes toward these immigrants were hardly uniformly rosy—the overwhelming swell of immigrants could not but have provoked a certain irritated territorial and tribal resentment among the native-born—these

³³ “The German Immigration,” *The New York Times*, January 6, 1855.

³⁴ Anon., “German Emigration to America,” *The North American Review and Miscellaneous Journal* Vol. 82, no. 170 (Jan. 1856), 268.

attitudes tended in general to be approving. For working-class Americans, the Germans appeared on the whole to be hardy, honest, respectable neighbors. For many Americans from the wealthier, more educated classes, however, the German presence connoted learning and culture—a level of learning and culture that the native-born should emulate for the betterment of the entire society, even though they might never achieve it.³⁵

Thus it is no surprise that in addition to affirmative general commentary about German attitudes and ways of life, American writers frequently acknowledged the newcomers' proclivity for intellectual and cultural pursuits, particularly music. "It is rare to find a German," ran one typical comment, "without some musical attainment – enough, at all events, to take their parts, and generally well, too, in glee, chorus, or concerted piece."³⁶ But the foundations for a positive reception were already secure and growing stronger, especially among better-educated and more knowledgeable critics who wrote in the larger Eastern cities, by the transmission to the United States of a body of German philosophical thought about music and its relationship to the nation. We now need to consider certain key ideas that were conveyed to the United States during those crucial antebellum years, when the country's musical culture was still in an early and highly malleable phase yet more and more heavily influenced by composers, musicians, and writers from German-speaking lands.

German Romantic Philosophy and Musical Nationalism in the Antebellum United States

Although nineteenth-century German music criticism was by no means monolithic in its philosophical arguments, several of its basic unifying assumptions were transmitted to the United

³⁵ Konrad Jarausch, "Huns, Krauts, or Good Germans? The German Image in America, 1800–1980," in *German-American Interrelations: Heritage and Challenge*. Edited by James F. Harris (Tübingen: Attempto, 1985), 147–48.

³⁶ "Vale," "A Prosing about Music," *Spirit of the Times: A Chronicle of the Turf, Agriculture, Field Sports, Literature and the Stage* Vol. 24, no. 21 (July 8, 1854), 242.

States during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Arriving through a variety of channels, including the writings of German Romantics as filtered through American Transcendentalists, these German currents of thought were adapted in unique ways in the United States.³⁷ They took on a new and different valence in the young country because of its political origins, its heterogeneous populace, and its vaguely but powerfully perceived identity as the “last best hope of earth,” as Lincoln would later express it.³⁸ The following overview will help establish a context for understanding the influence of German thought on the antebellum American discourse concerning the social role of art music.

The cultural influences at issue here fall into two major categories: Romantic idealism and German musical nationalism. Romantic idealism with regard to music first emerged among writers in German-speaking lands in the years around 1800. As we saw in Chapter Two, music as a pathway to the spiritual was fundamental to certain understandings of *Kunstreligion*. Along with the works of Novalis, Ludwig Tieck, Wilhelm Wackenroder, and others, E.T.A. Hoffmann’s review of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony, which first appeared in the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* in 1810, contributed to the nascent construction of a German symphonic canon and articulated the notion that music was the most “romantic” of all the arts, one which “unlocks for man an unfamiliar world having nothing in common with the [world of the senses] which surrounds him.”³⁹ The idealist view of autonomous, abstract instrumental music asserted

³⁷ For more on the relationship between music and nationalism in Germany in the first half of the nineteenth century, see Sanna Pederson, “Enlightened and Romantic German Music Criticism, 1800–1850” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1995) and Mark Evan Bonds, *Music as Thought: Listening to the Symphony in the Age of Beethoven* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), esp. Chapter Five, “Listening to the German State: Nationalism.”

³⁸ Abraham Lincoln, Second Annual Message to Congress (Dec. 1, 1862), The Center for Legislative Archives, The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, accessed March 18, 2016, <http://www.archives.gov/legislative/features/sotu/lincoln.html>.

³⁹ E.T.A. Hoffmann, quoted in David Gramit, *Cultivating Music: The Aspirations, Interests, and Limits of German Musical Culture, 1770–1848* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 3.

that it offered a key to the experience of the transcendent. “Through idealism,” Mark Evan Bonds writes, “the work of art became a central means by which to sense the realm of the spiritual, the infinite.”⁴⁰ In short, for German writers around 1800, music—particularly instrumental music—became an ethical matter, a reflection of and an entreaty to the higher moral sensibilities. This surge of musical idealism around the turn of the nineteenth century was to have profound and long-lasting implications for the reception of instrumental repertory in the West.

Two scholars, Michael Broyles and Ora Frishberg Saloman, have explored in considerable depth the growth of German Romantic ideals in the U.S., together with their social consequences. Broyles locates Boston as the primary site of the rise of musical idealism in the United States during the 1830s. While he argues that some key roots of this idealist concept can be traced to church music reformers in the early eighteenth century, he also maintains that it was during the 1830s that the importation of German Romanticism began to attach ethical attributes to instrumental music. As noted above, this importation occurred via two channels: through the writings of German Romantics themselves, and, much more significantly, through the interpretations of the New England Transcendentalists.⁴¹ In the United States, Romantic idealism arguably reached its fullest fruition in the writings of the Transcendentalists during the 1830s and 1840s. While musical Romanticism was considerably longer lived, continuing through the late decades of the century, its American manifestations were already strong in the generation preceding the Civil War. Among the Transcendentalists, idealism in musical discourse would

⁴⁰ Bonds, “Idealism and the Aesthetics of Instrumental Music,” 390.

⁴¹ See Broyles, “*Music of the Highest Class*,” 33 and 217–18.

take on a highly progressive, indeed a millennial orientation, one concerned with the ultimate perfection of human society.⁴²

To be sure, many of the most prominent representatives of the Transcendentalist movement, including for example Ralph Waldo Emerson and Theodore Parker, did not concern themselves to any great extent with either the spiritual or the social role of music. Yet in figures such as Margaret Fuller and George Ripley, among others, we find powerful expressions of these themes. In his Prospectus and “Introductory Notice” to the first issue of *The Harbinger*, George Ripley wrote not only that the new journal would serve the cause of democracy, but that in doing so it would pay “due honor” to the fine arts. “Music,” Ripley wrote, “the art most appreciable to the many, most associated with the hopes of Humanity, and most flourishing always where Humanity is most alive, we shall watch with almost jealous love; striving not only by criticism of all musical performances, schools and publications, but also by historical and philosophical essays on the principles of the Art itself, and the creations of its master minds, to keep it true to the standard of pure taste, true to the holy end for which the passion of hearing harmonies was given to man.”⁴³

Dwight was foremost among the Transcendentalists to transmit German Romantic idealism in the U.S. during the 1830s and 1840s.⁴⁴ Broyles asserts that while early on Dwight expressed some populist sentiments about music’s potential to unite all classes of society, describing these as “utterly unrealistic utopian ideals about social class,” by the 1840s he had

⁴² Günter Leypoldt, *Cultural Authority in the Age of Whitman: A Transatlantic Perspective* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 138.

⁴³ Cited in Joel Myerson, ed., *Transcendentalism: A Reader* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 482.

⁴⁴ H. Theodore Hach, a German-born cellist and founder and editor of the *Musical Magazine* from 1839 to 1842, was another Boston figure—though not a Transcendentalist—who helped disseminate German Romantic thought in the city during this earlier period.

adopted a staunch and immutable elitism about the best kinds of music and the privileged and educated few who could understand, appreciate, and promote this repertory.⁴⁵ This assessment must be severely qualified. Saloman, for instance, has examined the philosophical influences on Dwight during this early period, modifying Broyles' central thesis about Dwight's musical idealism. Contrary to Broyles, she shows that at least in the years before 1847 Dwight did in fact continue to endorse a musical culture accessible to all, one that would elevate all listeners to a higher plane of spiritual and moral truth. Saloman writes that Dwight held "universal ideals combined with practical educative aims," and espoused "the idea that art music could exert a positive force toward a better future attainable by all working together instead of dividing according to social class."⁴⁶ In fact, despite his lifelong musical conservatism and undeniably limited definition of the "best" music, throughout the 1850s and 1860s Dwight expressed his belief that music had the potential "to unite and blend and harmonize all who may come within its sphere."⁴⁷ Saloman has also demonstrated in detail how other German, English, and American writers transmitted elements of German Romantic philosophy regarding music and aesthetics, either directly or through Dwight; these figures included Friedrich Schiller, Thomas Carlyle, Gottfried Fink, H. Theodore Hach, Margaret Fuller, Christopher Pearse Cranch, and William Wetmore Story, among others.

Like most of the Transcendentalists, Margaret Fuller (1810–1850) wrote much more about literature than about music, but in her time she was probably the most ardent champion for German Romantic literature in the country, and she played a major role in the growing advocacy

⁴⁵ See Broyles, "*Music of the Highest Class*," 224, 233–34.

⁴⁶ Saloman, *Beethoven's Symphonies and J.S. Dwight*, 17. She notes that Broyles drew his conclusions "on the basis of only a few select documents written by Dwight in those decades."

⁴⁷ Dwight, "*DJM* Vol. 30, no. 14 (Sept. 24, 1870), 314. Reprinted from the *Atlantic Monthly*. Dwight expressed very similar sentiments years earlier in a piece for *DJM* that was also reprinted in the *Christian Inquirer* vol. 9 no. 43 (July 1855), 1.

of Beethoven in American intellectual circles during the 1840s. Though Fuller did not explicitly argue for the superiority of German music, her writings on music in the Transcendentalist journal *The Dial* and in Horace Greeley's *New-York Tribune* espoused German Romantic ideas, urging readers to consider works of art as autonomous things-in-themselves, music as a universal language, and Beethoven's symphonies as expressions of hope, the eternal, and the infinite.⁴⁸ Dwight made similar but much more specific claims. As we saw in Chapter Two, Dwight thought that instrumental music (as opposed to vocal) was autonomous, and argued that it alone could serve as a universal language uniting people of different nations and cultures. Chief among Dwight's examples of instrumental music as a universal language were Beethoven's symphonies, which he believed heralded a future world of social peace and concord.

A second strain of German musical thought transmitted to the U.S. during the second quarter of the nineteenth century had to do with national feeling. While the origins of the association of German cultural or national identity with music remain obscure, by the end of the eighteenth century this link was becoming ever more conspicuous among German music critics, philosophers, and other thinkers. A growing number of public voices began to discuss music as central to German national identity, indeed of *Kultur*. Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter describe Friedrich Rochlitz's aim as stated in 1799 in the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* as elucidating the "exclusively German character" of certain kinds of music, and music's pivotal role as an aspect of German culture.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ For more on Fuller's contribution to Beethoven reception in the United States, see Ora Frishberg Saloman, "American Writers on Beethoven, 1838–1849: Dwight, Fuller, Cranch, Story," and "Margaret Fuller on Musical Life in Boston and in New York, 1841–1846" both in *Listening Well: On Beethoven, Berlioz, and Other Music Criticism in Paris, Boston, and New York, 1764–1890* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009).

⁴⁹ Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter, "Germans as the 'People of Music': Genealogy of an Identity," in *Music and German National Identity*, ed. Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 4.

The influence of German musical nationalism became manifest in the United States slightly later than that of Romantic idealism, emerging only in the 1840s and 1850s. Its main conveyer was Adolf Bernhard Marx (1795–1866), whose writings were translated and reprinted in numerous American magazines, and whose ideas were also prominently interpreted by figures such as Dwight.⁵⁰ *DJM*, for example, reprinted many of Marx’s works in English translation, including parts of his *General Musical Instruction*, *Music of the Nineteenth Century*, and even Franz Brendel’s reviews of Marx’s *Ludwig van Beethoven’s Life and Works*. Marx’s thinking on music and the nation was complex, but some constants in his views are nevertheless clear. As Applegate notes, during the 1830s, 1840s and 1850s, he articulated the music-idealist tenets discussed above, which included the notion that music could evoke spiritual and moral ennoblement in listeners. As we will see, such assumptions would be echoed among both elite and more humble and popular American writers, who gave them a new and distinctly democratic cast. tenets that both elite and more humble American writers would also voice.

Marx himself tended to frame these solidly within a German nationalist rhetoric. In an article on the “present state of music” translated into English and printed in *DJM*, Marx referred repeatedly to the greatness of German music and composers such as J.S. Bach, Gluck, Mozart, and Beethoven in contrast to the “seductive foreign operas” of, we may assume, the Italians.⁵¹ He wrote that music

has power to raise us from a rude and barren state of being, to a higher, more susceptible, and spiritual existence . . . to exalt us above the human sphere to the confines of the Divine . . . In art itself all is pure, noble, and good.⁵²

⁵⁰ Dwight knew of Marx as early as the 1830s, as Saloman has shown in her discussion of Dwight’s use of Marx’s 1835 essay on Beethoven in the first volume of the *Encyclopadie der gesamten musikalischen Wissenschaften, oder Universal-Lexicon der Tonkunst* (*Encyclopedia of Complete Musical Knowledge, or Universal Lexicon of Music*). See Saloman, *Beethoven’s Symphonies and J.S. Dwight*, 33–40.

⁵¹ Although Gluck is most famous for working on the Parisian stage and absorbing the style of French opera, he was born in the German Palatinate and Germans often claimed him as their own.

Implicitly equating the spiritual aspect of music with Germans and its sensual aspect with Italians, Marx effectively placed German music at the pinnacle of his hierarchy of musical quality. Indeed, Marx helped to consolidate a discourse that had begun in the third quarter of the eighteenth century, one that framed German music as “the culture that included all others, incorporating the best of all national styles into their own.”⁵³ In this way, German music could both possess a national identity and claim superiority over the music of other nations.

Dwight was clearly influenced by Marx’s nationalism and often maintained that German music represented the art’s highest aesthetic possibilities, offering both intellectual and emotional stimulation to all listeners. His Germanophilia became so obvious that just a few months after the debut of *DJM* in 1852, someone identified as “Giustizia” wrote a letter to the editor complaining that “I can hardly read your journal now, growing worse and worse as it is every day. . . . From page 1 to page 192, what is there besides about 50 pages of advertisement? German music, German composers, German artists . . . [I] hope that you will take a hint from an unknown friend, and banish German mysticism and Boston transcendentalism from your paper.”⁵⁴ Dwight published a lengthy response to this letter, standing his ground and proclaiming that the journal was “partial to German music” because “we love it and believe it one of heaven’s best blessings to all who have learned in any good degree to appreciate it.” He further invited the writer and any lovers of Italian or other non-German music to contribute to his journal in order to

⁵² A.B. Marx, “A Glance at the Present State of Music,” *DJM* Vol. 14, no. 6 (November 6, 1858), 250.

⁵³ Celia Applegate, “The Internationalism of Nationalism: Adolf Bernhard Marx and German Music in the Mid-Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of Modern European History* 5, no. 1 (2007): 153.

⁵⁴ Giustizia, “Germano-Phobia,” Letter to the Editor, *DJM* vol. 2, no. 1 (October 9, 1852), 5. It is unclear whether the letter writer or Dwight himself provided the pen name “Giustizia,” Italian for “justice,” though the former is far more likely. In either case, the implication was clear: the author desired that Dwight do “justice” in his journal to the many other musical traditions present in the United States.

balance its treatment of repertory.⁵⁵ Although Dwight's bias toward German music was and remains plain to see, his attitude heralded trends that would come to dominate American musical discourse for at least several subsequent generations. A prime example of this attitude can be found in a piece in *Sartain's* of 1851, in which the author, identified as Mrs. Winchester, wrote that the "German, rude and awkward in his exterior, and possessing a most unmusical language, has yet more music in himself, than any other being in the world. It does not, as in Italy, break forth into song from throats that seemed modeled from the nightingale, but it dwells in the heart, and breathes itself in instrumental compositions such as the world has never heard elsewhere."⁵⁶ While less favorable sentiments regarding the German influence were by no means entirely absent among music critics and in the larger culture at mid-century, anti-Germanism did not represent the prevailing sentiment in musical discourse of this period

As David Gramit has shown and many others have helped to confirm, a fundamental tension lay at the heart of the central claims about German musical culture. He writes that "the status of German musical culture rested on a precariously double-edged claim: serious (and most often German) music was held to be universally valid, even though, at the same time, maintaining its prestige demanded limiting access to it along the lines of existing social divisions, prominent among them class, gender, education, and nationality."⁵⁷ Gramit's expression of this tension is in fact more all-encompassing than the paradox typically noted,

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Mrs. Winchester, "Thoughts on National Music," *Sartain's Union Magazine of Literature and Art* Vol. 9, no. 6 (Dec. 1851), 442.

⁵⁷ Gramit, *Cultivating Music*, 21. Speaking more broadly about all forms of German musical life, including singing societies, Celia Applegate has argued that "musical culture in [nineteenth-century] Germany, by virtue of its organizational forms, its ideological roots, and the intrinsic demands it placed on its bearers, also cuts across conventional distinctions between popular and elite culture. It was a socially inclusive nationalism, seeking inspiration in the sophisticated art forms of aristocratic musical culture, the popular forms of folk music, and the socially amorphous forms of church music," in Celia Applegate, "What is German Music? Reflections on the Role of Art in the Creation of the Nation," *German Studies Review* 15 (Winter 1992): 30.

which simply observes the odd coexistence of claims of German music's universality and specifically national origin. Others have shown, however, that in some formulations this becomes not a paradox at all. In this sense, German music could possess both its national identity and claim ascendancy over all other musical traditions, for as Applegate and Potter put it, "The history of the idea of absolute music... reveals the gradual development of German music's reputation as superior precisely because of its universality and transcendence of national differences."⁵⁸ This was the logic of German composer Joachim Raff, who as Bonds points out asserted that the "universality of German music...assured its superiority over the music of all other nations."⁵⁹

In the United States, these claims would gain resonance well beyond the narrow worlds of elite music criticism and aesthetic philosophy. At about the same time that German Romantic idealism and musical nationalism were moving beyond the writings of American intellectuals into the broader cultural sphere, the influx of German immigrants into the United States was reaching unprecedented levels. The combination of these circumstances resulted in a cultural alchemy whereby, for a significant number of both philosophically inclined and quite humble American writers, an elite and nationally specific European musical tradition came to symbolize hopes for progress toward the full promise of democratic freedom, and toward the ultimate social harmony of all humankind. A broad spectrum of commentators, from educated Bostonians to anonymous writers for popular magazines, noted this vision in the spread of a love for German music, above all German instrumental music, among people who considered themselves a part of the greatest liberal, democratic, egalitarian experiment ever attempted in the history of human civilization.

⁵⁸ Applegate and Potter, "Germans as the 'People of Music'" 13.

⁵⁹ Bonds, *Absolute Music*, 288.

German Musical Culture in the Antebellum United States and the American Response

The immigrants from German lands who arrived on American shores during the nineteenth century continued to engage conspicuously and without the least hesitation in the traditional musical pursuits that they had known at home. German immigrants established and participated in singing societies, maintained concert series at beer gardens, performed on an amateur and professional basis in both large and small ensembles such as symphony and theater orchestras and chamber groups, and worked as music teachers, instrument makers, and critics. Their growing visibility in the United States' antebellum musical scene was not lost on their American counterparts; it could not possibly have been. In the words of one observer for *Putnam's Monthly Magazine* in 1855, "Well may the Germans say that the land of song is every German's Fatherland. From North, West, South and East, thousands of Teutons poured into the capital, to besiege our busy life with harmony."⁶⁰ Americans across virtually the entire country could by now witness first-hand the cultivation of German music and musical values by Germans themselves, rather than being informed of them second-hand via the European musical press or by elite American editorial writers.⁶¹

But Americans were also concerned about achieving a democratic and distinctively American musical life, and Germans had so zealously overtaken certain parts of musical culture in the United States—particularly art music—that American critics found themselves faced with

⁶⁰ "Music: Close of the Season," *Putnam's Monthly Magazine of American Literature, Science and Art* Vol. 6, no. 32 (Aug. 1855), 222. Presumably by "the capital" this writer meant New York City, the largest city in the United States, its busiest musical center, and the main port of arrival for immigrants.

⁶¹ The activity of German choral societies during the nineteenth century, in particular, displayed these groups' engagement with political and nationalist themes, and are discussed at length in Karen Ahlquist, "Men and Women of the Chorus: Music, Governance, and Social Models in Nineteenth-Century German-Speaking Europe," in *Chorus and Community*, ed. Karen Ahlquist (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

a difficult question: To what extent should the nation emulate and adopt German art music? The American writers and composers who felt that the dominance of the German repertory stifled homegrown American compositional attempts remained relatively few in number, although their voices did gain attention because of their positions, milieus, and connections. These dissenters balked at the decidedly un-democratic Old World system of wealth, patronage, and insider knowledge traditionally supporting such a musical culture. Like many of the Germanophiles, figures such as the composers William Henry Fry and George Frederick Bristow wished to cultivate a musical environment that made musical learning, experience, and enjoyment available to all, regardless of wealth, education, or class status. But Fry and Bristow also desired a national music that would represent a new departure, a music whose repertory included the works of composers representative of the American populace, and which thus might fully reflect the American experience.⁶²

On the other hand, German music represented most of the choral and instrumental repertory performed in the U.S. and was inescapable in its influence. For a majority of American commentators, German instrumental music proved so compelling in a universal sense that—despite its ethnic origins and presumed philosophical connotations—they felt it had the potential to unite and edify listeners of all classes, and therefore championed it over the music of composers from virtually all other regions and traditions. Moreover, the rapidly expanding German musical presence in this period seemed to confirm many of the perceptions that elite thinkers such as Dwight had formed about German musical thinking, aesthetics, and behavior.

⁶² There is no reason to assume, at least in this earlier period, a colonialist plot on the part of the Germans to dictate the cultural life of Americans. Rather, as Jessica Gienow-Hecht has shown, the relationship is more accurately portrayed as one of “elective affinity” between the two peoples—an attempt to conduct cultural diplomacy through the sharing of musical works and attitudes. See Gienow-Hecht, *Sound Diplomacy*, 15. Furthermore, because Germans enjoyed virtually no political unity or national identity prior to unification in 1871, they attempted to gain a sense of identity through pride in their rich artistic heritage.

The Germans brought with them two fundamental attitudes toward their music. First, in their “light music” (their polkas, waltzes, *Ländler* and similar pieces which were immensely popular with American audiences), as well as in their highly social choral tradition, they brought a sense of genial affability and happy union. Second, in their manners and writings about their art music, they conveyed associations of beauty, gravity, intellect, and complexity, but most importantly, the idea that German art music could make claims to aesthetic universality.⁶³ These attitudes would draw admiration and positive echoes in the writings of American commentators, who often extended these claims to argue that the supposed “universality” of specifically German art music could serve as a catalyst for the realization of democratic virtue and social unity in American society.

For most Americans in this period, the most noticeable manifestation of German immigrant musical culture was the singing society, a primary outlet through which these immigrants expressed their cultural heritage.⁶⁴ These groups required members to pay regular dues and served social as well as musical purposes. Singing societies were established wherever a critical mass of such immigrants had settled. Most of the singing societies were *Männerchöre*

⁶³ For a discussion of how German choral societies and especially the genre of the symphony became entwined in rhetoric of nationalism, democracy, and German identity in the first half of the nineteenth century, see Bonds, *Music as Thought*, especially chapters four and five. These themes resonated strongly with American concerns in roughly the same period, and a comparison of these ideas in a transatlantic context begs for further study.

⁶⁴ A number of American music scholars have contributed work on the intense activity of *Männerchöre*. Mary Jane Corry contributed a paper, “The Role of German Singing Societies in Nineteenth-Century America,” to the anthology *Germans in America: Aspects of German-American Relations in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. E. Allen McCormick (New York: Social Science Monographs, 1983). Suzanne G. Snyder has written on the *Männerchöre* of Indianapolis, demonstrating the extent to which these groups of German singers helped to stimulate musical life in the city (“The Indianapolis *Männerchor*: Contributions to a New Musicality in Midwestern Life,” in *Music and Culture in America, 1861–1918*, ed. Michael Saffle [New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1998]). In the same anthology, Mary Sue Morrow has examined the larger social context of *Männerchöre* in the more metropolitan settings of New York and New Orleans. Morrow emphasizes the material disparities between the elite, monied clubs and the “rank-and-file” clubs, but observes that no difference in musical choices and taste can be detected between the two (“German *Männerchöre* in New York and New Orleans” in *Music and Culture in America, 1861–1918*, ed. Michael Saffle [New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1998]). Karen Ahlquist takes one large 1879 singing festival as a case study in her previously mentioned article “Musical Assimilation and ‘the German Element,’” 381–416. She examined the Old World manifestation of singing societies in “Men and Women of the Chorus.”

(male choirs) and had their roots in the German principalities as clubs for men from the bourgeois and laboring classes, who gathered to enjoy singing, drinking, and fellowship. These groups had proliferated in early nineteenth-century German-speaking lands; between 1800 and 1843, over 120 were formed.⁶⁵ In the initially unfamiliar environment of the United States, the singing societies served an even more important purpose as havens of German *Gemütlichkeit* where immigrants gathered to share a common language and cultural traditions. Women could sometimes participate in a far less involved manner in a *Damenchor*, the female counterpart of the *Männerchor*, but were not permitted to become members of the latter. Mary Sue Morrow has noted that “a club’s activities nearly always extended beyond the purely musical realm to include such other functions as elaborate balls, picnics, and summer excursions, making them into organizations whose social and cultural aspects assumed at least as much importance as their musical ones.”⁶⁶ New York City’s Deutscher Liederkranz, founded in 1847, was one of the nation’s most prominent and successful singing societies, and boasted William Steinway as a member from 1858 until his death in 1896. The number of *Männerchöre* continued to increase after the Civil War, as Germans steadily entered the U.S. seeking better futures and as established German immigrant families flourished. A smaller core of active members formed the *Männerchor*’s administrative body and chorus, while the majority of members paid their dues in exchange for the privilege of enjoying the club’s musical entertainments and social events.⁶⁷ The

⁶⁵ Applegate, “What is German Music?” 29.

⁶⁶ Morrow, “German *Männerchöre* in New York and New Orleans,” 83. Morrow describes how, although some members had been hopeful that the *Männerchöre* would serve as a “unifying force” for the immigrants in their strange new home, by the last third of the nineteenth century, some particularly wealthy groups in New York and New Orleans increasingly set themselves apart from other *Männerchöre* in their cities, as they could offer an abundant menu of musical amusements for their large number of paying members (84–85).

⁶⁷ Morrow, “German *Männerchöre* in New York and New Orleans,” 83.

Männerchor would prove one of the most enduring features of German-American musical and social life.⁶⁸

Mid-nineteenth-century American commentators widely praised the *Männerchöre* tradition, in which social intercourse and social uplift were closely related. More important, these two goals would become virtually inseparable in the prevailing public discourse. In 1851, writing for *Graham's American Monthly Magazine*, an anonymous writer predicted that the presence of this strong German singing culture would exert a salubrious and civilizing influence on Americans:

Here are numberless bands of Germans, driven from their 'father-land' by oppression, flocking to this country, bringing with them their national tastes, and soon we shall see a beneficial effect produced by them upon our people, not only in our large towns but in every village and hamlet. Every little town will have its '*Maänner Chor*' [*sic*], its Musical Club, and the young men, with their warm excitement-seeking natures, will become as interested in music and studying parts of concerted melodies, as heretofore they have been in banding themselves together in lawless associations. Then, instead of listening to the promptings of fierce, violent prejudice against religion and color, gratifying their basest passions and endangering the peace of the community, their better natures will be elevated and purified—they will have no wish nor leisure for riots and church-burnings.⁶⁹

Although this writer did not refer to any specific incidents, this exaggerated concern with youth violence was likely a way of emphasizing the need for music's civilizing influence. In this line of thinking, the German newcomers were an object of sympathy and to be welcomed, for the social power their musical tradition could bestow was nothing short of miraculous. The expectation that "Every little town will have its '*Maänner Chor*'" [*sic*] was not terribly far from the eventual truth, especially in the latter part of the nineteenth century, but the prediction that these choirs

⁶⁸ *Männerchöre* still are still active in a significant number of American cities, including the "Beethoven Maennerchor" in San Antonio, TX, and groups in Indianapolis, IN, Utica, NY, Columbus, OH, Cleveland, OH, Harrisburg, PA, Madison, WI, and Newark, NJ, among others.

⁶⁹ Anon., "The Fine Arts," *Graham's American Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art, and Fashion* Vol. 38, No. 6 (June 1851), 452.

would prevent crime and violence among young men—and even might combat racial and religious prejudice in the highly charged political atmosphere of the 1850s—was astonishingly idealistic.

Yet this writer evidently felt that only in the context of American democracy could such fundamental social change occur. The author continued by arguing that the framework of American political organization would tame the restive Germans, allowing their musical aesthetics and attitudes to flourish. The combination of American democracy and the German artistic temperament would produce a kind of social harmony and appreciation of the beautiful as yet unforeseen: “Under the genial influence of our free government, which provides outlets for this restless, ungovernable [German] spirit...they will become calmer, and the beautiful taste they bring with them will develop [sic] and benefit not only themselves and their children, but the people with whom they will gradually unite.” The writer mused on the general moral elevation that the presence of German music would bring, rhapsodizing that it “is a beautiful thought to dwell upon, even though it be only a dream, the possibility of large masses of our people becoming humanized and refined under the influence of this divine study.”⁷⁰ This observer expressed the sense, increasingly prevalent around mid-century, that the dissemination of German *Kultur*, tempered by American ideals, could and would have a dramatic effect on social relations by unlocking the highest moral potential of citizens.

Starting in the 1840s, numerous *Männerchöre* groups gathered periodically in cities around the country to participate in large festivals known as *Sängerfests* or *Jubilees*. These events usually involved parades and some element of competition, with prizes awarded to the best choirs in certain categories. *Sängerfests* had begun in the German territories as occasions for choirs from far-flung regions to come together to sing secular, sometimes politically motivated

⁷⁰ Ibid.

music and to achieve social harmony in the face of political and cultural differences.⁷¹ In some ways the Sangerfest served the same social purpose in the United States as it had in its birthplace, but for American commentators, the Sangerfest took on a yet larger social function. The Sangerfest seemed to demonstrate for American observers both the sociable public spirit of the Germans and their superior, morally elevating musical tastes. Newspapers reported diligently on the mechanics of the Sangerfest, describing everything from the parade route to the colorful decorations to the music performed, while commentators remarked approvingly on the positive social and cultural influences of such events. In 1850, Philadelphia played host to a national “German Musical Festival” that entailed an assembly of dozens of German singing societies performing and processing through the streets, waving flags in celebration. The *Public Ledger* of Philadelphia made a point to comment on this occasion in glowing terms, and the piece was reprinted in New York’s *The Message Bird*. The festival, wrote the contributor, “like every thing useful and pleasing, is suggestive of something still more useful, and often a source of pleasure and delight. In most of these German Musical Societies, the love of harmony is made a tie of musical fraternity; besides being in itself a source of indefinite and boundless pleasure, at once pure, disinterested, and intellectual.” By implication, the *Mannerchore*—and the gathering of many of them at large festivals—were at once an example of the joyous social union of German musical culture and an example of the Kantian aesthetic “disinterestedness” that by this era had come to dominate the evaluation of musical beauty among both European and American critics.⁷²

This sort of esteem for what was perceived as the socially unifying and intellectually stimulating German musical life was often combined with a certain American self-flagellation.

⁷¹ Ahlquist, “Musical Assimilation and ‘the German Element,’” 388.

⁷² In his *Critique of Judgment*, Kant defines aesthetic “disinterestedness” as finding pleasure in something because one judges it beautiful, not judging something beautiful because one derives pleasure from observing it.

Self-deprecation with regard to American cultural production became something of a pattern in U.S. newspapers and magazines at mid-century. The *Public Ledger* writer took fellow Americans to task for failing to cultivate music as an aspect of public life: “There is our great deficiency as a people—we neglect the public culture of music and all its softening influences.” This was the reason that Americans had not yet contributed a great composer to the pantheon, which for this observer included Germans predominantly, though not exclusively. Was there any, he asked, “who can take his place by the side of Auber, Beethoven, Haydn, and other illustrious composers; and why? Simply, because Americans have not made it an object of public distinction, and kindled the ambition of the young to excel in its divine creations...”⁷³ The explicit message was that the German attitude toward music reflected a healthy, genial social life that Americans would do well to emulate.

Two years later in 1852, a writer for the *Message Bird* reported on the “third anniversary of the great Musical Jubilee of the United German Amateur Singing Societies of the United States” held in New York City. With obvious approbation, the commentator remarked that the participants in these groups “belong to all classes of society, many of them being mechanics and laborers.” Many of them did not even perform music, but patronized these singing groups because they loved music and appreciated the highly social element of the groups’ events. Then with an unmistakable air of condescension, the writer contended that these singing societies and annual music festivals “are strictly Germanic in their origin and spirit; and if our Americans singers and musicians are wise they will learn an important lesson from them, and profit by its teachings. We hear a great deal of whining about ‘German influence,’ ‘German monopoly,’ ‘German clanishness,’ &c., &c., from any native artists, who would do well to stop their whining

⁷³ Anon., “Music,” in the Philadelphia *Public Ledger*, reprinted in *The Message Bird* Vol. 2, no. 25 (August 1, 1850): 407–8.

and imitate German industry and German enterprise.”⁷⁴ Whoever the writer was, it is clear that he had fully accepted the positive stereotypes of Germans as a disciplined, industrious people who approached music as an inherently social activity. He used his report on the annual musical jubilee in New York City as an opportunity to reassert what had become commonly recognized among many American observers: the superiority of German musical culture in both social and aesthetic dimensions.

The next year in 1853, an anonymous contributor to *DJM* (most likely John S. Dwight himself) wrote regarding the “Fourth Jubilee of the German Singing Clubs,” held in Philadelphia that year. Commenting on the comparatively exotic nature of such a cultural performance, the author noted that its “nationality gives it a pleasant piquancy, viewed as a spectacle outside of us,” and that Americans could not possibly oppose the event because it is “essentially in harmony with the free spirit of our own institutions.” The author continued by entreating his readers thus:

But the interesting question about it is: Why may not *we*, who are not Germans, borrow this excellent practice and incorporate it into our American life. If the music-loving Germans must seek out a republic for the free continuance of their musical existence, so on the other hand must a widespread, imperial democracy like this seek pledges of good order, concord and refinement in an all-pervading and inspiring influence of Art. The needed element comes providentially, with the tide of immigration, in the persons of these hearty, generous, art-loving Teutonic cousins of our Anglo-Saxon blood. As they assimilate to us politically, let us assimilate to them in the warm, rhythmic social culture, of which as a people they are the most quickening example ... German music takes every day a deeper hold upon American sympathies and taste than any other music. We would not have the charm of separate nationality in these German festivals dissolved; but we should be pleased to see Americans and Germans, (in this great land of blended nationalities, where all peoples are combined to make one good liberal and

⁷⁴ Anon., “German Musical Festival,” *The Message Bird* Vol. 3, no. 21 (July 1, 1852), 358. I thank Katherine Preston for the observation that this comment might have been directed at the extraordinarily prolific American composer Anthony Philip Heinrich (1781–1861).

universal people), mingling together and making common cause in this great work of developing a popular musical sentiment...⁷⁵

This writer evidently felt that the Germans provided a musical and social model to be emulated by native-born Americans. And yet in these lines we also sense a distinct effort to retain the cultural demarcation between Americans and Germans. A certain tension emerged here between the need to preserve the ethnic “charm” of the German singing festivals on the one hand, and a strong desire to absorb German music and musical behavior for the betterment of American social life on the other. But this tension involved recognition of the need for a balance between absorption and preservation of distinctive German cultural traits. Still, the author clearly expressed a wish for great social union and regarded German musical culture as the means by which such a goal might be attained.

American visitors to the German territories in the mid-nineteenth century wrote home of their experiences in the Old World, sometimes entreating their readers to emulate what they found culturally enlightening among the Germans. Lamenting the lack of public gardens and the inaccessibility of “good music” in the United States, the American musician William Batchelder Bradbury (1816–1868) wrote from Leipzig in 1848:

Can we not have our public gardens and delicious music, that all may enjoy?
...Do not Americans love good music? and if they heard more, would they not love it still better? And cannot GOOD music be placed within the reach of every man, woman, and *child* of our land? and, until we can raise up our own native musicians, will we not encourage the German musician—intelligent, industrious, and universally respected—to our shores?⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Anon., *DJM* Vol. 3, No. 13 (July 2, 1853), 101–2. Given the tone of this piece, the author is probably Dwight, who frequently praised the German culture of music making. The claim that “we would not have the charm of separate nationality in these German festivals dissolved” is therefore probably an earnest one, and not a reference to the infamous “clannishness” of German musicians in the U.S. at midcentury (see Preston, “American Orchestral Music,” liii).

⁷⁶ William Batchelder (W.B.) Bradbury, “Music for the People,” *Home Journal* 33, no. 131 (August 12, 1848), 3.

Bradbury equated “good music” with German music in general, and positioned the U.S. as artistically helpless, needing to call upon the Germans to foster both a taste for and practice of art music in the New World. But clearly Bradbury’s central purpose here was to emphasize his desire for such music to be accessible to Americans of every class, in order that everyone, without exception, could benefit from its alleged spiritually and intellectually edifying powers.

A number of German orchestras toured the United States during the 1840s and 1850s. These included the Styrian (or Steyermarkische) Orchestra led by Francis Riha, the Saxonia Orchestra led by Carl Eckhart, the Gung’l Orchestra led by Josef Gung’l, and the Germania Musical Society, led initially by Carl Lenschow and later by Carl Bergmann. We have already encountered the Germania several times in this study, and for good reason. Although Nancy Newman has already provided a fascinating and thorough history of the Germania’s musical career, the orchestra warrants consideration here as an integral aspect of the “German element” in nineteenth-century American musical life. The Germania toured the United States for six years at mid-century (1848–1854), managing to perform some 1,000 concerts during that time. The career of the Germanians both exemplifies the benefits afforded to European musicians in the U.S. at mid-century, and provides a window into the social overtones of American concert life in the same period.⁷⁷

The years of the Germania’s American tours coincided both with the enormous wave of immigration to the U.S. and with the increasing activity of American concert life. Nancy Newman argues persuasively that the Germania probably did more to further American

⁷⁷ In this chapter I focus primarily on German orchestral ensembles, but there was another extremely successful (non-German) touring orchestra in the United States: Louis-Antoine Jullien’s orchestra was a major presence during the last year of the Germania’s American tour, both helping to complement the Germania’s goals and competing for audiences. Jullien’s orchestra was, after all, “the largest and best orchestra ever before heard on the North American continent,” according to Katherine Preston in “‘A Concentration of Talent on our Musical Horizon’: The 1853–54 American Tour by Jullien’s Extraordinary Orchestra,” in *American Orchestras in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by John Spitzer (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 319.

familiarity with, and interest in, symphonic music than any other organization during this period.⁷⁸ Their concerts brought audiences primarily German music: Beethoven, Haydn, Mozart, Spohr, Schubert, Mendelssohn, Wagner, Weber, Flotow, among others, and works composed by their own members Carl Lenschow, Carl Bergmann, and Carl Zerrahn. While German music was central to their repertory, they also performed a variety of music by non-German composers (including Auber, Meyerbeer, Halévy, Verdi, Donizetti, Chopin, Gade, William Vincent Wallace, and William Sterndale Bennett). The Germania performed not only for wealthy urbanites and the middle- to upper-middle-classes living in Eastern cities New York, Boston, Washington, D.C., and Baltimore, but also for people living far from the East Coast and outside heavily populated areas: their concerts were heard in widely scattered cities and towns including York, PA, Worcester, MA, Buffalo, Hartford, Norfolk, Cincinnati, Louisville, Milwaukee, and Detroit.⁷⁹ Like European concert soloists who began touring the U.S. regularly during the 1830s and 1840s, the Germanians took advantage of the rapidly expanding transportation network during the late 1840s and 1850s, which included new roads, steamboats, and above all, railroads, in order to complete their far-flung concert circuits.

Although the members of the Germania certainly experienced their share of disappointment over the course of their tours, they nonetheless enjoyed great overall success among their audiences. Returning to her native Boston in 1854 after a sojourn of several months in the South, for example, the young, observant, and opinionated travel writer Sarah Mendell expressed her warm approval of public concerts on the Common: “and to-night, as the Germanians were to play, I forgot my fatigue and went out.” Inspired by her listening, she waxed

⁷⁸ With its spectacularly successful and wide-ranging American tour in 1853–54, Jullien’s orchestra may have been equally if not more influential than the Germania in familiarizing American audiences with symphonic music.

⁷⁹ For a complete list of the Germania’s concert dates and locations during their American tour, see Newman, *Good Music for a Free People*, 198–246.

thoughtful about the social effects of such events. “Nothing has a better effect, and is of more real service than music; it so subdues the feelings and makes one harmonious with one’s self ...To-night there was a large number on the Common [to hear the Germanians], and the good effect was apparent at once, in the uniform quiet that prevailed. I trust that other cities will follow this example, and have music in one or two of their principal parks; for by this means, many who have a love of music, can have it gratified occasionally, even though they have no dollar or half-dollar to pay for it; and every such thing tends to improve the mass, and thereby lessen the number of criminals and outcasts.”⁸⁰

Critics responded favorably, often adoringly, to the group’s polished musicianship. Their success can be attributed to several factors. First, the Germania represented an established orchestra with relatively consistent membership, distinguishing it from the common practice both in Europe and the U.S. of gathering a group of local professional musicians to form ad-hoc orchestras on an as-needed basis. Their consistent membership meant that they knew what to expect from each other musically, and thus their ensemble boasted a balanced and unified sound, far superior to the comparatively uneven and haphazard productions that had characterized many earlier ad-hoc American ensembles. Second, the Germanians were often contracted to accompany famous European soloists, including the famous Swede Jenny Lind and the Norwegian Ole Bull. Thus they gained exposure to a range of audiences—not only those who came to their own orchestral concerts, but the throngs who excitedly patronized concerts by the celebrated solo singers and instrumentalists with whom the Germanians collaborated. Third, listeners widely praised the Germanians for their impeccable technical prowess on their instruments. Critics raved about the impression the Germania gave of an orchestra made up

⁸⁰ Sarah Mendell and Charlotte Hosmer, *Notes of Travel and Life* (New York, 1854), 284–85.

entirely of highly accomplished soloists who nonetheless played together like a well-oiled machine. Fourth, their self-portrayal (and genuine self-perception) as a musical group with the express purpose of cultivating great music in a politically free society proved highly successful for the purposes of American reception. The Germania's idealistic *raison d'être* resonated with American audiences who appreciated the orchestra's commitment to furthering the love of good music in a democratic nation.⁸¹

In addition to their participation in traveling orchestras from Europe, German immigrants played a central role in emerging and established American instrumental ensembles. By the mid-nineteenth century, these included orchestras large and small such as the Philharmonic Society of New-York—which was, for the first twenty years after it was founded, the only standing professional orchestra in the country⁸²— various Boston ensembles such as the Harvard Musical Association and the Boston Academy of Music, as well as countless pick-up orchestras and theater orchestras in American cities and towns. Germans made up the majority of members in many chamber ensembles, such as those that took part in Theodore Eisfeld's Quartette Soirees and in the William Mason-Theodore Thomas Quartet, the Mendelssohn Quintette Club, and the German Trio.

Much of the most passionate commentary about German instrumental music in the United States at mid-century set out to accomplish one of two goals: it either spoke directly of established American instrumental ensembles (their choice of repertory, how they were contributing to the diffusion of a more discriminating musical taste across the country, and how

⁸¹ See Nancy Newman's excellent study of the Germania Musical Society in the context of their political ideals: *Good Music for a Free People: The Germania Musical Society in Nineteenth-Century America* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2010).

⁸² Preston, "American Orchestral Music," xlvi.

this elevation of taste would result in a concomitant improvement in social warmth and equality), or it praised the German orchestral tradition in general as the highest, most spiritual of all music. An 1861 piece from the *Cincinnati Daily Press* offers examples of both. The author of the letter to the editor (signed only “W.”) described a performance of orchestral music organized by the German-American Frédéric Ritter at the Catholic Institute Hall, presumably involving one of the performing societies Ritter had founded in the late 1850s. The orchestra performed a nearly all-German program of works, described by this author as the “precious and immortal harmonies of Beethoven, Mozart, and Mendelssohn.” Complaining that there were few attendees, the letter-writer then claimed that “Next to religion, music is the greatest of all revelations. It is above poetry, though it is poetry, but the quintessence of poetry. Music begins where poetry throws away her pencil in despair. Over the gamut of human passions, which defy the skill of the poet and the painter, music reigns supreme.”⁸³ The author was clearly advocating the view of music (especially German instrumental music) as a revelation that Americans would do well to nurture in their country.

The idea that art could be universal in its appeal and effect found particular resonance in arguments over orchestral repertory performed in the United States. The well-known controversy in the musical press in 1853 and 1854 over the programming choices of the Philharmonic Society of New-York, involving American composers William Henry Fry, George Frederick Bristow, and critics Richard Storrs Willis and John Sullivan Dwight, reverberated widely in the larger literary scene. Willis wrote to Bristow that “the Temple of Art is a *universal* temple, and

⁸³ W., “The Concert on Thursday Evening,” Letter to the Editors of the Daily Press, *Cincinnati Daily Press* Vol. 5, no. 52 (April 24, 1861), 1. It is far from surprising that there were few attendees at a concert that appears to have consisted almost entirely of relatively large-scale abstract works by European “masters.” The disappointingly small number of attendees at this particular concert doubtless reflects—at least in part—many Americans’ preference for vocal music or otherwise more overtly narrative and illustrative works. The message to be taken from this letter to the editor is, however, that there was a salient strain of thought in the public consciousness which held implicitly or explicitly that German instrumental music specifically represented the “quintessence the poetry.”

that you are an American is no reason that you should have free admission there.”⁸⁴ A few months later Willis reiterated this position: “We intend to resist, in this journal, every encroachment upon the universal domain of Art: whether it come from American or German or Italian source. Art is free—it *is* universal: there is no nationality in Art, that the *ipse dixit* of any nation should rule and bear sway. Art is to be judged by itself—not by the nation from which it emanates.”⁸⁵ Similarly, a few months later in *Putnam’s Monthly*, George William Curtis asked, “Has Mr. Fry, and those who complain of over-much German in the selections of this [Philharmonic] Society, yet to learn that art is not, in any limited sense, national?”⁸⁶ Curtis further opined that

The best of every great performance in art is human and universal. It is not what is local and temporary which makes the fame of a great artist, but it is that which the world recognizes and loves, and there is nothing more pernicious to the cause of real culture than this effort to institute a mean nationality in art.

Yet in this same article, Curtis noted that at the most recent Philharmonic concert, the repertory consisted of “German music, most of it, it is true,—but then, German music comprises so much of the best of all instrumental compositions, that it was almost unavoidable.”⁸⁷ Curtis (and others) wanted to claim, paradoxically, that both circumstances were true: that great art had no national associations, and was determined by the extent of its admiration; at the same time, however, the largest and best portion of it was reliably German in origin. Evidently such commentators believed that the universality of German music allowed it to transcend its national

⁸⁴ *New-York Musical World* 8 (Feb. 25, 1854), 85.

⁸⁵ “On Stringed Instruments,” *New-York Musical World* Vol. 9, no. 6 (June 10, 1854), 63. One might suspect a certain disingenuousness here, but Willis’s bias did not favor German music as such, but rather he discriminated among European composers and eras. His bias thus cannot be reduced to a national bias.

⁸⁶ Lawrence, *Reverberations*, 484n.

⁸⁷ George William Curtis, “Music,” *Putnam’s Monthly Magazine of American Literature, Science, and Art* Vol. 3, no. 17 (May 1854), 563.

origins, and that the United States was the land in which this universality could be achieved in concrete social and political realities.

Germans themselves also played a significant role in cultivating American admiration for German musical expression. In 1852 a German traveler to the U.S. wrote a piece for the Leipzig-based *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* that was translated and reprinted in part for New York's *Musical World*. Speaking about German music in America, this writer held that Lowell Mason, more than any other figure, had conveyed the glories of German music to the American people through his psalmody:

Mason is a man of immense importance in America, and in Boston the Germans have named him 'the Psalm-King.' He has written out all his music from the collected works of the great German composers, simplifying them for Americans even to the primary ideas of melody, and thus awakening the sparks, at least, of musical taste and enjoyment.⁸⁸

Although a few American prominent critics did take exception to such sentiments, words such as these, suggesting that the dissemination of German music was virtually the sole reason for the improvement of American musical taste, were widely echoed among native commentators at mid-century. As we have seen, many American writers on music in this period betrayed a keen sense of inferiority vis-à-vis European music in general and German music in particular. Yet this attitude was balanced by hopes for cultural progress among a free people.

Ramifications

The practice of art music in the United States today—including aspects of concert culture, repertory, education, and musical standards—represents a legacy established over the course of the long nineteenth century, largely by European musicians, especially the German immigrants

⁸⁸ Anon., "Germans and German Music in America," from the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, reprinted in *The Musical World, An American and Foreign Record of Music, Literature, and Art* Vol. 3, no. 17 (1 May, 1852): 253.

who arrived in the country at mid-century. But during this period, American writers had at least as much to do with the diffusion of German music and musical values throughout the larger culture as the Germans themselves. As Ahlquist notes, “Perhaps more interesting [than the predominance of one national tradition] (because more complex) is the Anglo-American population’s willingness to accept this music wholeheartedly, and...with their spokesmen’s endorsement.” But she argues that it was during the late nineteenth century that American intellectuals “played an important role in establishing the success and high prestige of German music.”⁸⁹ I have shown that this process in fact began much earlier, and was widely visible in the American press through the 1840s and 1850s. In the face of growing anxieties over the integrity of their democratic Republican experiment, these commentators welcomed German musical culture not only as virtually a stand-in for what they saw as the lack of native talent, but as a gift that could help salvage and promote the imperiled dream of American democracy, social unity, and progress.

⁸⁹ Karen Ahlquist, “Mrs. Potiphar at the Opera: Satire, Idealism, and Cultural Authority in Post-Civil War New York” in *Music and Culture in America, 1861–1918*, ed. Michael Saffle (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1998), 30.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PEOPLE’S BEETHOVEN

The American neoclassical sculptor Thomas Crawford (1814–1857) gained renown during the 1840s and 1850s as a creator of patriotic monuments. The federal government in Washington commissioned him to adorn the U.S. Capitol building with sculptures celebrating American civilization, including the enormous bronze figure atop the building, *Freedom Triumphant in War and Peace*. In Richmond stands his towering equestrian statue of George Washington, surrounded by the likenesses of other famous Virginians. Given Crawford’s reputation as sculptor of the *Pater Patriae* and other national monuments, it is revealing that the art critic and patron Charles C. Perkins would commission Crawford to sculpt a statue of Beethoven.¹ Cast in Munich and shipped to the United States in 1855, the statue was placed the next year in the Boston Music Hall, and stands today in Jordan Hall at the New England Conservatory of Music. The work was a typical idealization of the composer. Crawford draped an elegant cape around his subject’s shoulders in imitation of classical sculptural tropes, perhaps to evoke the sagacity of a Greek philosopher. The great man stood high on a pedestal, holding a thick sheaf of scores, his visage serene but cerebral, with penetrating eyes under a leonine mane.

¹ Hina Hirayama, “*With Éclat*”: *The Boston Athenaeum and the Origin of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston* (Boston: University Press of New England, 2013), 59.



Figure 1. Thomas Crawford's statue of Beethoven, which now stands in Jordan Hall at the New England Conservatory. Photo courtesy of the New England Conservatory Archives, Boston, MA.

Within months of its unveiling, the statue had drawn dozens of admiring mentions in the American press, but was ultimately far more a reflection than a cause of the composer's soaring fame in the United States. Indeed, it would be difficult to overstate the prestige Beethoven came to enjoy, even more than other indisputably "great" composers, in the firmament that had been established in American concert culture and in the nation's culture as a whole by the 1840s and 1850s. Beethoven came to hold particular resonance in the American musical landscape partly because the man and his music combined two of the major strains running through the early

history of art music's development in the U.S.: *Kunstreligion* and the German element. We have seen in Chapters Two and Three how these two currents manifested themselves in broader American culture before the Civil War. They joined to reach a combined zenith in Beethoven. First, Beethoven's music was readily made into an object of virtual worship by critics, as it was thought to open a special channel for listeners' experience with the divine. As the century progressed, in a process we have encountered earlier as the well-worn concept of "sacralization," symphony conductors, musicians, teachers, publicists, and a burgeoning number of concertgoers increasingly regarded Beethoven's music as in some sense "hallowed." Second, Beethoven was himself a product and exponent of the grand German art music tradition, which by the 1850s had firmly ensconced itself in American cultural life.² Both *Kunstreligion* and the German element directly encouraged the growth of Beethoven hero-worship in the U.S. around mid-century.

As earlier chapters have also noted, however, these themes were inseparable in the American context from mounting concerns with looming obstacles and threats to the ideals of freedom, progress, spiritual growth, social harmony, and ultimate equality. To study the reception of Beethoven's music in America during this era is to see yet more clearly the ways in which native and immigrant observers sought to wield traditionally elite European instrumental music as a weapon in defense of their progressive and democratic "city upon a hill." The poetic flights evoked by Crawford's Beethoven statue help shed some light on these circumstances. In March of 1856 a grand inauguration ceremony for the statue took place at the Boston Music Hall, at which the American writer and poet William Wetmore Story recited a lengthy poem he had composed for the occasion. Consisting of a series of nearly fifty rhymed couplets, the poem

² It seems almost symbolic of the importance of the German musical element to Americans that Crawford's Beethoven statue was created in Munich to be transported to the United States.

was a soaring ode to Beethoven, the meter of which (but not the length) precisely matched that of Schiller's poem, "Ode to Joy," the text of the vocal portion of the Ninth Symphony's Finale.³

Story's verses were especially notable for the way in which they combined a celebratory emphasis on Beethoven's triumphant, immeasurable genius with a sobering recognition of the titanic struggles that marked the great composer's life. In this respect the poem echoed the many popular biographical sketches that had circulated for at least a decade and a half among American readers. On one hand the piece rang with words of positive exaltation:

We can only say, Great Master, take the homage of our heart;
Be the High Priest in our Temple, dedicate to thee and Art;

Stand before us, and enlarge us with thy presence and thy power,
And o'er all Art's deeps and shallows light us like a beacon-tower.

Story suggested that the great composer's music sounded a call for human freedom and ultimate equality:

High the claims of Art upholding; firm to Freedom; in a crowd
Where the highest bent as courtiers, speaking manfully and loud.

Beethoven was thus a "monarch" in "the mighty realm of music," a hero who spoke a universal language "that every heart can reach," and who penetrated transcendent realms of eternal truth and mystery. The term "ideal" appeared no fewer than five times in the poem.

On the other hand, Story's words included more explicit references to the adversities the composer had had to overcome than would have been necessary to create a meaningful image of musical greatness:

Poor in life, by friends deserted, through disease and pain and care,

³ An orchestra, chorus, and soloists were present at the unveiling. Upon Story's completion of the poem, the orchestra performed the first three movements of the Ninth Symphony. It remains unclear why they omitted the choral finale. They then performed the famous soprano recitative and aria, "Abscheulicher! Wo eilst du hin?" as well as the quartet from Act I of *Fidelio*, the first movement of the violin concerto, the "Hallelujah" chorus from *Christ am Ölberge*, and the *Choral Fantasy*. Dwight reports that the orchestra numbered fifty and the chorus one hundred and sixty, in *DJM* Vol. 8, no. 23 (March 8, 1856), 182–83.

Bravely, stoutly hast thou striven, never yielding to despair . . .

Overcoming his “silent world of deafness, broken by no human word,” and facing lifelong hardships that left him with a “careworn brow,” Beethoven emerged here as a model of inspired struggle and triumph in the fullest sense. More than this, the figure of heroic struggle spoke directly to a nation in need of “tones consoling and prophetic, tones to raise, refine and cheer.” The still-young country sorely wanted the gifts for which the statue stood:

Here as yet in our Republic, in the furrows of our soil,
Slowly grows Art’s timid blossom ‘neath the heavy foot of toil. . . .

Never is a nation finished while it wants the grace of Art –
Use must borrow robes from Beauty, life must rise above the mart.

And in the tense atmosphere of these pre-war years, the need was “Mostly here, to lift our nation, move its heart and calm its nerves . . .”

Mid the jarring din of traffic, let the Orphic tone of Art
Lull the barking Cerberus in us, soothe the cares that gnaw the heart.

Thus would the “Evil spirits that torment us” vanish. In what became almost literally a prayer to Beethoven’s spirit, the poet concluded in a fully hymnodical and almost messianic mode:

Let our voices sing thy praises, let our instruments combine,
Till the hall with triumph echo, for the hour and place are thine.

The verses were reprinted in whole or in part in a number of publications, among them *DJM*.⁴

It is no surprise that a writer could refer to Beethoven as “the Shakespeare of music”: a phrase certain to highlight to antebellum Americans his enormous influence.⁵ Beethoven’s exalted position in the U.S. emerged in part because of concurrent developments in European musical canon formation and widespread agreement about his preeminence as a composer in the Anglo-American world. But his image took on quite new and different meanings in antebellum

⁴ See the Appendix for the full poem.

⁵ “Herr Regenbogen’s Concert,” *Putnam’s Monthly Magazine* Vol. 4, no. 19 (July 1854), 23.

America. Here his music was more and more commonly regarded as a uniquely forceful expression of freedom, brotherhood, and democracy, the values upon which most Americans believed their nation was founded, but which now seemed less certain than they had been to earlier generations. As Saloman has noted, J.S. Dwight expressed the view very early on in his life that Beethoven's music could unify society. He wrote as early as 1845 that "the music of Beethoven is a presentiment of coming social harmony."⁶

Partly following Dwight's lead but also in line with broader patterns of reception, numerous mid-century critics even suggested that Beethoven's music spoke most directly and appropriately not to his own time, but to theirs, and to the nation's struggle to achieve—or perhaps to save—the social and political ideals of its founders. For such writers, Beethoven's music had broken away from its original context of European court culture, aristocratic posturing, and political oppression. It now stood as a symbol of freedom, and it inspired confidence in the continuing pursuit of American ideals, chief among them a spirit of democratic progress and universal uplift. Perhaps most strikingly, commentators in the generation preceding the Civil War frequently remarked that for all its sophistication and complexity, Beethoven's music nonetheless managed to touch the hearts even of the uninitiated. Here was proof of his music's fundamentally democratic orientation. This mid-nineteenth-century appropriation of Beethoven as an icon of American social and political ideals becomes all the more notable in light of the manifest and mounting tensions of these decades, which included sectional conflicts that threatened to destroy a country barely three generations old.

In the eyes of many if not most American critics who addressed it at any length, the music of Beethoven was different from that of Mozart or of any other European composer of art

⁶ Dwight, "Musical Review: Music in Boston During the Last Winter. No. IV," *The Harbinger* Vol. 1 (August 30, 1845), 188–89. See also Saloman, "American Writers on Beethoven," 161; and Saloman, *Beethoven's Symphonies and J.S. Dwight*, 35.

music. Beethoven's works, observers noted, managed to appeal not only to a refined sensibility and elevate listeners in a variety of dimensions, but also to diverse audiences. Critics commonly sounded the idea that Beethoven's music had a quality that made it universally intelligible and meaningful. Such assertions reflected the social idealism of the age, in that writers portrayed Beethoven's music as a kind of antidote to the social ills they believed had befallen the country. In an 1853 *Albion* piece about Jullien's latest concerts in New York, a commentator remarked on the character and sophistication of audiences, but had nothing to say about the need for "refinement" when listening to Beethoven:

It is a flattering and cheering sign of the improvement in the public taste, to observe that on several occasions the *Andantes* of Symphonies have been *encored*, even by the mixed audiences of laymen and *cognoscenti* in music, gathered at Castle Garden, thereby proving that the highest order of classical music, if perfectly played, is appreciable through its own intrinsic merit, even by untutored ears. Nature is ever true to herself, and Beethoven is nature. A popular and vulgar error is also hereby reprov'd; play the Symphonies as the mind and genius of Beethoven conceived them, and their appeal to the great human heart will not fail.⁷

This writer's statement that "Beethoven is nature" resonated powerfully with prevalent ideals of this period. As noted earlier, some of the central themes of New England Transcendentalism (itself profoundly informed by early nineteenth-century German Romanticism) were by this time infiltrating the broader American cultural sphere, including the conviction that nature shared in a special communion with the human spirit. This writer posited, wittingly or unwittingly, that if listeners—any listeners—heard the best available performances of Beethoven's symphonic works, they would be granted communion with the ultimate mysteries of nature herself. In an 1842 essay titled "Synthetic Philosophy," the sometime Transcendentalist and irrepressible spiritual seeker Orestes Brownson prefigured the *Albion* writer with even greater force: "To raise men to a perception of what are called the higher truths, it is necessary to purify and exalt

⁷ "Music," *The Albion* Vol. 12, no. 37 (Sept. 10, 1853), 440.

sentiment. Beethoven carries us nearer to God, than Kant or Hegel. Without love, man cannot soar; and without that exaltation, that enthusiasm which goes by the name of Inspiration, there are few truths of an elevated nature that are discoverable.”⁸ Here Brownson praised Beethoven for ennobling feeling over reason in his music. In doing so, he suggested, Beethoven made it possible for all listeners to partake equally in the “higher truths” of the spirit.

Some hearers did not shy away from interpreting his music in explicitly Christian terms. In 1845 a *Universalist Quarterly* writer lauded the fifth symphony as an “ultimate achievement” in Christian art: “This admirable and truly Christian symphony presents a compendium of the soul’s efforts and success in the work of redemption. . . . Had we ground to regard the author of this symphony, as a believer in universal restoration, we should have interpreted it, as the grandest representation, ever yet made, of the follies, wanderings and strugglings of the human family on earth, and of their final ingathering and eternal beatitude in the kingdom of heaven.” While the writer clearly hesitated to call the composer himself a Christian, his expansive understanding found a message of spiritual egalitarianism and universal redemption in the music.⁹

Given his centrality in the musical landscape of the United States in the nineteenth century, the secondary literature on the influence of Beethoven’s music in the country is relatively scant. Among the most visible scholarly discussions of Beethoven reception in this country is Michael Broyles’ 2011 monograph *Beethoven in America*. Partly because of the sweeping nature of his study, which covers the main lines of reception in the U.S. from its earliest days to the present, Broyles offers only a brief treatment of the public discourse during

⁸ Brownson, “Synthetic Philosophy,” *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* Vol. 11 (1842), 578.

⁹ “S.,” “Religion and the Fine Arts,” *Universalist Quarterly* Vol. 2 (April, 1845), 132.

the mid-nineteenth century, devoting attention mainly to the Transcendentalist appropriation of Beethoven by Dwight, Fuller, and others. To date, the most thorough contributions to the scholarly literature regarding Beethoven reception in America in the antebellum period include a 1976 dissertation by Anne Hui-Hua Chan (“Beethoven in America to 1865”) and several more recent articles and a book by Ora Frishberg Saloman.¹⁰ While these writings represent significant contributions to our understanding, neither Chan nor Saloman attend to the rhetoric outside the elite circle of figures such as Dwight, Fuller, Christopher Pearse Cranch, and William Story. Scholars have not yet explored publications beyond the major newspapers, music periodicals, and Transcendentalist literary journals in which Beethoven was discussed, such as *DJM*, *The Dial*, *The Harbinger*, and *The New York Tribune*. The relatively narrow focus of existing studies has prevented serious investigation of the ways in which a broader public discourse about Beethoven in the 1840s and 1850s absorbed and reflected emerging social concerns, especially at a time when, as we have noted, debates over the future of democratic ideals, as well as the very unity of the nation, were rapidly reaching a boiling point.

American Mythologies

Public recognition of Beethoven in America in the context of musical societies and performances began earlier than one might expect. The Beethoven Society, a choral society organized in Portland, Maine in 1819, may have been the first society devoted to the composer in the world.¹¹

¹⁰ Saloman’s major contribution to the literature on the reception of Beethoven in the United States is *Beethoven’s Symphonies and J.S. Dwight: The Birth of American Music Criticism* (1995). Saloman’s scholarship on this topic also includes “Dwight, Transatlantic Connections, and the American Premiere of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony in New York, 1846,” and “Fink, Hach, and Dwight’s Beethoven in 1843–44,” in *Listening Well: On Beethoven, Berlioz, and Other Music Criticism in Paris, Boston, and New York, 1764–1890* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009); “American Writers on Beethoven, 1838–1849: Dwight, Fuller, Cranch, Story,” in *American Music* 8, no. 1 (Spring, 1990): 12–28.

¹¹ Cited in Chan, “Beethoven in America to 1865,” 22 and Broyles, *Beethoven in America*, 24.

As early as 1822, Boston's Handel and Haydn society (founded in 1815), inspired by its members' acquaintance with choruses from *Christ am Ölberge*, commissioned an oratorio from Beethoven himself. Little is certain about this incident, and as far as we know the commission was not fulfilled.¹² But the episode had a prophetic aspect: before most of their fellow citizens had ever heard the composer's name, Americans who had been exposed to his music were moved to ask him for a new piece, written for them. Less than a year after Beethoven's death, a summary of the so-called "Heiligenstadt Testament"—an emotion-laden note to his brothers in which he confronted his deafness in alternately suicidal and victorious terms—appeared in *The Philadelphia Monthly Magazine*.¹³ A full English translation was published in the U.S. in the July 1841 issue of the *Musical Reporter*.¹⁴

By that time, the American mythologizing of Beethoven was quickly gaining momentum. Over the following decades, biographical sketches, anecdotes, and essays on the man, his character, and his sufferings popped up in countless journals and papers. Biographically he was often depicted as a respecter of humanity and human rights at every level. According to Margaret Fuller he avoided traditional forms of patronage, for he "could not accommodate himself to the ceremonies of a court." His outlook was emphatically democratic, though it was "very unlike that fierce vulgar radicalism which assumes that the rich and great must be bad. His was only vindication of the rights of man; he could see merit if seated on a throne, as clearly as if at a

¹² Chan, "Beethoven in America to 1865," 15–18. The story has the sheen of anecdote, but Chan cites several documents—including a small 1823 article in the Viennese journal *Das Morgenblatt für gebildete Leser* and an 1822 letter from Beethoven to his friend Ferdinand Ries—that support the story's authenticity. On the other hand, in his *Beethoven in America*, Michael Broyles does not even mention the commission.

¹³ "Literary Intelligence: Beethoven," *The Philadelphia Monthly Magazine, Devoted to General Literature and the Fine Arts* Vol. 2 no 1 (April 15, 1828), 60.

¹⁴ See "Beethoven's Will," *Musical Reporter* Vol. 7 (July, 1841), 309 and *The Message Bird* Vol. 1, no. 20 (May 15, 1850), 327. For a fuller account of Beethoven reception in the broad scope of American history, see Broyles, *Beethoven in America*. For an analysis of the mythologization of Beethoven in popular culture, especially as this mythologization pertains to Beethoven's likeness, see Alessandra Comini, *The Changing Image of Beethoven: A Study in Mythmaking* (Santa Fe: Sunstone Press, 2008).

cobbler's stall.”¹⁵ A far humbler and anonymous writer for *The Independent* explained in 1854 that the composer had intended to dedicate his Eroica symphony to Napoleon. “But Beethoven, who, it is well known, was an ardent republican in his political principles, indignantly canceled the dedication, and actually trampled with rage upon the symphony one day, when a friend had informed him of the newly-developed aim of Napoleon at a crown.”¹⁶

Typical of the popular biographies was an anecdote called “Beethoven and the Blind Girl,” which began appearing in newspapers and magazines across the country in the 1850s. This story, whose origin remains unclear, related the memories of an unnamed musician who claimed to have joined Beethoven on a walk. They both heard someone nearby playing Beethoven’s “Pastoral” Symphony on the piano, and entered a small abode to find a young blind girl and her brother. Beethoven was touched to meet the blind girl who loved his music, and, inspired by the moonlight streaming through the window, improvised his “Moonlight” Sonata.¹⁷ The combination of the composer’s blindness, the humble setting, the natural beauty of moonlight, and the moment of inspiration help to explain the powerful popular appeal of the tale.

In the United States as in Europe, Beethoven’s deafness was a central facet of the narrative in which the composer enjoyed a special union with the divine. Fanciful, pseudo-historical tales of Beethoven’s life and struggles with deafness abounded in newspapers and magazines. Writers in a variety of forums claimed that the composer’s inability to hear with his

¹⁵ S. Margaret Fuller, “The Lives of the Great Composers,” in S. Margaret Fuller, *Papers on Literature and Art* Vol. II (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1846), 99–100.

¹⁶ “Descriptive Music,” *The Independent* Vol. 6 (Feb. 1854), 50. This story came ultimately from Schindler’s biography, and had been repeated in Eliot’s 1841 review of the Moscheles translation.

¹⁷ For example see “Beethoven and the Blind Girl,” (from the German), *National Anti-Slavery Standard* Vol. 17, no. 12 (August 9, 1856), 4; *Anti-Slavery Bugle* Vol. 12, no. 2 (August 23, 1856), 4; as well as the *Ashland Union* (Ohio) vol. 11 no. 18 (October 8, 1856), 4. A German artist, Fritz Hermann Armin (1865–1908), completed a work sometime between 1885 and 1895 depicting the scene in which Beethoven discovers the blind girl playing his music.

earthly ears granted him access to spiritual musical ideas. Such stories appeared even in papers such as *The North Star*, an influential anti-slavery newspaper, published under various titles from 1847 to about 1860 in Rochester, New York by Frederick Douglass. In the paper's opinion section of July 13, 1849, an anonymous piece titled "The Deaf Musician" offered an account of Beethoven's last hours on earth. Similar to the "Beethoven and the Blind Girl" story, in "The Deaf Musician" Beethoven experienced moments of greatness among common folk. The *North Star* author narrated a story of the elderly composer—suffering from chronic illness—setting off on foot on a journey from Baden-Baden to Vienna. His poor health obliged him to rest at a humble cottage he encountered along the way. The family of peasants inside fed him and then proceeded to play music together, which of course Beethoven could not hear. He was struck by the family's profoundly emotional engagement in their music-making, and asked to see the sheet music of the piece that had evoked their delight. Beholding a movement from his *Pastoral* Symphony, he told them, "I am Beethoven." After the family recovered from the shock of and exultation at his presence, Beethoven sat at the harpsichord to improvise, while "his spirit, breaking through the bonds which enchained him to earth, seemed to rise triumphantly towards Heaven."¹⁸ This rhetoric directly reflected the prevalence of *Kunstreligion* in the musical discourse of this period, even as it resonated—at least distantly—with the freedom talk of the abolitionists. It appeared to such writers that Beethoven's singular connection to the divine allowed him to communicate with all listeners, even untutored peasants, on an equal spiritual plane.

A writer working under the name of "Lucerne" expressed similar sentiments in an article titled "Infirmities of Genius," originally published in the *Boston Transcript* and reprinted in the

¹⁸ "Selections: The Deaf Musician," *The North Star* Vol. 2, no. 29 (July 13, 1849), 4.

Farmer's Cabinet, a long-running newspaper in Amherst, N.H. (1802–1900). The author argued that physical afflictions—blindness, deafness, illness—often gave greater voice to genius and greatness than good health, because the artist turned inward, to the interior movements and struggles of the soul, for creative inspiration. Because his bodily handicaps forced him to rely on abstract thought and imagination, his music was closer to the immaterial, spiritual realm:

Let us not forget, too, a Beethoven, whose very soul overflowed with, as it were, Heaven's own melodies—so grand that they startle the listener. Yet he was so deaf that he never heard his own delightful compositions. Were they not more *heavenly* from the fact of their being conceived in the depths of his *soul*, instead of being nursed by the natural ear? and does not that account for their wildly beautiful, almost unearthly strains?"¹⁹

For Lucerne, Beethoven's deafness did not hinder his artistry, but rather contributed to it. This was a line of thought that became common in critical writing about Beethoven in Europe only after about 1870, when Richard Wagner published his *Beethoven* essay. Wagner would argue that Beethoven's inscrutable late works, in particular, were products of genius attributable to the deafness from which he suffered most severely late in his life.²⁰ Before Wagner's reinterpretation of the effect of Beethoven's deafness, however, most European critics concluded that his handicap had prevented him from communicating effectively with audiences through his late works. Lucerne's commentary spoke generally about Beethoven's works and not the late compositions specifically, which remained unfamiliar to most American musicians and critics in this period—but it is noteworthy that the writer anticipated an understanding of the composer that became generally accepted in Europe only decades later.

¹⁹ Lucerne, "Infirmities of Genius," *Farmer's Cabinet* Vol. 54, no. 49 (July 10, 1856), 1.

²⁰ See K.M. Knittel, "Wagner, Deafness, and the Reception of Beethoven's Late Style," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 51, no. 1 (Spring, 1998): 49–82.

The Broader Reception of Beethoven's Music in the Antebellum United States

While the myths surrounding the man in American publications are striking, our more central concern must be mainly with reactions to the music itself, which unfolded somewhat more gradually—certainly much more so than in Europe. As Chan and others have shown, while they began to hear about the magnificence of Beethoven's music in the press, most Americans—even frequent concertgoers—never heard a strain of Beethoven before at least the 1840s, because the performance forces simply were not yet in place. Even through the mid-century decades, it seems likely that in the U.S. the myth of Beethoven often preceded actual exposure to his music. The power of the discourse itself did much to shape reception of the music.

Yet the rapid proliferation of performances in this period had a direct and undeniable effect on American perceptions. Occasional concerts that presented various movements of Beethoven's symphonies did take place earlier in the century, but after 1841, more frequent performances of the complete symphonies began to be offered by established orchestras, including the Boston Academy of Music (1832), the Philharmonic Society of New-York (1842), the Germania Musical Society (toured the U.S. 1848–1854), and French conductor Louis-Antoine Jullien's orchestra (toured the U.S. 1853–54).²¹ In addition, by the 1840s dozens of printed scores adapting Beethoven's music for voice, piano, and small ensembles, as well as widely advertised works such as *The Beethoven Collection of Sacred Music* (1844), offered popular adaptations of the composer's works to the public.²²

The new orchestras represented very different groups, with a variety of purposes and audiences. The Philharmonic Society of New-York, for its part, strove “to elevate the Art,

²¹ Chan, “Beethoven in America to 1865,” 86–102. Chan notes, “Until the late 1830s, Beethoven's music was, for most concertgoers, a legend rather than an experience” (96).

²² Elam Ives, et al., eds., *The Beethoven Collection of Sacred Music* (New York: Paine and Burgess, 1844).

improve musical taste, and gratify those already acquainted with classic musical compositions.”²³ Thus while the founders of the Philharmonic Society wished to improve the general musical taste of the city, they acknowledged that many of their listeners already enjoyed some familiarity with Beethoven and other composers of “classic” music. Yet if this big-city society’s sense of the imperative to advance general musical taste was somewhat less than urgent, the same cannot be said of most other organizations that had formed or were forming by the 1840s. As discussed in Chapter One, the Boston Academy had been founded by Lowell Mason to refine church hymnody but in 1835 the prominent Massachusetts politician Samuel Atkins Eliot seized leadership of the organization and began to shift its focus to secular instrumental music, maintaining that such music could exercise a noble moral influence on its listeners.²⁴ In even more dramatic contrast, the Germania Musical Society, discussed in Chapter Three, conceived of its purpose in explicitly social and even political terms. The Germanians wished to cultivate a love of orchestral music among “politically free” Americans, believing that the moral and social benefits of music such as Beethoven’s could come to fullest fruition in a democratic society.²⁵

The energetic Jullien strove toward a broadly complementary goal: he was very much a showman, but one who relished exposing diverse audiences to the most technically skilled renditions of the highest order of “serious” music in addition to popular “light” works. Indeed during his relatively short stay in the U.S., Jullien and his orchestra may well have done more to spread public awareness of, and enthusiasm for, Beethoven’s works than any other single

²³ Quoted in Bethany S. Goldberg, “Bernard Ullman and the Business of Orchestras in Mid-Nineteenth-Century New York,” in *American Orchestras in the Nineteenth Century* ed. John Spitzer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 225–26.

²⁴ Michael Broyles, “Bourgeois Appropriation of Music,” 235.

²⁵ Newman, *Good Music for a Free People*, 25.

individual or organization. His performances, including outdoor “promenade” concerts at such places as Castle Garden in New York City, attracted thousands. Critics and reporters in both the musical press and in more general publications proclaimed Jullien’s musical triumphs far and wide. Like the visit of Jenny Lind to the U.S. in 1850, Jullien’s tour was highly publicized, narrated, and discussed in a great variety of venues. Introducing performances of Beethoven’s music with the ceremonial donning of white gloves and the presentation of a jeweled baton on a silver tray, Jullien sought to impress his audiences with a sense of “serious” art. Yet in part because he also interspersed these performances of “serious” movements from certain Beethoven symphonies with “lighter” music—quadrilles, waltzes, polkas, marches—he did much to spread enthusiasm for Beethoven—above all his symphonic works—to a broader public.²⁶

The overall unfamiliarity of orchestral music to most American ears in the 1840s, and even into the 1850s, meant that for many listeners Beethoven’s symphonies came as a novel sort of experience, even a revelation. Critics often assumed a more sophisticated pose than their knowledge warranted, and often expressed a sense of innocent awe despite themselves. Writing in 1849, one English listener contributing to the *Quarterly Review* whose commentary was reprinted in the American *Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature* fell back on his knowledge of literature and art in describing the experience of Beethoven’s music, gushing that

There is a great pleasure in merely watching Beethoven’s art of conversation—how he wanders and strays, Coleridge like, from the path, loses himself apparently in strange subjects and irrelevant ideas, till you wonder how he will ever find his way back to the original argument. There is a particular delight in letting the scenery of one of his symphonies merely pass before us, studying the dim Turner-like landscape from which objects and landmarks gradually emerge, feeling a strange modulation passing over the scene like a heavy cloud, the distant sunlight melodies still keeping their places, and showing the breadth of the ground by the slow pace at which they shift toward us... There is varied pleasure in these and many other fantastic ideas which he conjures up—but there is quite

²⁶ For an excellent study of Jullien’s tour, see Katherine Preston, “‘A Concentration of Talent on our Musical Horizon.’”

as much in sitting a passive recipient and giving yourself no account of your enjoyment at all... No, pure wordless magic has too mysterious and unlimited a range for us to know precisely what it means.²⁷

After struggling with limited success to discuss the abstract qualities of Beethoven's music in terms that were familiar, this writer finally allowed the listener to give up the effort.

Commentators who appeared more familiar with Beethoven expressed the belief that any honest listener could and would come to appreciate the beauty of this music. After an 1855 performance of the Seventh Symphony, one writer admitted, "We could but think as we followed the familiar strains with inexpressible delight, what a woeful misapprehension exists in the minds of many, as to their power of appreciating and enjoying what they decry as 'classical music.'" That very term, he thought, had come to be "synonymous with cold, formal and learned compositions, which none but diligent students can learn to like." He hoped he might gather together "all the frequenters of ebony concerts and the lovers of namby-pamby sentimentalists," presenting them with this majestic work of Beethoven.²⁸ "We do not believe there is a person who likes music at all, but would acknowledge a new and exquisite pleasure in hearing it. It is true, repetition would give a deeper feeling of its beauties, but the very first impressions would be delightful."²⁹ Commentary such as this revealed an earnest hope that Beethoven's music might appeal to Americans of all backgrounds, no matter their degree of musical learning.

Claims for the immediacy and relevance of Beethoven's music in the United States went further. As Saloman has pointed out, Dwight maintained that Beethoven's music spoke more

²⁷ Anon., "Music," *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature* Vol. 14, no. 1 (Jan. 1849), 35. Reprinted from the *Quarterly Review*.

²⁸ Here the author was clearly denigrating attendees at minstrel shows—extraordinarily popular in this era—as well as those who enjoyed the numerous concerts of light and often sentimental vocal music by such composers as the Englishman Henry Russell (1812–1900) and performed by such groups as the Hutchinson Singers, active throughout the 1840s and 1850s.

²⁹ "Music," *Boston Daily Atlas* Vol. 24, no. 126 (Nov. 26, 1855), 2.

profoundly to Americans of his age than to the Viennese of earlier generations. Saloman quotes Dwight's highly Transcendentalist comment from *The Harbinger* of 1845: "The truth is, Beethoven's is the music of this age; it gives voice to the imprisoned soul and aspiration of this age. Spiritually and essentially, it can be better comprehended by unmusical Americans in Boston now, than it could in Vienna when it was born. It was prophetic of the great world-movement that now stirs so many hearts. . . We apprehend it is our destiny in this age and in this land to love Beethoven."³⁰ In the antebellum period, when Americans' confidence in inevitable progress was increasingly threatened, Beethoven's music seemed to fulfill a deep need for reassurance that the country would fulfill its idealistic social mission rather than collapse into conflict and despair. Dwight's words attributed immense power to Beethoven's music, and reflected the hopes of many in the 1840s that a spreading and deepening exposure to these works might rejuvenate the faith in social progress that was becoming ever more vulnerable. For commentators like Dwight who spoke to and for American audiences of symphonic music at this time, no other composer living or dead could capture their own historical moment and restore hope as vividly as Beethoven.

Writers proposed that even the most celebrated musicians of the present day had to contend with the looming shadow of the famed genius. "Beethoven towering far above our

³⁰ Dwight, quoted in Saloman, *Beethoven's Symphonies and J.S. Dwight*, 129. When Dwight referred to this "world-historical movement," he was clearly expressing a belief in concrete social and political progress. In 1845 he celebrated a "Musical Movement," "one of the greatest movement[s] which ever yet engaged Humanity, of which this our America, the common gathering place of all nations, is destined to become the theater. Whenever the life of a people is deep; whenever broad and universal sentiments absorb and harmonize the petty egotisms and discords of men; whenever Humanity is at all inspired with a consciousness of its great destiny; whenever Love gives the tone to the feelings, the thoughts, and the activity of an age; whenever a hundred Reforms, all springing from so deep a source, all tend, in the very antagonism of their one-sidedness, in the very bigotry of their earnestness, to one grand thought and aim, the Unity of the race; in short, wherever there is a Movement, then, too, as by a law of Correspondence, there should be a new development of the passion and the art of music" ("Musical Review," *The Harbinger* 1, no. 1 (June 14, 1845), 12-13.

heads,” wrote Margaret Fuller in 1846, “still with colossal gesture points above.”³¹ In fact, he (or a bust of him) quite literally and visibly loomed over his musical heirs. The American writer George William Curtis reported from Berlin in 1848, where he had heard Jenny Lind perform: “The solemn Beethoven looked upon her from behind. The figures of the greatest in her art held awful court around her.”³² Curtis contended that Beethoven continued to reign as the preeminent musical creator the world had known, admiring Jenny Lind from the grave, but in no wise fading into the past. In similar terms, Samuel Jennison Jr., an associate of Dwight from Harvard, spoke of Beethoven’s “unfathomable” music in his address to the Harvard Musical Association in 1851:

Above all these [other composers] place Beethoven; that master spirit, the utterance of whose name recalls in all musical souls such unnumbered impressions of sublimity and beauty; the heart-searching, unfathomable, mysterious Beethoven; standing alone upon his unapproachable eminence, even as he seemed to live in his own world; founder of a school of which he is himself the only fit representative; which admits of no successful imitation, even as he admitted but one learner, and scarce a listener by his side; a law unto himself; the embodiment, the type, if we do not misjudge, of the restless struggle and upheaving of his own time, of which that ill-fated continent seems yet doomed to witness the repetition...Beethoven, whose holy influence yet to be felt upon the world it is impossible to estimate; who points as with ever outstretched finger to the Future, the Untried, the Eternal,—‘The far off, unattained and dim...’.³³

Although it far transcended everyday comprehension, Jennison seemed to suggest, Beethoven’s music nonetheless would exert a sacred power among people, a power even now too mighty to be appreciated. For Jennison, Beethoven’s music both described the struggle toward and

³¹ Fuller, “The Lives of the Great Composers,” 48.

³² Curtis, “Jenny Lind,” *The Union Magazine of Literature and Art* Vol. 2, no. 4 (April 1848), 155.

³³ Samuel Jennison Jr., “Music in the Past Half Century,” *DJM* Vol. 1, No. 13 (July 3, 1852), 97. This was an address delivered before the Harvard Musical Association at Cochrane Hall, Boston, Dec. 22, 1851. Even though this address was meant to describe the history of music in the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century, Broyles characterizes it as largely prophetic of developments in the latter half of the century (“*Music of the Highest Class*,” 306). Perhaps Jennison was also suppressing his fears about the “struggle and upheaving” of his own continent.

prophesied an ideal social world that many American writers, including both elite East-coast critics and popular scribblers, hoped to be ultimately in the making.

The Challenge of Abstraction

While a majority of writers on Beethoven in this period spoke in broadly hopeful, even utopian terms about the democratic, unified future society heralded by his music, discussions of the challenge posed by making it truly popular continued to appear. Obstacles to universal public acclaim and love for Beethoven's music in the United States included, first, its abstract nature as mainly instrumental music. This quality by itself would not necessarily have rendered it unpopular—after all, “light” instrumental works for orchestra such as dances and short character pieces proved immensely successful among American audiences during the 1840s and 1850s. Such pieces tended to be short, repetitive, highly melodic, and more often than not their composers eschewed counterpoint or other learned compositional techniques. With his wildly popular *American Quadrille* and *Katydid Polka*, the visiting French conductor Louis-Antoine Jullien tapped into this predilection for light music—a predilection hardly unique to the U.S.³⁴ But in addition to their brevity, these light works often had some extra-musical referent, or if they were dances, contained recurring and more-or-less predictable phrases. Beethoven's instrumental works, on the other hand, demanded from listeners a measure of attention and concentration to which they were generally unaccustomed. These pieces were lengthy, often contrapuntal, with many development passages, and rarely tied to any specific extra-musical ideas, except in rare cases such as the *Pastoral* Symphony, which Jullien programmed regularly. In an extended meditation on music from different countries in 1851, a “Mrs. Winchester” described the challenges many listeners encountered in Beethoven:

³⁴ Katherine Preston, “A Concentration of Talent on our Musical Horizon,” 332–33.

The great musician, like the great poet, will utter tones that can touch the hearts of the most untutored of mankind, but he will often rise into regions where none but refined and elevated minds can follow him. The music of Beethoven will sometimes appear to the untaught, a confused jangle of discords, for want of an ear sufficiently educated to follow and unwind the complicated mazes of his harmony...³⁵

Still, while this author held that much of Beethoven's music exceeded his listeners' abilities to comprehend its intricacies, it was nonetheless the most "natural" music the world had ever heard: it appealed in this sense to both amateurs and connoisseurs, only in different ways. Winchester continued by asking, "yet, where is true nature to be found if not in the works of him from whose melodious soul have flowed magical strains that must forever enchant the world [?]" Even when writers spoke in elitist terms about "refined and elevated minds," their ruling assumption was that Beethoven's music fundamentally appealed to all listeners and was itself a tool for the refinement and elevation of all. Part of Beethoven's appeal as a universal guide, then, lay precisely in the fact that he was conceived as conveying experiences that lay above mere words. In his music's abstraction, Beethoven was furthermore the voice of Germany itself: "Beethoven, who, though he has carried musical art to its highest perfection, is yet all nature and truth, may be truly said to be in that art the genius of the German people." While his music did sometimes "[wander] into mysticism and unintelligibility," it nevertheless "[expresses] itself with the purest simplicity. He is truly the greatest musician of all time, and as truly German as he is great...Beethoven has breathed the very soul of Germany in the tones of his magical symphonies." For Mrs. Winchester, the connection between Beethoven's intangible Germanness and his music's appeal to the highest and most universal realms human experience could hardly have been more explicit.

³⁵ "Thoughts on National Music," *Sartain's Union Magazine of Literature and Art* Vol. 9, no. 6 (Dec. 1851), 442.

Aside from the possible exceptions of his song “Adelaide,” Op. 46, the finale of the Ninth Symphony, and the “Pastoral” Symphony, Beethoven was for most American listeners a composer of “absolute” abstract instrumental music. And it was clear by the mid-nineteenth century that in the U.S., as in Europe, the distinction between “absolute” and “program” music was becoming ever wider. Certainly a few of the more widely read American commentators kept up with the European and American debates—including the famous exchange involving Willis and Fry—over these two genres of instrumental music. Most of Beethoven’s instrumental music was clearly “absolute” in the common understanding of the term, and many American writers held absolute music in higher esteem than works with extra-musical referents. In *The Literary World* of 1853, a writer identified only as “J. H.” argued that abstract music could be taken seriously by Americans only if they looked to Beethoven as their ideal:

To arrive at this appreciation, we must divest ourselves of all externality of form in the contemplation of the subject, and suffer ourselves to be led into the Adyta of harmoniously modulated thoughts, whither we could have no better guide than Beethoven.³⁶

Beethoven offered listeners the ideal of musical abstraction, untainted by images or narratives. Indeed, the author here anticipated Eduard Hanslick’s praise for “tonally moving forms,” musical phenomena with no external associations. J. H. acknowledged that the kind of abstraction developed by Beethoven did not inevitably or immediately lend itself to broad popular appeal: “That the productions of Beethoven should not have enjoyed a free circulation throughout the universal mind, is an inference we might draw from the profundity and immateriality of his conceptions.”³⁷ Audiences had nothing concrete to grasp in Beethoven—but, for this very reason, Beethoven’s music had the potential to elevate them intellectually, spiritually, and

³⁶ “German Literature, Schilling on Music,” *The Literary World* Vol. 12, no. 312 (Jan. 22, 1853), 60. “Adyta” refers to the innermost sanctuary of an ancient Greek temple.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

morally. Writers proposed that the very wordless quality of so much of his music opened up another world to listeners, a world of higher truths. A contributor to the *Universalist Quarterly*, which was dedicated to preaching the radically democratic doctrine of universal salvation, wrote in 1854 that “The sublime aspirations, the elevated feeling of Beethoven, are more clearly exhibited and more eloquently expressed than words could do, in that swelling harmony, that subdued, chastened grandeur, which in his music, stir the religious sensibilities to their depths, and awaken in us a pure and almost painful sense of the sublime and infinite.”³⁸ The paradox in such thinking, that the fullest reality was a super-rational and super-sensible one, obviously had deep roots in Platonic, Romantic, and Transcendentalist traditions. What ultimately linked this thinking most closely to American perceptions was the vision of moral and social progress that it allowed.

Beethoven the American Prophet

Just a few months after he began issuing his journal in 1852, Dwight published an essay entitled “The Sentiment of Various Musical Composers.” He proceeded to describe the emotional effect of the music of a number of the most well known European composers, concluding, of course, with Beethoven. He wrote that Beethoven’s music “has more of the prophetic character than any other. The progressive spirit of this age, the expansive social instinct of these new times, accepts it by a strange sympathy.” Young Americans pass through tastes for other composers, but they came to love Beethoven immediately, because Beethoven is

like the seventh note in the musical scale. His music is full of that deep, aspiring passion, which in its false exercise we call ambition, but which at bottom is most generous, most reverent, and yearns for perfect harmony and order. The demands of the human soul are insatiable—infinite... We are to have all and to realize all by a true state of harmony *with* all. Is not this the meaning of Beethoven’s music?

³⁸ *Universalist Quarterly and General Review* Vol. 11 (Oct. 1854), 397.

Its wild impatience, its struggling chromatic harmonies, its surging, billowy movement, all imply a glorious unity and peace beyond the now immediately attainable. So the seventh note cries out on the verge of the completed octave, draws every thought to that, and pleads for its repose and its perfection.³⁹

Dwight heard in the music of Beethoven the goals, strivings, and aspirations of humanity toward ultimate social harmony and peace. This was, of course, a wildly idealistic stance. Dwight's lifelong views about Beethoven, however, represented only one of the more fervent antebellum American expressions of a diffuse but nonetheless potent idealism about the capacity of music to realize an equitable, unified society. If that vision now seemed to be slipping out of reach, and if preachers, statesmen and entrepreneurs often appeared impotent in the face of the nation's problems, perhaps one could look to the wordless inspiration of a Beethoven.

³⁹ Dwight, "The Sentiment of Various Musical Composers," *DJM* Vol. 1, No. 13 (July 3, 1852), 99.

CONCLUSION

After all, that which takes place on the American musical scene is very definitely a part of the American musical heritage, whether it happens to be composed by an American or not. For this reason, the historian who views music not as a *Ding an sich* but as something imbedded within the complex of a culture must reckon with the Bachs, the Handels, the Haydns, the Beethovens, the Mozarts, and the Mendelssohns if their music was, in fact, performed here.¹

As the distinguished American music scholar Irving Lowens articulated nearly forty years ago, the landscape of American music history contains many strains. We cannot do justice to the full picture of musical life in the United States unless we take into account its multifarious aspects, including but of course not limited to composers, performers, patrons, and critics and other commentators on music, whether or not they were born in this country. It is becoming clearer that we are in some ways still only beginning to understand the countless cultural influences that contributed to American musical life from its earliest days. In taking this “wide” view, we can see that Americans have found powerful meanings in the musical traditions of foreign lands that have resonated deeply with their own identity, hopes, ideals, and concerns as a people.

In approaching the musical life of nineteenth-century America, we can identify larger shifts in the country’s political, social, and religious character that help to explain how and why Americans regarded their musical life at any given time. Our focus in this study has been on the decades immediately prior to the Civil War, but this examination also helps illuminate circumstances both before and after that pivotal period. In the heady days of the early nineteenth century, free Americans experienced an intoxicating mixture of idealism about the democratic project and excitement about what seemed to be inexorable forward momentum toward the most

¹ Lowens, *Music in America and American Music*, 1.

free, just, democratic, and egalitarian society the world had ever witnessed. But a combination of factors more and more in evidence by the 1840s led Americans to question the future integrity of their social and political vision. The moral question of slavery and its grave political implications, along with the decline of religious enthusiasm, the tide of foreign immigration, and growing social inequality all seemed to threaten the prospect of a fundamentally free, cohesive nation of equals. Intensifying quests for political and social answers to these challenges were inevitably accompanied by responses that looked to cultural influences. Over the generation immediately preceding the Civil War, a flourishing print culture and a wave of Romantic thought created a fertile and fluid intellectual environment in which commentators attributed to music an unprecedented potency to elevate, unite, and equalize Americans—and perhaps ultimately all of humankind.

We have seen in this study that this antebellum idealism about European classical music in both elite and mass publications can be understood through an examination of several different but interrelated historical currents. With the waning of religious hope by the 1840s and 1850s, music came to be conceived as intimately connected with the world of the spirit, allowing listeners to engage in a form of divine communion and spiritual equality akin to *Kunstreligion*. With the tide of immigration from Europe and the resulting social disorientation for both the natives and the newcomers, the enormously salient link between music and the German element began to take on connotations of universal unity, helping at least rhetorically to ease the tensions between the American-born and the German and Irish arrivals. And with the ominous sectional rumblings heralding a possible civil war, the music of Beethoven came to symbolize the stubborn American faith in a future of unprecedented social harmony.

In the emerging world of antebellum art music, truly democratic accessibility and intelligibility to all ultimately remained a chimera. One major reason for the impracticability of this ideal was the simple fact of economics: many concerts were too expensive for average listeners. But even when ticket prices hovered within range of the financial resources of the wider public, writers in the public sphere acknowledged the reality that “only true lovers of music” would be likely to attend many concerts of art music, especially concerts that presented mostly abstract instrumental music. Commentators did not describe what music was doing to ease social tensions, but rather prescribed music as an antidote to the increasingly visible social ills that Americans were forced to recognize in this period. These writers rarely made explicit reference to differences between social classes, race, or gender when discussing potential or actual patrons to concerts. But the language they used suggests that they were aware of certain disparities separating various kinds of listeners, including educational and financial disparities (which themselves could be understood as code for racial, gender, and ethnic differences). In the face of the seemingly intractable barriers to social well-being, critics and other writers pressed on in their insistence that the broad exposure of Americans to art music would result in tangible moral and social progress.

Implicit throughout this study has been the idea that the Civil War brought this era of musical idealism to an end, and marked a watershed in American cultural preconceptions more broadly. By the end of the century, attitudes about the role of music in American life had become less hopeful, less idealistic, and more practical. A vast institutional culture for music now emerged, unlike anything that existed before the 1860s. Opera witnessed a more rapid elevation to assume a position next to instrumental music as an exalted high art rather than mere entertainment. And, to be sure—as Levine and others have duly shown—high culture became

“sacralized” to the extent that, in the case of music, a body of works entered the canon virtually permanently, a set of composers became glorified as demigods, and the arbiters of culture imparted to the concert hall a mystique that tended to repel Americans who enjoyed less education and capital. In relation to the questions of when and why a cultural hierarchy in music developed in America when it did, some scholars have addressed the motivations of the “arbiters of culture” in the late nineteenth century.

Historians of music in America generally agree that over the course of the nineteenth century, members of the elite increasingly functioned as arbiters of public taste. They disagree sharply, however, on whether the arbiters took on this role for reasons of “social control” and to gain superior social status, or because they were genuinely philanthropic and loved art.² The latter argument has certainly been overblown by some scholars, for it is surely difficult to deny that with increasing social stratification and the coalescing of cultural hierarchy toward the end of the century, American critics and commentators became more resigned to social realities and less idealistic about music’s ability to effect real social change. The ideal never went away entirely, but it became noticeably less salient in public discourse.

On the issue of musical “sacralization” specifically, part of the problem involved a growing chasm between performers and audiences, and between composers and listeners. In the mid-nineteenth century, ordinary Americans participated widely in musical life as amateurs.

Amateur performers played in all sorts of orchestras, town bands, sang in community choirs, and

² Horowitz explains the dismissive attitudes of American cultural historians toward Gilded Age society, noting that “Outside music, many contemporary scholars remain essentially contemptuous of Gilded Age culture-bearers and intellectuals, depicted as inanely timid, arrogantly elitist, or stupidly racist. More often than not, such portraiture misapplies a twentieth-century template of understanding. The present-day observer of late-nineteenth-century behavior must grapple with a different reality: people of intelligence once believed in superior and inferior races, in religion being threatened by science, in the inevitability of class distinctions sharper than in subsequent decades. They also lived in times of much greater economic and social instability. They were not any more obtuse or self-interested than we are today,” (*Classical Music in America*, 244). If we are to understand the cultural atmosphere of late nineteenth-century America, Horowitz observes, we must make a greater effort to interpret thoughts and events of past eras not through our present-day biases, but through those of the people we study.

practiced music with family and friends in the home. But this situation was beginning to change quite dramatically by the last years of the century. Commenting on the perceived widening gap between professional musicians and laymen, an anonymous contributor to the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1894 observed that

Amateur has collided with professional, and the former term has gradually but steadily declined in favor; in fact, it has become almost a term of opprobrium. The work of an amateur, the touch of the amateur, a mere amateur, amateurish, amateurishness—these are different current expressions which all mean the same thing, bad work.³

Other kinds of late-century commentary may not have put the matter quite so starkly, but it is difficult to escape the evidence of a less idealistic attitude about the capacity of art music—especially the “great” music of the European tradition—to unite Americans, or people more generally. To be sure, amateur music-making continued to flourish throughout the late nineteenth century. Yet the assumption that “amateur” and “professional” were engaged in a common project was on the wane. Dwight remarked in 1870, for example, that the “bond of union” furnished by chamber music “only reaches the few; coarse, meaner, more prosaic natures are not drawn to it.”⁴ Such expressions, which were comparatively rare before 1861, reflected the growing reality that high culture was becoming farther removed from mainstream American life.

Certain developments of this middle period were not without their lasting consequences. The promotion of German musical values by both German and American writers during the 1840s and 1850s had genuine and ongoing ramifications in the process of cultural transfer between the musical worlds of the United States and the German-speaking lands. The influence of German Romantic musical idealism and musical nationalism in particular aided the

³ Anonymous, “The Decline of the Amateur,” *Atlantic Monthly*, 73 (June 1894), 859, quoted in Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, 140.

⁴ Quoted in Levine, 127. Dwight, “Music as a Means of Culture,” *Atlantic Monthly* Vol. 26 (September 1870), 329.

development of an American cultural hierarchy, despite attempts to bring culture to “the masses” in both theory and practice. At a time in American music history during which many patterns of behavior, repertoires, concert life, and attitudes were highly volatile, the German musical presence helped to persuade and cement certain patterns of musical thought, assumptions, and tastes into the fabric of the nation’s social and cultural consciousness as the century progressed. The *Sängerfest*, for instance, participated in this process, helping slowly to alter American conceptions about the purpose and place of music in social life. As Karen Ahlquist points out, after the Civil War, the American *Sängerfest* increasingly became a site not as much of social and political solidarity as one where German-Americans could publicly avow their commitment to musical-aesthetic principles. The American *Sängerfest* gradually presented fewer popular songs and a cappella works to make room for grander repertory such as oratorios, pieces for orchestra and vocal soloists, and instrumental overtures.⁵ These developments suggest that in the later nineteenth century these groups became less concerned with the promotion of communal and democratic values than they had been earlier.

Some major developments on both sides of the Atlantic may have influenced this change in attitude toward music’s potential as a social tool. Most obviously, the Civil War represented a point after which Americans had to re-orient themselves to living in a country in which the promises of liberty and equality came at a heavy price. There may indeed be an element of nostalgia in the common argument that situates the Civil War as an immense turning point, before which were halcyon days of relative peace. This framing is obviously misguided, but it is not entirely without merit. The horrors of Reconstruction in the South, along with an ever-increasing tide of European immigrants, both contributed to general disillusionment about the possibility of social harmony through music as it had been envisioned in earlier decades. The

⁵ Karen Ahlquist, “Musical Assimilation and ‘the German Element,’” 388.

Germany national unification of 1871 meant that in some ways, music no longer served as central a purpose in providing a sense of identity or belonging for ethnic Germans in the United States.

Numerous exciting avenues lie ahead for further research on the questions this study raises. For example, Joseph Horowitz has identified the lack of investigation into the German presence in American Gilded Age life. He writes that the “late nineteenth-century influence and prestige of German learning and culture—of German music, obviously; of [German] models of scholarship; of German science, medicine, philosophy, and jurisprudence—in the United States generally, and in New York especially, is a story yet to be adequately told.”⁶ Another potential area for further research involves the tenacious idea of music as a “universal language,” and the way this idea has been put to political and social use both within and outside the United States since the nineteenth century. The framing of music as a “universal language” remains pervasive in modern popular discourse outside the academy, perhaps even more so in a society becoming ever more globalized. We find frequent references to music as a non-verbal language that allows people from very different cultures to communicate, recognize their common humanity, and build bridges of empathy and understanding with each other. Study upon study, some of dubious rigor, have attempted with varying degrees of success to prove that music—usually Western music—evokes more or less the same emotional reactions in people around the globe. One might reasonably argue that, at best, music can serve as a means of communicating only the most general emotional content—not an articulate language, which presupposes a meaningful syntax of sounds that convey specific ideas. Yet the rhetoric focusing especially on Western music as a universal language, either implicitly or explicitly, is still very much in the air. An article for CNN International Edition published in January 2016 tells the story of an initiative called

⁶ Horowitz, *Moral Fire*, 78.

“Ghetto Classics” by the Art of Music Foundation, whose aim is to bring Western music education and performance opportunities to children in Kenyan slums. The video published along with the article describes Western classical music as “an art that transcends boundaries.”⁷ In the academy today such a sentiment seems quaint, but perhaps its stubborn persistence in twenty-first-century global culture is a sign that the idealism of antebellum Americans about the social power of Western art music still retains some hold over our collective imagination.

⁷ Colin Hancock and Thomas Page, “The Kenyan Slum Where Musical Prodigies are Made,” Inside Africa, CNN International Edition, January 19, 2016, <http://edition.cnn.com/2016/01/19/africa/ghetto-classics/index.html>.

APPENDIX

Poem by William Wetmore Story, recited at the unveiling of Thomas Crawford's statue of Beethoven. Reprinted in the *Boston Daily Atlas* vol. 24, no. 209, (March 4, 1856) 1, and in *Dwight's Journal* vol. 8, no. 23 (March 8, 1856), 181–82.

Lift the veil! The work is finished; fresh created from the hands
Of the artist,—grand and simple, there our great Beethoven stands.

Clay no longer—he has risen from the buried mould of earth,
To a golden form transfigured by a new and glorious birth.

Art hath bid the evanescent pause and know no more decay;
Made the mortal shape immortal, that to dust has passed away.

There's the brow by thought o'erladen, with its tempest of wild hair;
There the mouth so sternly silent and the square cheeks seamed with care;

There the eyes so visionary, straining out, yet seeing naught
But the inward world of genius and the ideal forms of thought;

There the hand that gave its magic to the cold, dead, ivory keys,
And from out them tore the struggling chords of mighty symphonies.

There the figure, calm, concentrated, on its breast the great head bent;--
Stand forever thus, great! Thou thy fittest monument!

Poor in life, by friends deserted, through disease and pain and care,
Bravely, stoutly hast thou striven, never yielding to despair;

High the claims of Art upholding; firm to Freedom; in a crowd
Where the highest bent as courtiers, speaking manfully and loud.

In thy silent world of deafness, broken by no human word,
Music sang with voice ideal, while thy listening spirit heard;

Tones consoling and prophetic, tones to raise, refine and cheer;
Deathless tones, that thou hast garnered to refresh and charm us here.

And for all these 'riches fineless,' all these wondrous gifts of thine,
We have only Fame's dry laurel on thy careworn brow to twine.

We can only say, Great Master, take the homage of our heart;
Be the High Priest in our temple, dedicate to thee and Art;

Stand before us, and enlarge us with thy presence and thy power,
And o'er all Art's deeps and shallows light us like a beacon-tower.

In the mighty realm of Music there is but a single speech,
Universal as the world is, that to every heart can reach.

Thou within that realm art monarch, but the humblest vassal there
Knows the accents of that language when it calls to war or prayer.

Underneath its world-wide Banyan, friends the gathering nations sit;
Red Sioux and dreamy German dance and feast and fight to it.

When the storm of battle rages, and the brazen trumpet blares,
Cheering on the serried tumult, in the van its meteor flares;

Sings the laurelled song of conquest, o'er the buried comrade wails,
Plays the peaceful pipes of shepherds in the lone Etrurian vales;

Whispers love beneath the lattice, where the honeysuckle clings;
Crowns the bowl and cheers the dancers, and its peace to sorrow brings;—

Nature knows its wondrous magic, always speaks in tune and rhyme;
Doubles in the sea the heaven, echoes on the rocks the chime.

All her forests sway harmonious, all her torrents lisp in song;
And the starry spheres make music, gladly journeying along.

Thou hast touched its mighty mystery, with a finger as of fire;
Thrilled the heart with rapturous longing, bade the struggling soul aspire;

Through thy daring modulations, mounting up o'er dizzy stairs
Of harmonic change and progress, into high Elysian airs,

Where the wings of angels graze us, and the voices of the spheres
Seem not far, and glad emotions fill the silent eyes with tears.

What a vast, majestic structure thou hast builded out of sound,
With its high peak piercing Heaven, and its base deep underground.

Vague as air, yet firm and real to the spiritual eye,
Seamed with fire its cloudy bastions far away uplifted lie,

Like those sullen shapes of thunder we behold at close of day,
Piled upon the far horizon, where the jagged lightnings play.

Awful voices, as from Hades, thrill us, growling from its heart;

Sudden splendors blaze from out it, cleaving its black walls apart;

White-winged birds dart forth and vanish, singing, as they pass from sight,
Till at last it lifts, and 'neath it lets a blaze of amber light

Where some single star is shining, throbbing like a new-born thing,
And the earth, all drenched in splendor, lets its happy voices sing.

Topmost crown of ancient Athens towered the Phidian Parthenon;
Upon Freedom's noble forehead, Art the starry jewel, shone.

Here as yet in our Republic, in the furrows of our soil,
Slowly grows Art's timid blossom 'neath the heavy foot of toil.

Spurn it not—but spare it, nurse it, till it gladden all the land;
Hail to-day this seed of promise, planted by a generous hand—
Our first statue to an artist—nobly given, nobly planned.

Never is a nation finished while it wants the grace of Art—
Use must borrow robes from Beauty, life must rise above the mart.

Faith and love are all ideal, speaking with a music tone—
And without their touch of magic, labor is the Devil's own.

Therefore are we glad to greet thee, master artist, to thy place,
For we need in all our living Beauty and ideal grace,

Mostly here, to lift our nation, move its heart and calm its nerves,
And to round life's angled duties to imaginative curves.

Mid the jarring din of traffic, let the Orphic tone of Art
Lull the barking Cerberus in us, soothe the cares that gnaw the heart.

With thy universal language, that our feeble speech transcends,
Wing our thoughts that creep and grovel, come to us when speaking ends,

Bear us into realms ideal, where the cant of common sense
Dins no more its heartless maxims to the jingling of its pence.

Thence down dropped into the Actual, we shall on our garments bear
Perfume of an unknown region, beauty of celestial air;

Life shall wear a nobler aspect, joy shall greet us in the street;
Earthy dust of low ambition shall be shaken from our feet.

Evil spirits that torment us, into air shall vanish all,

And the magic harp of David soothe the haunted heart of Saul.

As of yore the swart Egyptians rent the air with choral song,
When Osiris' golden statue triumphing they bore along;

As along the streets of Florence, borne in glad procession went
Cimabue's famed Madonna, praised by voice and instrument;

Let our voices sing thy praises, let our instruments combine,
Till the hall with triumph echo, for the hour and place are thine.

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